

telling our story

some introductory ideas

AIMS

To help us to begin to tell 'our story' as individuals and as a faith community about our relationship with God

INTRODUCTION

In the Vision4life Evangelism material we have different strands: 'God's story' and 'Our story'.

'Our story' refers to the story of our life, both individually and as a faith community.

In these activities we think particularly about the story of our local faith community:

What is it like?

Why are we part of it?

Here are some introductory ideas for you to try as a group or in pairs to help you begin to tell 'our story' as a faith community. You can also think about this material on your own, perhaps making some notes in a notebook or journal to help you.

WHY HERE?

Find a conversation partner and ask each other the following questions. You have 5 minutes each. I will let you know when to swap over and when time is up.

- What attracted you to the church you now attend?
- What was your first experience at that church?

WHAT IS ATTRACTIVE?

Continue your conversation. Think particularly about things that are attractive about your church. What would these 'good things' be to attract you to go and see for yourself?

- Friendly welcome
- Open minds
- Interesting things away from the service
- Music – uplifting, engaging, powerful praise, lively
- Grandchildren looked after
- Passionate about God
- Challenging sermons
- Meaningful
- Spiritual atmosphere
- Bible based
- Wide age range
- Family

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- Children welcome – accepting of noise
- Socialising after the service
- Varied activities – cell groups etc
- Church feels like a family
- Welcome not pushy
- Sense of belonging
- Feeling loved
- Introduced to suitable person to befriend me
- Participative worship – members involved
- Mildly involved – without threat
- Reflective stillness
- Full of people excited to be there
- People willingly offered their skills
- Good mix of traditional and new
- People know people who are prayed for
- Feeling Gods presence
- Passion / engagement
- Youth provision
- Linked to everyday life experience
- Something that challenges / clarifies / stretches your belief
- People willingly participated
- People of live and active faith

Perhaps you'd like to add some things to the list that are particularly relevant to you and the fellowship to which you belong.

GOING DEEPER

Experience suggests that terms like 'friendly welcome' mean different things to different people. Go down the list again and try to work out together what the items really mean. Is 'friendly welcome' any more than a handshake, if so what? Does 'Grandchildren looked after' mean they don't take part in things with adults? What is 'uplifting' about music or prayers if this is relevant?

Experiences of things like warm welcome, acceptance, friendship offered, inspirational worship – what you had heard was true, people really do love God and each other and it's infectious. It can't help but bubble over to the wider community.

This is a church that truly is salt and light to its community

Truly loving God, and neighbour as they love themselves – and they do love themselves! There is healthy dose of reality, working towards acceptance of self and each other 'warts and all'.

More than an acknowledgement that it is in giving that we receive – it is something that is known from experience and they are generous with their love and receive love back.

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PLACES THAT INFLUENCED OUR FAITH

When we think about our own faith journey there are places that have meant something special to us. Get a large map of your Synod, Britain or the world: this will depend on the gathering you are holding and the diversity of your congregation. When we celebrated the Gospel in Yorkshire we asked people to name places in Yorkshire that had influenced their faith journey but you might want to widen the question. Give out blank post cards or post-it notes for people to write the place and a sentence or two about it. Invite people to read some out or collect them up and read some of them out. Later, collate the responses so that you can display on the map where people the places were that influenced them. Display this with the map as a poster (see photo of one we did earlier) and invite people to discuss this informally, at the coffee after the service for example. It provides an opportunity to people to rehearse one part of their faith story. Have some spare cards or notes available for newcomers to add their place.

THE STORY OF 'OUR' CHURCH

Take a long piece of paper – old wallpaper with a smooth reverse surface is fine) and stretch it out. Mark a line down the middle. At one end decide what is the earliest date of your church fellowship – when it was founded, when some churches came together into an LEP, or whatever you decide is the 'start date'. Mark this on the line in some way – maybe with a relevant object like the communion silver that is usually kept in the safe and only comes out on special occasions. Make it clear that the other end of the line is 'today' whatever that date is. Give everyone present a sticky note and ask them to write on it

1. their name;
2. the date they came to the church;
3. the reason they came.

Invite participants to come up and stick their note on the line at the point they think represents the date of their coming into the church. Where people find it difficult to do this task encourage other participants to find ways of supporting their involvement. Review the patten of names, dates and reasons once everyone has placed theirs on the line.

A photograph of this activity from Carlton URC, Halifax is on the website.

Prayer

God of place and space,

Thanks for meeting me and brining me into this community.

Companion Christ,

May I travel on with you, unfolding the story of faith in this place.

Inspiring Spirit

Help me to share the story of faith with others.

Amen

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EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

More material for Evangelism Year appears on the website.

Acknowledgements

This material has been contributed by a variety of Vision4life enthusiasts to whom we are very grateful.

HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group and the coordinator about general issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

Website issues can be dealt with through web@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email: Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk