

SHARING FAITH



A short course for parishes
in sharing faith

Mission & Development Team

 The Diocese of
Peterborough

Introduction to the course

We hope you will enjoy this short course, and find it helpful in your Christian journey.

During the three sessions we will explore:

- The importance of our individual and shared Christian experience;
- The barriers we may experience in sharing faith;
- A variety of ways of expressing our faith story;
- Difficult questions we may face;
- Today's current affairs from a Christian perspective;
- Situations where we may find sharing faith difficult

It includes an opportunity to prepare, and then have a go at sharing your faith for a few minutes, in a small group, in a safe space. It also encourages prayer for situations where we can share faith, and for people we know, with whom we would like to share.

This booklet will navigate you through the sessions, and contains the main points, plus space for you to jot down your own notes and thoughts.

My ideas for follow-up

Conclusions

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It's not about formulas and "getting it right" - the Christian life is not an exam!

It is about:

- nurturing and deepening our relationship with God as we respond to his love for us. "Be yourself with God for others"
- praying and asking for opportunities to share our faith and watching for them;
- asking ourselves: Will what I say make sense to a non-Christian? Does it help them discover the Good News of Jesus?
- being willing to speak or act – trusting in God, not in our own strength: Acts 1 : 8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

"Heavenly Father, thank you for the example of St Paul, sharing his testimony in different places, with different people. Help us to be watchful and prayerful for ourselves and one another, that you may open a door for our message. May we proclaim it clearly, be wise in how we act, and make the most of every opportunity. May our conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that we may know how to answer everyone, and be able to give a reason for the hope that is within us. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Session 1.

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Father God, thank you for gathering us here, and for the opportunity to talk about sharing our faith, in a safe space. Thank you for all you mean to us, as our Father in heaven, for all that Jesus has done for us and for the whole of creation, and for the presence and comfort of your Holy Spirit. Help us to learn from one another, and above all, to learn from you. In Jesus' name, Amen."

- **Scenarios we might encounter;** (Handout 1)
- **Situations we may find ourselves in;** (Handout 1)
- **Barriers to sharing our faith.** (Handout 2)

Things that make it easier:

We are all in the same boat! But there are things that can make it easier:

1. Prayer
2. Prayer for particular people
3. Asking God for opportunities.
4. Asking God for courage to take the opportunities.
5. Confidence in the story we are sharing

"Father God, thank you for opportunities to share our faith. Help us to trust in you, so that we might have courage and not be held back by the barriers we have discussed – but have confidence in you and in the story we have to share. In Jesus' name, Amen."

The importance of your Christian story

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For all human beings, our life story and our identity are closely linked. **As Christians our identity is bound up with God's story** – who he is, what he has done for us, and his big plan for the whole of creation. The story of our life will illustrate those in different ways, and will include our response to him. It will involve God as:

- Creator and Father;
- Jesus, our Saviour, Brother and Friend;
- the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Guide.

So when we talk to others about our faith, there are **three stories** going on – ours, God's and the other person's.

Christians come in all shapes and sizes, and we may use different vocabulary from each other, to describe our experiences of God.

"We all have a role without needing a personality transplant" We may feel that we don't have much to share, compared with others who may seem more confident. But be encouraged – although we share a huge amount in common as Christians, it is said *'it takes a whole world to know Jesus'*. In other words, no-one has walked in your shoes except you, and you have experiences with God, and glimpses of the eternal, that no-one else has. Your faith story is precious and unique, and of immense value in God's hands, in his world. **Be assured, you are exactly where you need to be**, to share your faith. The best place to witness to God is from within our existing contexts, rather than from outside. Most people come to faith through knowing and talking to a Christian friend. *"Hear the music of the gospel through relationships."* We share our faith because we love God and we love others – and because he loved all of us first.

We don't need to manipulate our relationships with others to do this – we are simply who we are, because God has loved, forgiven and accepted us. **Sharing our faith becomes part of a natural outward expression of our inner identity and security in God.**

Reframing

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How can we be flexible and adaptable in choosing which part of our faith or story to share in each situation?

What is particularly important to me about God and the Christian faith?

Responding in different situations (*Handout 3*)

The Bridge illustration (*Handout 4*)

Answering difficult questions (*Handout 5*)

What are the big issues in the world today?

- what is the gospel value or principle involved?
- what Bible passage, verse or story is relevant?
- how Jesus might respond?

Is there anything from my personal faith story which connects with any of these issues?

Session 3.

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“Almighty God, thank you for all the situations in which you place us, and all the people with whom we have contact. Help us as we try to discern the best way to respond, to those who are seeking you, and to those who seem far from you. Help us to remember that nothing is impossible with you, and that you can do far more than we can ever imagine. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Colossians 4:2-6

“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly as I should. Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

Note the importance Paul attaches to prayer.

We are links in a chain.

We may sow a tiny seed in someone’s life, with a single sentence. Others may water that seed, and yet others may be there at the harvest, when someone commits their life to Jesus. Every part of that process, every pearl threaded on the necklace, every link in the chain, is important and precious to God.

Drawing an overview of your life

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(You can stick your time line in here)

When can you see God at work in your life?
Which parts could you share with others?

Some ways of expressing your faith

- **linear story** – an account of events in the order they happened, taking an overview of your life
- **conversion experience** – focusing on the particular time in your life that you became a Christian. (N.B. Not everyone can pinpoint that, especially if you were brought up as a Christian)
- **specific illustration** – choose one example from your story that illustrates something about God.
- **contrast before and after** – what differences has being a Christian made to your life?
- **something that's important to you today** – a current example, perhaps an answer to prayer, or something that God has put on your heart, that illustrates his nature.
- **a Christian perspective on a contemporary issue** – a perspective on how Jesus might respond to issues in the news today.

Which one resonates with you? It could be more than one. How might you begin to talk about one of these?

HOMEWORK

1. **Read these Bible passages involving St Paul. What is happening in each one?**

Acts 16: 29-34	The jailer
Acts 19: 1-8	Paul in Ephesus
Acts 19: 8-10	In the synagogue
Acts 17: 16, 22-31	Paul in Athens
Colossians 4: 2-6	Paul to the Colossians

2. **Continue to pray** for opportunities to share your faith, and for particular people you know.

3. **Find a newspaper or magazine article** that illustrates an important issue in the news or in today's society. Bring it to our next session.

“Thank you, Lord, for your word, to inform and encourage us. Thank you for the example of all your saints, and their courage in not denying you, even at the cost of their lives. Thank you for the opportunity to share our faith today, and for the story we have to tell. Help us to walk so closely to you, that our faith will overflow into the whole of our lives, in thought, word and deed. For Jesus sake, Amen.”

Team Quiz – The Kingdom of Heaven is like

Jesus used many images, similes and metaphors to help people understand what God and the Kingdom of heaven are like.

For example - **The Kingdom of heaven is like . . .** three lost things – sheep, coin, son (Matthew 18)

Which other images did Jesus use?

Can you think of some modern day images that would stimulate people’s imagination and understanding of the Christian faith?

It’s important that we have a **dynamic, growing faith**, so we have something fresh to share, as well as the great things God has done for us in the past.

Also that we can faithfully improvise as we share our faith – finding ways of expressing what we believe and have experienced in ‘word pictures’ that connect with people’s own experience of the world.

HOMEWORK

Read these Bible passages for an overview of the Gospel message. Try to identify key facts about the Christian faith in these passages.

Stephen in Acts 6-7

Philip & the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 : 26-40

Peter at Pentecost in Acts 2

Prepare your story – to share in a group of three next time.

- You can use one of the approaches we have discussed, or one of your own.
- There are different ways of recording and expressing your story to help you remember – timeline, storyboard, spider diagram, key images, passages from the Bible, prompt cards.
- In the next session, you will have the opportunity to share your faith for up to ten minutes (including time for questions) with two other people.

Pray for opportunities to share your faith, and for particular people you know, with whom you would like to share your faith.

“Heavenly Father, thank you for our group, and for all the rich, diverse ways we have encountered you in the course of our lives. Help us to have confidence in what we know of you, and in what Jesus has accomplished on the Cross for us. Help us to be open to the leading of your Spirit, wherever we find ourselves in the coming days. In Jesus ‘ name, Amen.”

Session 2.

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“Father God, thank you for all the blessings you have showered upon us through the course of our lives, and those you have brought to mind as we have prepared for today. Help us to have confidence in the unique faith story you have given each one of us, and above all to know that we are always held in your saving love. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Some key facts about the Christian faith

- God is at work in human history;
 - God speaks to people and guides them by his Spirit;
 - Humans have rebelled against God;
 - The Old Testament speaks of Jesus;
 - Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead;
 - Many people witnessed Jesus was alive again after his death
- Christians believe in forgiveness for sins, through
- what Jesus has done

What are other key facts for you?

How did Jesus do it?

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Listening and asking questions

Matthew 9: 27-30 Jesus healing the blind

Matthew 20: 29-34 Two blind men

Luke 24:13-35 Jesus on the road to Emmaus

What did Jesus say in each case?

Jesus using appropriate responses

Matthew 19: 16-26 **The Rich Young Ruler**

Mark 7: 25-30 **The Syro-Phoenician woman**

John 4: 1-26 **The woman at the well**

How did Jesus handle each encounter?

What were the outcomes?

Jesus engages with people in a personal way which is relevant to each one – their situation, what they already know, their motivation and hopes – answering the person as well as their question. When we talk to someone about the gospel, try to be aware of their situation, history, thoughts, feelings – what are they actually asking or saying?

The woman at the well shares her encounter with Jesus – and people come to faith. John 4:28-30 and 39-42