

SHARING SCRIPTURE – TOGETHER IN A COMMON LIFE



To open a Bible and explore it with other Christians is a rich experience which takes us back to our very roots. The engagement with scripture is also essential for the bonding and unity of the Church. So it is, that when Paul seeks to combat heretical ideas and destructive behaviour, he appeals to "what you were taught about Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 4:20-21) as the resource that the Spirit will use to bring about Christian maturity and unity.

Following the founding event for the Church of the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out on the gathered disciples with the result that three thousand people, from all parts of the known world, were added to the Church, 'the believers spent their time learning from the apostles' Acts 2:42). What kind of issues would they be sharing together?

As we look at the message of the apostles (see Acts 2:14 - 36) we can see two components emerge immediately, first reflection on the scriptures, secondly the recounting of the **story of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus**. Soon they are looked to for guidance as to how the Church should operate (Acts 6: 1- 6), and we know from the letters the apostles wrote they also addressed the issues of how Christians should behave in their daily lives (see 1 Peter 3 and 4). It is exciting to see that the components of our Bible have emerged, right at the start of the Church's life together.

Paul wrote to Timothy who was leading a church.

You have often heard me teach. Now I want you to tell these same things to followers who can be trusted to tell others . (2 Timothy 2:2)

Here we have a picture of the basics of the scriptures being transferred across four
Paul - Timothy - those he entrusts - those they teach.....

The sharing of scripture was a significant driving force behind the mission of the Church As the early Church responded to what they learnt from the apostles so "each day the Lord added to their group others who were being saved." (Acts 2: 47) Scripture shaped Jesus' own mission profoundly (see Luke 4:18 - 19; see Isaiah 61: 1-2). His instructions to the disciples to go to all nations flows from the understanding of God as creator of all and Lord of all (see Psalm 24). It is as disciples share together the riches of Scripture that they grow in their commitment to carry out the mission of God.

*The power of the Word of God - can serve
the church as our support and vigour ... as
strength for our faith ... food for our soul
Dei Verbum, 1965*

UNITY - REFLECTING TOGETHER

Ideas

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is an ideal time for Christians in mixed groups to look at the Biblical material together - through sermons and study sessions.

Lectio Divina is a way of reflecting deeply on scripture and then responding to God through prayer. Coming from the Catholic tradition it is a most enriching approach.

The Jesus Video - watch this video together as a way to stimulate your thinking together about the message and life of Jesus. This film is based on Luke's gospel. The questionnaire could be used to start the discussion, or you could easily design your own questions.

The Miracle Maker is a more recent video on Jesus in Luke's Gospel. It has the advantage that there is workbook available and also (via *Unlock*) resources for those who prefer a 'non-book' approach

A small group could read the same passage from the Bible, but each person using a different translation. They can then consider the insights and values that each translation brings.

Over coffee or a glass of wine people are invited to share their favourite passage of scripture and explain why it is important to them.

Storytelling is a way to relate to the biblical stories. *The Telling Place* will be able to provide resources to run a workshop which can be arranged by the churches together. The understandings and skills learnt can then be shared.

Examples

Christ Church LEP in Plymouth invited people to take photographs of their daily lives (which were produced as OHP's) to illustrate the passion readings. Christ's journey was linked to a photograph of the road leading to the church; his warning to women of Jerusalem by a photo of mothers and babies from the congregation. The images were re-used on Good Friday when invited people commented on their favourite picture.

The chaplaincy team at Exeter University worked with students using *Tales from the Madhouse*, 'as a discussion trigger on a weekend exploring Jesus in Film. The video was a thought-provoking and relevant way to discuss the difference faith in Christ can make.' *Tales from the Madhouse* is a video which retells the experience of characters from Christ's passion in an unusual setting. A group study guide is provided. There is also a workbook for schools relating this material to religious and media studies.

EDUCATION - LEARNING TOGETHER

Ideas

Moral and social issues can be selected and looked at through the lens which scripture provides. Churches could arrange mixed groups, with each group taking an issue. Insights can then be shared.

Faith Comes by Hearing is the New Testament on cassette. People are encouraged to listen to it over a sixty day period and to share their experience. Sermons, groups or talks could be arranged to coincide with the listening schedule. Churches have found that there is a growth in unity and commitment through listening this way.

'the people who worked together found that it helped to remove barriers and bring the churches together'

Contemporary films are popular, especially with the under twenty fives, but also deal with deep issues. **Reel Issues** is a booklet which explores the links between contemporary films and the Bible. It also provides many practical ideas as to how to explore these connections. So why not go to the cinema together (or rent a video) as part of your common life?

Bible Sunday resources are provided annually by Bible Society. They provide suggestions for several ways to engage with Scripture.

Example

In Norfolk an ecumenical centre has developed into a partnership between the Cathedral and the University of East Anglia, providing courses on issues involving Theology, Church and Society. Recent courses have looked at The Law and The Prophets. *Grow with the Bible* is a consortium of four Bible reading notes providers and Bible publishers.

MISSION - ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY TOGETHER

Ideas

- **Community Bibles** - individuals, including a civic figure, such as the mayor hand write a book of the Bible a verse at a time -sections can be shared out among the churches
- **Flower Festival** - Churches join together to plan, promote and present , using a biblical theme such as light, family, creation or conflict. Why not have a children's corner?
- **The Jesus Video** - churches deliver this video to the homes around them. It involves prayer and working together
- **Readathon** - arrange to read the whole of the Bible (or the New Testament). This takes about seventy five hours and has an impact on readers and hearers. Children and young people welcome!
- **Test of Time** is an educational video and teachers' workbook, which establishes the validity of well known sayings of Jesus such as 'forgive your enemies', through global testimony. Churches could present copies to schools and ask for a report on how it has been received. They could even use the video themselves!

Examples

Bible comes to Life - **twelve churches from the Bristol area** worked together to plan, promote and staff an Exhibition on the Bible and its impact in our society.

Cheltenham Churches Together organised a passion play in the town for Easter. From this a video in three parts developed. *Jesus for to-day* focuses on the play - there are six Bible studies exploring people from the Passion which enrich this. *Jesus for tomorrow* explores the relevance of the resurrection for Christians with Key Stage 3 in mind. *Jesus for ever the same* is a sequence of prayer meditations on themes from the play such as friendship and conflict.

" Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."
Catechism of the Catholic Church, 133

Corner Art Prize - a church in Islington organised a national art competition with a prize of £1,000. Christians from many churches were involved in the 150 entries and in the judging process. The theme was Matthew 6:19-21, about not storing treasure on earth. It attracted many professional artists and much local and national interest.

Sharing Scripture - Together In a Common Life

Churches worked with teachers and children in fifteen schools in Eastbourne to promote an exploration of biblical themes and then an exhibition in the Town Hall, using artwork, models, videos, diaries and 'stained glass window's; a group of deaf children made their presentation through sign language. The event was featured on local radio.

In Bedford, 60 volunteers, backed by Churches Together in Bedford, trained as storytellers and then presented 30 biblical stories (one per week) to 15 schools in the area. In addition to the storytelling, large models were also used to illustrate the stories.

Resources

The Test of Time, The Miracle Maker and Tales from the Madhouse: each of these has a workbook for use with children and young adults; although designed for the educational curriculum they are a valuable resource for church use as well] are all available from Bible Society, who can also help with the Community Bible idea Bible Society Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon, SN5 7BR, 01793 418100, Web Address - <http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/>

The Jesus Video - CPAS Sales - 01926 458400; for details on the project contact Agape, Freepost BM616 Birmingham B11 1BR

The Telling Place - Hetton Hall, Chatton, Alnwick, Northumberland, NE66 55D, 01289 388477, e-mail - thetellingplace@bigfoot.com

The Damascus Trust can help with the Redathon - The Damascus Trust, 51 Clockhouse Way, Braintree, Essex, CM7 3RD, 01376 342529 e-mail - admin@damascustrust.fs.net.co.uk

Your response:

- This leaflet is primarily intended to stimulate local action.
- A national process of reflection is also taking place as part of the Together in a Common Life process, and the aim is to share the results widely. So, you are invited to send your comments to Common Life 2000 at Churches Together in England, 27 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HH, or email to commonlife2000@churches-together.net. Your response can then be incorporated into the website, www.churches-together.net. Responses grouped under the headings set out inside this paper would be particularly helpful. Copies of the leaflet may be obtained from Churches Together in England, 10 for £2 incl. p&p.
- You may photocopy this leaflet, down-load it from the website, or obtain it as a rtf file by email from commonlife2000@churches-together.net. Feel free to adapt the text for particular local situations. Please acknowledge Text © Churches Together in England 2002.

*O God, Holy and Eternal Trinity,
We pray for your Church in all the world.
Sanctify its life; renew its worship;
Empower its witness; heal its divisions;
Make visible its unity.*

*Lead us, with all our brothers and sisters,
Towards communion in faith, life and witness
So that, united in one body by the one Spirit,
We may together witness to the perfect unity of your love.*



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