



# Embracing the Other

A resource for Receptive Ecumenism



## **Five-Session Course** *Facilitator's Guide*

# *Introduction*

For this facilitator's version to be used as it has been designed, it should be consulted before each session takes place. Things that the facilitator should consider are in red. Other text (in black) is the text of the handout for participants.

*'Receptive Ecumenism is both a way of thinking and a process that enables unity to be built by receiving gifts from others. It challenges us to not think of what others might benefit from receiving from us but instead invites us to recognize our needs and to put ourselves in the place of being a recipient.'*

This material is designed to explore Receptive Ecumenism interactively. It employs both individual and collective exercises.

This is a course of five one-and-a-half hour sessions that may be used as a Lent course or at any other time of the year. It is designed for use with groups of various sizes, normally in the context of a Churches Together Group or a Local Ecumenical Partnership. It could, however, be used in a variety of other settings, such as gatherings of church leaders or within the congregation of one tradition where other traditions are present.

A good deal depends on the facilitator who may need to adapt the material to take into account the size and make-up of the group or in order to respond to the direction the group is taking.

Photographs and videos are available session by session.

# Session One

## *Presenting Receptive Ecumenism*

*Equipment needed: a flipchart for sections 5 and 7.*

### *1. Welcome and introduction*

The facilitator should introduce some background to Receptive Ecumenism; perhaps begin by asking how many people are familiar with it. If needed, the facilitator can find some introductory information about Receptive Ecumenism [here](#).

### *2. Getting to know one another*

Share your church background and something of your personal journey.

Depending on the size of group, this can be in plenary if the whole group is no more than about eight people or if more than eight, in small groups of no less than four and no more than twelve. It would be helpful to ensure a good ecumenical spread within each group.

These groups will be important at different moments during the coming sessions. They are 'base groups' where people can build up relationships of trust. For this reason, it may be advisable to keep the same base groups when they are used at different moments. Naturally, people should be free to change group

should they so wish.

### 3. *Setting the scene*

Explain what is going to happen in the series. Provide some background information about how Receptive Ecumenism has developed, refer to the outline documents that can be found [here](#).

This is a good point to invite people to be silent and commit to God what you are about to share. A short invitation to the Holy Spirit to be present may be used.

### 4. *Images of the church*

Source: [www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother](http://www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother)

Reflecting on three images of the church:

a building,

a garden,

a body.

Input is given by the facilitator using images and readings. A selection of readings can be taken from the following – for a building: 1 Corinthians 3:11-17, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Ephesians 2:19-22; for a garden: John 15:1-11, 1 Corinthians 3:6-9; for a body: Romans 12:4-10, 1 Corinthians 12:11-31; Colossians 1:15-20.

Each of these three kinds of image of the church has a biblical basis, especially in the letters of Paul. Paul's use of body and building language is particularly developed, though he does use the imagery of planting and growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-9). The picture of a garden is used by modern writers on spirituality and the church, and

agricultural pictures are spread throughout the Bible as ways of talking of God's people. Jesus, of course, often used such pictures to speak of the kingdom.

### 5. *Discussion*

Brainstorm in plenary to look at how each of the different images represents the church. A flipchart may be useful for this.

Photographs of the images can be found [here](#).

The church as a building –

What are the strengths of this image? What are its weaknesses?

The church as a garden –

What makes a good garden? What makes for health?

**Note: there are three images of a garden: one manicured, one overgrown, one half-dead.**

The church as a body –

What makes the body alive? What makes a body sick?

### 6. *Continue to discuss*

In base groups (or, naturally, in plenary if the whole group is small).

How do you see the ideas of church that we have explored applying to your own church? Or how would it apply among the churches where you live? Or to your Churches Together Group?

In what areas of our life as a church, do we need to learn?

It may be good to do this as a two-minute time of silent reflection.

In the group share what *you* think you need to learn.

### *7. Plenary Discussion*

a) If the meeting did go into base groups, share what was said in them. Write up comments from each tradition's background. Otherwise, move straight to point b).

b) What have we learned that might improve the life of our own churches? A flipchart may be useful here.

c) Ask people to say in one sentence what they have gained personally from the discussion.

d) Introduce the four other sessions. This is a summary of them:

Session Two will invite us to focus on where we discover our hope as Christians and where we find our hope rooted both in our personal faith and in our tradition.

Session Three is about a very important skill and discipline that is important in so many areas of life: listening. This is crucial to the success of Receptive Ecumenism. It relies upon our ability to listen to one another and hear what people are saying at a deep level.

Session Four takes listening a step further and focuses on our ability to learn. This means being able to embrace change both for ourselves and in our churches.

Session Five will give the opportunity to review what we have experienced and discovered and challenge us to make use of these things in the future, once again both individually and in our churches.

#### *8. Prayer of dedication*

The following prayer is suggested to conclude the session. There will be a similar prayer at the end of each session.

Lord our God,  
we wonder at the beauty that you are and that you have given  
your church  
and, at the same time, we confess that we do not always act  
in accordance with the Spirit's beauty in us and among us.  
In the power of that same Spirit we dedicate ourselves  
to discover the gifts of our fellow Christians  
so that the whole Body of Christ may flourish in every possible  
way  
and we be made ready to give an account to others  
of the hope that is in us;  
in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.



## Session Two

# *Giving an account of the hope that is in us*

*Equipment needed:* a flipchart for sections 5 and 6; pen and paper for individuals to use in section 6.

### *1. Silent or spoken prayer*

Some groups may be helped better by silence and some by a short, spoken prayer of invocation of the Holy Spirit. This is up to the judgement of the facilitator.

### *2. Reading – 1 Peter 3:13-17*

The facilitator may wish to remark on the fact that the context of this passage is persecution and suffering, which normally is not the context of Receptive Ecumenism. Nevertheless, it is always important to know where our hope lies. In Receptive Ecumenism too, this will help us share authentically.

### *3. Sharing together*

The whole group is invited to share where they feel they have reached in their spiritual journey, and what they hope they might receive or learn from others. Are there any reflections from the first session?

### *4. Communicating our deepest hopes as people of faith*

## Video Input

Source: [www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother](http://www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother)

## Silent reflection

Allow two minutes in silence, then in go into small groups, using the base groups formed in the first session.

In groups consider:

What hopes do we draw from our faith and how and where are those hopes rooted?

To set people talking, it may be good to suggest that hope, according to different practices, could be found in fellowship, scripture, song, tradition, liturgy, theology, silence. Or hope may be found in some other way. There are no wrong answers.

Allow groups to discuss for 15 minutes.

## 5. *Returning to plenary*

Share and record the hopes and roots of hopes.

Give the opportunity for people to ask questions of one another about the hopes they have expressed so as to deepen understanding. It is important in this exercise to remind people that they are listening to what others are saying, not arguing about whether it is correct. This should not turn into a debate! Jot down what is said, perhaps on a flipchart.

## 6. *Consider and share*

What have I learned from hearing the hopes of others?

How can my church learn from the hopes expressed?

Be aware that for some people 'my church' may mean their local congregation, while for others it may mean their denomination or world communion. A flipchart may be useful here.

These two questions could be reflected on either individually or in plenary. If individual reflection is used, the facilitator will need to give the opportunity for people to write down their thoughts; whereas if group reflection is used, a flipchart will be helpful. Facilitators will need to judge from the timings and the feel of the conversation whether the individual or the group option may be better.

In the end, the facilitator should indicate that this exercise leads on to the next session about conversion in the context of learning to listen.

### *8. Prayer of dedication*

Lord our God,  
you fill us with hope in the abundance of your love  
and all the gifts you shower upon us in your church.  
We recognize our need for one another  
to heal our weakness and enlighten our confusion.  
In the power of your Holy Spirit we dedicate ourselves  
to discover the gifts of our fellow Christians  
so that the whole Body of Christ may flourish in every possible  
way

and we be made ready to give an account to others  
of the hope that is in us;  
in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.

# Session Three

## *Learning to Listen*

*Equipment needed:* a bowl water for the act of transition in section 5; pen and paper for the individual work in section 8.

### 1. *Silent or spoken prayer*

The idea is to bring people into an attitude of attentiveness and deep listening. Depending upon the character of the whole group, the facilitator should choose whether silent or spoken prayer is more suitable.

### 2. *Sharing together*

Invite people to reflect on what they have learned so far. They should ask themselves: what has stayed with me from the last session?

### 4. *The need to Listen*

Video input is followed by reflection.

Source: [www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother](http://www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother)

This is a video describing situations where listening has not been done well. It can be found here. After it finishes, invite people to reflect individually, asking:

Are there situations where either I did not listen or where I was not listened to.

What stops me from listening?

Discuss this in base groups.

5. *An act of transition*

Come back into plenary.

We take a bowl of water and read Romans 6: 1-11 to remind us of our new life in Christ.

Invite people to dip their fingers into the bowl of water, some may wish to make the sign of the cross.

6. *The quality of God's listening to us and how, being made in the image of God, we should listen to one another*

In groups, share reflections on the following thoughts: Jesus loves us by becoming one of us, and taking on himself not only our human nature, but our suffering and sin on the cross – what do we learn from that? What do we learn about how we should behave with one another?

Here using base groups will be useful.

7. *Video input*

Source: [www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother](http://www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother)

8. *Individual work*

Write yourself a letter or short paragraph about something new you might want to do or something you would want to change so that you might be able to

listen more deeply.

Re-assure people that this is not for sharing that it is entirely personal – give people five minutes for this.

### 9. *Plenary reflection*

What reflections do we have about our collective listening as churches?

If time does not permit this discussion can be omitted.

Note: it may be that the facilitator wishes to catch several people at the end of this session in order to prepare the different kind of prayer in the next session (see Session Four, section 7).

### 10. *Prayer of dedication*

Lord our God,  
your ears are always open to hear the cries of the world,  
and with a tender heart you care for our needs.  
Help us to listen to one another with the same attention  
and so discern the wonders you work among us.  
In the power of your Holy Spirit we dedicate ourselves  
to discover the gifts of our fellow Christians  
so that the whole Body of Christ may flourish in every possible  
way  
and we be made ready to give an account to others  
of the hope that is in us;  
in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.

# Session Four

## *Listening to Learn*

*Equipment needed:* a flipchart for section 6.

Furthermore, the prayer at section 7 may need preparation with several people before the session.

### 1. *Silent or spoken prayer*

As in the previous session, the idea is to bring people into an attitude of attentiveness and deep listening. Depending upon the character of the group, the facilitator should choose whether silent or spoken prayer is more suitable.

### 2. *Group sharing*

Invite people as before to share anything from the previous session – especially some new insight.

### 3. *Video input*

Videos of people speaking about what they appreciate in other traditions. Source: [www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother](http://www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother)

### 4. *In church/denominational groups*

Look at what you believe the particular strengths of your tradition may be.

### 5. *In mixed groups of twos or threes*



Present to one another what has been discussed, asking for comments.

Like the base groups, these twos or threes should be denominationally mixed. Here we are trying to understand together what we see as valuable in each other's traditions.

#### 6. *In Plenary*

A flipchart may be useful here.

In denominational groups report back and look at what has been learned and what has surprised you about the gifts others have seen in your church.

Discuss what practical differences this learning might (ought to?) make.

#### 7. *Prayer using different styles of prayer*

If there is a good spread of traditions there could be various forms of prayer: some extempore, some from the missal or a prayer book, some silent. By this time in the group it should be possible to identify the kind of range that would be typical.

#### 8. *Reading* – 1 Cor 12:1-13

#### 9. *Prayer of dedication*

Lord our God,  
the power of your love is always at work in the world  
bringing good out of bad and life out of death.  
We confess that we are not always ready to see your work in  
others

and so learn and be transformed.

In the power of your Holy Spirit we dedicate ourselves -

to discover the gifts of our fellow Christians

so that the whole Body of Christ may flourish in every possible  
way

and we be made ready to give an account to others

of the hope that is in us.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

## Session five

# *Being the branches of the vine*

Note: for use in section 5, the facilitator may find it helpful before the session to prepare a list of the web addresses of churches, or those in authority in them, that course participants attend. The facilitator may also wish to prepare a bowl of water for the closing ritual in section 6. Furthermore, the facilitator may wish to prepare a flipchart for sections 4 and 5.

1. Silent or spoken prayer

2. *Plenary*

Think back to Session One and consider:  
What has been learned?  
How have we become more 'healthy'?

3. *Reading* – John 15: 5, 'I am the vine and you are the branches.'

4. *Focusing on the mission of the Church.*

What are our strengths and weaknesses? Where are the growth points?

It is important to help the group focus on mission and not to allow it to drift or to be solely focused on

mission as growing numerically. A flipchart may be useful here.

Audio Input

Source: [www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother](http://www.cte.org.uk/embracingtheother)

Listen to this together. It is an imaginary radio broadcast that includes mission-focused scenarios. The file is downloadable here.

In groups discuss:

What kinds of scenarios might evolve in your church, town area, city or country?

What would need to happen for these possibilities to be achieved?

Here base groups will be useful.

## 5. *In Plenary*

General discussion arising from the course

Ask for feedback from the group discussion and consider what out of the experience of the whole course may have been learned that can be offered as a gift to the wider church at whatever level. People can be invited to write something that can be sent on to CTE, for example, or to someone within their own denomination. A flipchart may be useful here.

Give participants the opportunity to share their experience of the course and provide other information. (Web addresses of churches or those in authority in them may be given at this point. This will

require researching beforehand.)

#### 6. *Closing ritual*

The group may wish to suggest its own suitable closing ritual.

It would be good to have the bowl of water (as in Session Three, section 5) ready so that it can be used again. During a hymn or in silence, members could be invited to bless one another with it, dipping their fingers in it and touching each other's forehead.

#### 7. *Prayer of dedication*

Lord our God,  
we are amazed above all by your love displayed in Jesus  
who died in agony and rose in joy for us.  
As we learn from one another, we long to see the fullness of  
his life  
displayed likewise in his church and throughout the world.  
In the power of your Holy Spirit we dedicate ourselves  
to discover the gifts of our fellow Christians  
so that the whole Body of Christ may flourish in every possible  
way  
and we be made ready to give an account to others  
of the hope that is in us;  
in the name of Jesus.  
Amen.