

# THE BLESSING COURSE

Units in this series

- Unit 1 - Being Disciples
- Unit 2 - Building Our Faith
- Unit 3 - Prayer & Our Spiritual Lives
- Unit 4 - Being The Church
- Unit 5 - Being God's Servants
- Unit 6 - Blessing Your Local Area

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Diocese of Durham



# UNIT 5

**BEING GOD'S  
SERVANTS**

THE  
**BLESSING**  
COURSE

LIVING AS DISCIPLES OF  
THE GOD OF BLESSING

Blessing our communities in Jesus' name



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND

## Foreword

God is in the business of blessing. He blesses in creation (Genesis 1.22, 28). He blesses in the covenants he makes with humanity (e.g. Abraham Gen 12.1-4). He blesses supremely in our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1.3-14).

We are blessed people. So in response we bless God in praise and worship.

Then we are also called to be a people of blessing. God chooses to use us to bless others, as individuals and communities, and to bless the whole of creation. So we need to grow in our experience and understanding of this blessedness. Hence *The Blessing Course*.

The aim of the whole series is to help us grow as followers of Jesus so that we can be a people of blessing. We bless by our presence, by our prayers, by proclaiming the good news, and by serving.

It is my simple prayer that *The Blessing Course* will be a blessing to all who engage in it; and that we will all then be a means of God's blessing to others.

+Paul Dunelm  
*May 2016*

Close your session by saying the following blessing. You may either say it together, or, if you are in a public space, one person may say the blessing on behalf of everyone.

May Wisdom's long-lasting blessings be upon us.

Keep us from short-sightedness and the ease of the crowded road.

For narrow is the way and full is the heart on the path of your blessing.

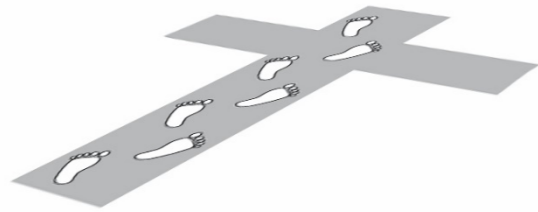
Keep us on that path as we lie down at night.

Keep us on that path as we set out again by day.\*

\*Adapted from Tess Ward, 'Blessing From Wisdom's House', in the Northumbria Community Trust, *Celtic Daily Prayer Book Two: Farther Up and Farther In* (London: HarperCollins, 2015), p.1088

# Responding

Jesus' disciples go out to bless other people. We are called to do the same: to be a blessing wherever we go and to the people we meet.



- Activity 5.6 Talk about a time when God used someone to bless you. Or about a time when God used you to bless someone else.

Draw or write your thoughts here:

- Activity 5.7 Give a blank greeting card to each person. On the card, write a few brief words of encouragement to someone that you know. This may be someone in one of the social groups that you talked about earlier in the session. Or it may be someone in your church or in your family.

The aim of the card, and of your words of encouragement, is to bless that person.

Post or hand-deliver the card to that person this week. Send it as a blessing.

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## Introduction to Being God's Servants

Jesus said:

*Remain in me and I will remain in you.*

*No branch can bear fruit by itself.*

*It must remain in the vine.*

*Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*

*I am the vine. You are the branches.*

*If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.*

*Apart from me you can do nothing.*

John 15.4-5

What does a vine produce? Fruit, such as grapes. What are the benefits of grapes? People eat them, are nourished by them, and enjoy them.



In this image from John, the fruit is what our lives produce when we depend on Jesus. We take our nourishment from Jesus, and Jesus gives us life that is fruitful. Other people are blessed through our lives.

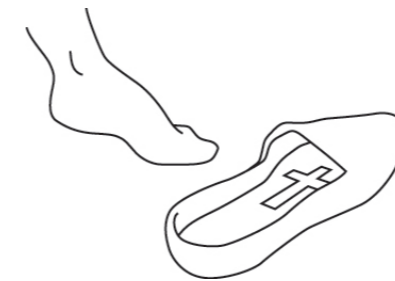
How do we remain in Jesus? Through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus. The Holy Spirit makes us part of the church. The Holy Spirit helps us to live as God's people. As you work your way through this booklet, you will be given opportunities to think about different ways that the Holy Spirit equips you to serve God. The focus of these sessions is on you as an individual, your life with God and your relationship to the church.

- Activity 5.4 Use the passage to talk about the following:

*What did you notice in the passage?*

*What do you notice about Jesus' instructions?*

*What might these instructions look like for you today?*



The structure of Luke 10.1-20 is a useful guide. Vs. 1-12 are Jesus' instructions to his disciples as they go out. Vs. 13-16 is Jesus' proclamation of woes for those who reject him and his disciples. Vs. 17-20 tell about the joyful return of the disciples.

- Activity 5.5 As a Christian, wherever you are, Christ is with you. Not only does Jesus send you, he goes with you.

*What are the implications of this for your weekly schedule?*

No matter where you are, you belong to Christ.

When you are present in a place or with a group of people, you bring the light of Christ to that place or group.

The key idea here is *presence*. Your presence as a Christian.

Activity 5.2 Refer back to the activities and groups that you talked about in Activity 5.1. What might it mean to simply *be present* in those activities or among those people as a Christian?

Draw or write your thoughts here:



Turn next to the story of the sending of the 70 disciples, in Luke 10.1-20.

- Activity 5.3 Before you read, ask everyone to put themselves in the shoes of one of the 70 disciples and to imagine being sent out by Jesus. Then read Luke 10.1-20 out loud slowly.

## Session Contents and Structure

The sessions in this booklet are designed for group study and consist primarily of activities for you to engage in as a group. In between the activities are short explanatory paragraphs that are meant to guide your sessions. You may want to read these paragraphs aloud, or the group leader may summarise them briefly.

Each session is divided into three sections. The first section is called *Welcome and Worship* - all of the sessions open and conclude with worship. Worshipping God together honours God. It also reminds us that our sessions are about our spiritual growth and opens us to the work of the Holy Spirit.

The next part of each session is called *Reflecting Together*. Here you will find opportunities to talk about your faith and what you believe. The final section, *Responding*, helps you to relate your thoughts about your faith to your own discipleship. It allows space for personal reflection and includes the closing worship.

At the very beginning of each session, you will also see a section labelled *Resources*. This provides a list of items you will need for that session. The group leader may provide the items in the list, or you may divide responsibility for these items among the members of your group.

## Spiritual Gifts

Session 4 assumes that you and your group have begun to identify your spiritual gifts. You may prefer to do this independently as a group. Durham Diocese is also sponsoring half-day sessions on identifying your spiritual gifts. You may alternatively want to arrange for your group to attend one of these half-days. Please get in contact with Durham Diocese to find out the date and time of the next half-day on spiritual gifts.

# Session 1

## Head

**We serve God when we tell others about him.**



### Resources

*For this session you will need:*

- Newspaper or magazine clippings of short good news stories. You may also want to download stories off of the internet.
- One Bible per person

## Welcome and Worship

Whether you meet in a public venue or in someone's home, begin the session by welcoming everyone and then chatting together over food and drinks.

You may want to give thanks to God for the food and location. If you are in a public venue, then pray with your eyes open if you prefer.



## Reflecting Together

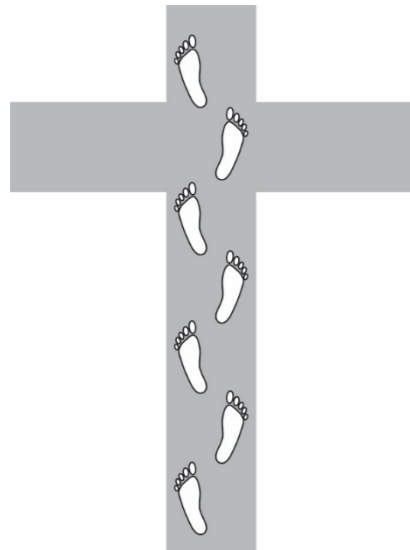
The reason for meeting in an alternative venue is to think about how God is present with you wherever you are. Your life as a Christian is not limited by the walls of a church building.

- Activity 5.1 Talk together about the different activities or groups you are involved in that are not connected with your church. This may be any form of social group including work, clubs, etc. This may include any group of people that you see on a regular basis, such as other parents at the school gate.

Some of my social groups outside of church:

# Session 5

## Feet



**We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.**

### Resources

*For this session you will need:*

- If possible, hold this session in an alternative venue. This may be in someone's home. Or it may be in a public space, such as a pub or café. The purpose of the change of venue is to help people to think about living out their faith wherever they are. But please do not meet in the church building or church hall!
- If you are meeting in a public venue, then bring some money to purchase food and drinks.
- If you are meeting in someone's home, then bring drinks and cakes to share.
- Simple, blank greeting cards and pens
- One Bible per person

## Welcome and Worship

Talk about the people who helped you to meet Christ. This may be family members, church members, friends, a Sunday School teacher, or anyone else who helped you to understand the Christian faith.

Then pray, giving thanks for these people, using the following responsive prayer:

Father, we give you thanks for the people who helped us to meet you.  
**We give thanks for: *name of the person or people.***  
Thank you for sending these people to us.  
**We ask for your blessing on all that they have done in your name.**  
Help us to bless others in the same way.  
**Amen.**

## Reflecting Together

What do you think of as good news?

- Activity 1.1 Look together at the news clippings. Why is each story good news? What makes you think of something as good news?



- Activity 1.2 Talk together about any good news that you personally have received in the last few months. What was your response to this good news? How did it make you feel?

The Christian faith began and continues to exist because of good news. This good news is the gospel. In fact the word ‘gospel’ means ‘good news’. At the heart of the gospel is Jesus – Jesus is the good news.

- Activity 1.3 Turn to the story of Philip and Nathanael, in John 1.43-51. Before you read, ask everyone to put themselves in the shoes of Philip in the story, and to imagine that Nathanael is a personal friend who knows almost nothing about Jesus.

Ask 4 people to read the passage out loud, each taking one of the following roles: the narrator, Philip, Nathanael, and Jesus.

After reading the passage, talk together briefly about the following:

*What was Philip’s role in the story? How might he have felt?*



*Nathanael’s initial response to Philip was negative (verse 46). What changed that?*

**All that I am, Lord  
I place into your hands.**

**All that I do, Lord,  
I place into your hands.**

**Everything I work for  
I place into your hands.**

**Everything I hope for  
I place into your hands.**

**The gifts you have given me  
I place into your hands.**

**All the time before me  
I place into your hands.**

**In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen\***

\*Adapted from ‘Prayers For Committing Our Work to God’, in the Northumbria Community Trust, *Celtic Daily Prayer: Book One The Journey Begins* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p.278

Take your gift tag from Activity 4.9 home and use it in your prayer time in the coming week.

**Note that Session 5 suggests that you meet in an alternative venue. Please look ahead at the beginning of that session for details. You may want to choose your venue and make arrangements for meeting there before concluding this current session (Session 4).**



- Activity 4.8 How might the gifts on the tags be developed in your church?

Draw or write your thoughts here:



The good news of the Christian faith is that Jesus became one of us in order to heal our relationship with God.

**Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you received, in which also you stand, through which you are being saved: ... that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.**

1 Corinthians 15.1-4 (NRSV)

The aim of this discussion is *not* to multiply activities in your church. Instead, it is to help you to think together about how the Spirit has equipped your church and to consider how to develop those gifts.

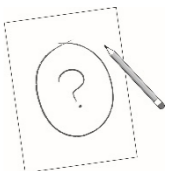
- Activity 4.9 Give everyone a second gift tag. On this tag draw a picture or write a word that expresses your own desire to serve God. This may be related to your gifts, or to anything else that you do or desire to do to serve God.
- Activity 4.10 Ask everyone to stand, holding their gift tags. Ask one person to hold the gift box as well. Pray together. Ask one person to give thanks for the gifts and another person to ask God to enable everyone in the group to serve him.

Conclude by saying together the following prayer:

- Activity 1.4 The passage in the box above is a short statement of the gospel. The writer, Paul, begins by saying that he wants to remind us of the good news at the centre of our faith.

Talk *briefly* about this passage and ask, in what way is the gospel good news for you?

Write or draw your thoughts here:



Because of Jesus, we may know and live for God.

- Activity 1.5 In the space below, make a list of times when the gospel has been good news for you. You may want to include times when you have been aware of the presence of God in your life. This may be through worship, prayer, Scripture, other people, creation, or anything else that you can think of.

My list:



Philip seeks out Nathanael to tell him his good news: he has met Jesus. Philip shares his good news with his friend. In the same way, when we talk about Jesus' presence in our lives, we share good news with others.

- Activity 4.6 The gift tags represent some of the gifts that the Spirit has given to your church.

What do these different gifts suggest about your church?



- Activity 4.7 Compare the gifts on the tags to the life of your church.

*Are there other ways that these gifts might be used in the future?*

*Which gifts are used a lot and why?*

You are unique. And your spiritual gifts are part of that uniqueness.

- Activity 4.4 Take the gift tags out of the box and give everyone a few of them. On each tag write or draw a picture of one of your spiritual gifts. Do not write your name, just the gift.



Use the sellotape to attach the gift tags to the outside of the box by taping the string of the gift tags to the box.

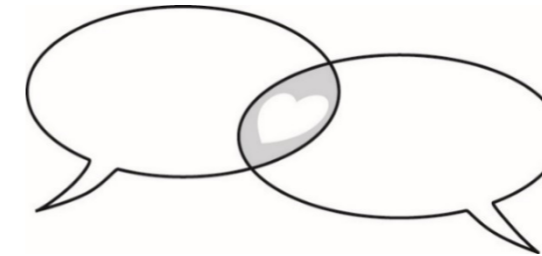
- Activity 4.5 Read aloud the gifts on the tags. Talk about these gifts. How might these gifts be used to bless other people?

Draw or write your thoughts here:

## Responding

The story of Dorcas shows how deeply one person's gifts may impact other people.

Like Dorcas, your spiritual gifts are *from* the Spirit, and *for* the church and your community. They enable you to serve God.



the other person tell her or his story. Each person should tell her or his story in 3 minutes or less.

- Activity 1.6 Divide into pairs. Using your list from Activity 1.5, select one item on that list and tell the other person in your pair the story of that item. Then listen to

Jesus is called 'Emmanuel', which means 'God with us'. When you talk about your experience of God and your belief in God, you tell others that God is with you, now, even in the midst of our sometimes difficult world.

- Activity 1.7 Ask each person in the group to share the selected item on her or his own list with rest of the group. This should take less than one minute each.
  
- Activity 1.8 Talk together as a group about how it felt to hear the different ways that God is at work in the lives of the people in the group.

## Responding

In the story of Philip and Nathanael, what did Philip say to Nathanael? Quite simply: 'We have found the Messiah. Come and see!'

When people ask you about your Christian faith, even a few words can make a difference. These words do not have to be perfect. They do not have to be rehearsed. But they do need to be your *own* testimony (or personal story).

- Activity 1.9 What you talked about in Activity 1.7 is your own testimony to God at work in your life. You may have other testimonies to God as well. Your testimony develops as your life with God develops.



In the space below, draw a picture or write a few words that will help you to recall your story of God at work in your life:

God gives you spiritual gifts so that you may bless other people.

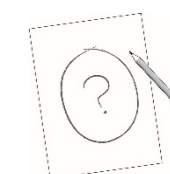
- Activity 4.2 Your spiritual gifts are a blessing from God to you, so that you might bless others. Talk about ways you have seen people in your church bless others through the use of their gifts.

Look together at the story of Dorcas, in Acts 9.36-42, as an example of someone who used her gift to bless others.

- Activity 4.3 Ask everyone to imagine Dorcas as a close friend. Dorcas is the type of friend who is always ready to lend a helping hand. You can rely upon her.

Then read Acts 9.36-42 out loud. Afterwards, ask everyone to talk about the following:

*How did the story make you feel when you heard that Dorcas had died? Then when you saw Dorcas alive again?*

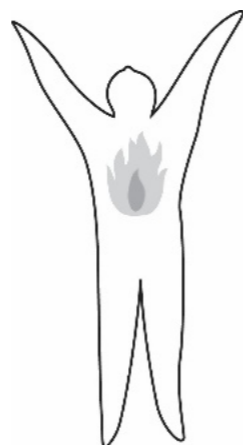


*How might Dorcas provide you with a model for using your gifts?*

## Reflecting Together

This session assumes that you have already begun the process of identifying your spiritual gifts. Here you will think about how you might use your gifts.

The Holy Spirit equips you to serve God by giving you spiritual gifts. Your gifts reflect both how God made you and how the Spirit works through you. So, a gift may reflect who you are as a person. Or it may be an ability that comes directly from the Spirit. Or both.



- Activity 4.1 Why does God give you spiritual gifts? To help you answer this question, talk about the verses in the box below.

**To each one of us the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.**

1 Corinthians 12.7 (NIV)

**Jesus gives gifts 'to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.'**

Ephesians 4.12 (NIV)

These passages show that spiritual gifts have a purpose:

*for the common good.*

*to build each other up in Christ.*

Close by giving thanks for the many ways that the members of your group have encountered God. Use the prayer below to help you.

Blessed are you, God our Father,  
through your Son the Christ.  
His name is Jesus.

**God is with us. Praise the Lord.**

Jesus came and shared our life.  
**God is with us. Praise the Lord.**

Jesus' touch made people whole.  
**God is with us. Praise the Lord.**

Jesus raised the dead to life.  
**God is with us. Praise the Lord.**

Jesus died to set us free.  
**God is with us. Praise the Lord.**

Jesus rose to life again.  
**God is with us. Praise the Lord.**

Jesus is our King on high.  
**God is with us. Praise the Lord.**  
**Amen.\***

\*'Praise and Thanksgiving G72', New Patterns for Worship, The Church of England,  
<https://cms.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/common-material/new-patterns-worship/resource-section-themes/g-praise-thanksgiving>

## Session 2

# Heart

**Serving God means loving others. One way to love others is by listening to them.**



### Resources

*For this session you will need:*

- A candle and matches
- The music for 'The Servant Song' by Richard Gillard.
- One Bible per person

## Welcome and Worship

Place the gift-wrapped box in the centre of the room. The box represents God's gifts to us. God gives us many good things. Ask each person in the group to name out loud one thing she or he is thankful for.

Then give thanks using the following prayer:

Let us give thanks to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
**who has blessed us in Christ  
with every spiritual blessing.**

Before the world was made, God chose us in Christ,  
**that we might be holy and blameless before him.**

Let us praise God for the glory of his grace,  
**for the free gift he gave us in his dear Son.**

To Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
**give praise and dominion, honour and might,  
for ever and ever.**

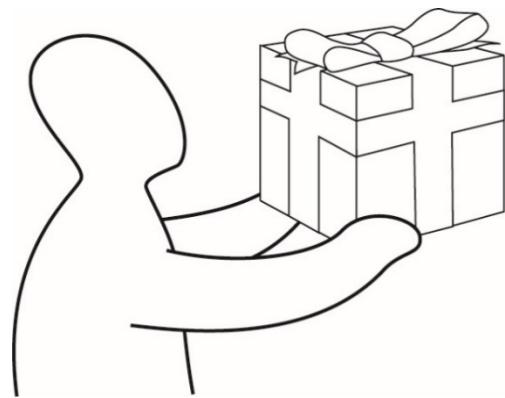
**Amen.\***

\*'Praise and Thanksgiving G22', New Patterns for Worship, The Church of England,  
<https://cms.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/common-worship/common-material/new-patterns-worship/resource-section-themes/g-praise-thanksgiving>

# Session 4

## Gifts

**How might you use your gifts to serve God in your church and your community?**



### Resources

*For this session you will need:*

- A large gift-wrapped box with a removable lid
- Blank gifts tags with strings at one end – put these inside the box
- Pens or markers
- Sellotape
- A Bible

## Welcome and Worship

Light a candle and place it in the centre of the room. Leave it lit throughout the session to remind you of God's presence with you.



Listen to 'The Servant Song' by Richard Gillard.

Then say the following affirmation of faith together as a prayer:

**We believe in the Father who looks at the heart.**

**We believe in the Son who knows what is in our hearts.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit who searches our hearts.**

**Amen.\***

\*'Journeying: Declaration of Faith', in the Northumbria Community Trust, *Celtic Daily Prayer Book Two: Farther Up and Farther In* (London: HarperCollins, 2015), p.1076.

## Reflecting Together

In the story of Ruth, Ruth leaves her homeland, Moab, to travel with her mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Israel, the homeland of Naomi. So Ruth becomes a foreigner in a new country. Naomi is old while Ruth is young. Both are widows.

- Activity 2.1 Read Ruth 2.1-23 out loud slowly. As you read, pay particular attention to the role of Ruth. After reading, talk briefly about the following:

*What did you notice in the story?*



*How does Ruth demonstrate her love for Naomi? What is the result?*

Ruth's love for Naomi was self-sacrificial. Ruth gave up her homeland to be with Naomi, who was completely alone. She worked in the fields in order to provide for both of them. The way she relates to Naomi expresses her love for Naomi.

- Activity 3.6 Pick one item on your list from Activity 3.5. Talk about how you could make this happen. How might you put it into practice?

Pray together. Let the candle remind you of God's presence with you and pray quietly, asking God how you might personally show welcome and hospitality to others.

Conclude your time of prayer by saying together the prayer of St Francis of Assisi (Alternatively, you may want to sing 'Make Me a Channel of Your Peace' by Sebastian Temple, which is based on this prayer):

**Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,  
Where there is injury, pardon,  
Where there is doubt, faith,  
Where there is despair, hope,  
Where there is darkness, light,  
And where there is sadness, joy.**

**O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved, as to love.**

**For it is in giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.**



## Responding

The widow of Zarephath welcomed Elijah and provided for him, even when she had very little to give. God blessed her generosity.



Like the widow, we do not have to have a lot to make others feel welcome. Giving another person attention and assistance extends God's love to that person.

**Give of your hands to serve,  
and your hearts to love.**  
*Mother Teresa*

- Activity 3.5 Use the lists that you made in Activity 3.3 to help you think about some practical ways to welcome others. Think especially about how you personally may show welcome to others who come to your church. How might you help your church create an atmosphere of welcome?

Make a list of your ideas on a separate sheet of A3 paper. You may want to use your conversation in Activity 3.4 to help you.

Write or draw your ideas here:

In the Bible, love has to do with how we relate to others. It is a choice: we choose to act in love. This love includes how we feel, but it does not depend upon our feelings. This love is self-sacrificial and sometimes involves tough choices.



- Activity 2.2 Can you think of a time when someone acted in a self-sacrificial way towards you or towards someone else? What was the result?

Write or draw your thoughts here:

We express our love for others through the way that we relate to them.



One of the simplest but also most profound ways that you can love other people is by listening to them.

Listening does *not* mean doing what the other person says. It means taking the time to *hear* the other person. It means seeking to understand, even if we do not agree.

Listening to others is not always easy.

- Activity 2.3 How easy do you find it to listen to other people? Put a tick next to any of the following statements that are *often* true of you:

*In a chat with other people, I tend to do lots of the talking.*

*I change the subject when someone starts to get emotional.*

*Sometimes I talk at the same time as other people.*

*When other people are talking, I find myself looking around and waiting for them to finish.*

*When other people are talking, I like to think about what I'm going to say next.*

*I feel impatient when other people don't state their point quickly.*

*I often interrupt other people.*

*I often wish other people wouldn't talk about themselves so much.*

*I often complete other people's sentences.*

Now count up the number of ticks you have made. If you have put ticks next to 5 or more of these statements, you may need to work on your listening skills. If this is true of you, don't worry. That's what this session is about. Helping all of us to listen better.

So far, we have been thinking about what makes *you* feel welcome. Now we are going to consider how you and your church may make others feel welcome.

**Reach out and welcome one another, to God's glory.  
Jesus did it. Now you do it!**  
Romans 15.7 (*The Message*)

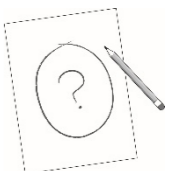
Romans 15.7 calls us to be a welcoming church community, and points to Jesus as our model.

**Dear friend, when you extend hospitality to  
Christian brothers and sisters, even when they  
are strangers, you make the faith visible.**  
3 John 5 (*The Message*)

According to 3 John, our hospitality makes the Christian faith 'visible' to others.

- Activity 3.4 Talk about these two verses.

*What does welcome look like in your church?*



*How does this welcome make your Christian faith visible?*

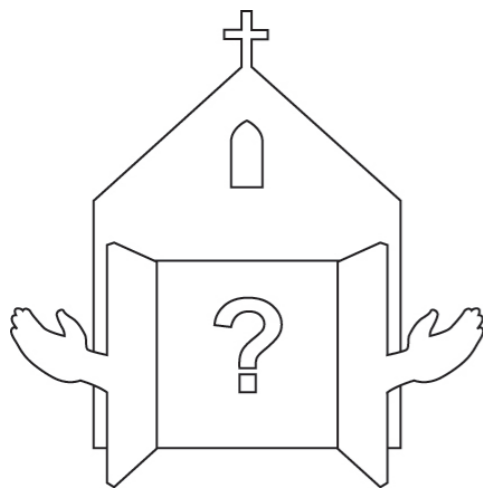
- Activity 3.3 Talk about situations in which you felt welcome. What impact did they have on you?

Then talk about situations in which you did not feel welcome. What impact did they have on you?

As you talk, use your responses to fill out the two columns below. You may also want to put this on another sheet of A3 paper.

**Things that made me feel welcome**

**Things that made me feel *not* welcome**



As Christians, God welcomes us into his family.

Just as God welcomes us, we are called to welcome others into the church, to receive others in love as God has received us. Most people come to Christ, and into the church, through relationships.

Listening is an act of love. It is often self-sacrificial – it is a discipline that does not come easily to all of us. Many of us have to *learn* to listen.

The German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, made a strong connection between love and listening.

**The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. Just as love of God begins with listening to his word, so the beginning of love for our brothers and sisters is learning to listen to them.**

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

- Activity 2.4 Take 3-4 minutes to talk about the quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What stands out to you in the quote? What is the connection between love and listening?

Write or draw your thoughts here:

Listening allows others to express their joys and concerns. It builds trust. It liberates the heart. **For the remainder of this session, you will be given the opportunity to practice your listening skills.** The aim of the following activities is not to role play, but to actually *listen*.

- Activity 2.5 Divide into pairs. In your pairs, each person should tell the other a story about an event that made her or him happy. While the first person tells her or his story, the other person should listen carefully but remain quiet, except to ask clarifying questions. Then swap, and have the second person tell her or his story while the first person listens but remains quiet.

This activity should take about 6 minutes – so that’s 3 minutes of talking time for each person.

Afterwards, in your pairs, tell the other person one thing that you appreciated about that person’s story.

- Activity 2.6 Feedback your partner’s story to the group. Do *not* retell the story. Instead, summarise the story in one or two *brief* sentences.

- Activity 2.7 How did it feel to be heard?



## Reflecting Together

The word ‘welcome’ comes from the combination of two words: ‘will’ and ‘come’. Here, ‘will’ means to desire and ‘come’ refers to the person who arrives or ‘comes’. So the word welcome refers to a person whose coming is wanted or well-received.

- Activity 3.1 On an A3 sheet of paper, get everyone to draw pictures or write words that they associate with feeling wanted or ‘welcome’.

Alternatively, you may want to give everyone post-it notes to write or draw on, and they can attach the post-it notes to the A3 paper.

Talk together about what you have put on the paper.

In the story of the Widow of Zarephath, in 1 Kings 17.1-16, the widow shows welcome to the prophet Elijah during a period of extreme drought.

- Activity 3.2 Ask everyone to put themselves in the shoes of the widow. Then read 1 Kings 17.1-16 out loud slowly. After reading the passage, talk *briefly* about the following:

*How does the widow feel at the beginning of the story? How might her feelings have changed as the story progresses?*

*What role does the widow’s faith play in the story?*

## Welcome and Worship

Place the painting *The Good Shepherd* by Sieger Koder in a spot where everyone can see it, and leave it there throughout the session.

Today's session considers how we welcome others. This painting shows how Jesus, our good shepherd, welcomes us into his family.

Using the painting, meditate silently for 2-3 minutes on how Jesus welcomes you. What do you notice in the painting? What does it suggest about your own welcome?

Close the meditation by saying together the following as a prayer:

**Hands, Lord –  
your gift to us.  
We stretch them up to you.  
Always you hold them.**

**Your hands,  
scarred,  
became a sign  
of your love  
no time can erase.**

**Your hands,  
which have us  
inscribed on their palms  
pour down blessing  
on the details of our days.  
Amen.\***

\*Laurel Bridges, in the Northumbria Community Trust, *Celtic Daily Prayer: Book One The Journey Begins* (London: HarperCollins, 2000), pp.521-22.

## Responding

Listening is a way of caring for others. It is *pastoral*.

As Christians, we are called to demonstrate God's love to other Christians and to the community around us. Listening helps us to do that.

- Activity 2.8 Back in your pairs, tell one another about a personal concern that you have. As in Activity 2.5, each person should talk while the other listens carefully but remains quiet (this activity should also take about 6 minutes – so that's 3 minutes of talking time for each person).

- Activity 2.9 Still in your pairs, talk about those concerns. Don't seek solutions or be tempted to give advice. Instead, ask one another questions and probe the concerns together.

For instance, you may want to ask: 'How did it feel when...?'  
Or, 'Where did you sense God at work in ...?'

Listening opens the door to prayer. When we listen well, we gain understanding that helps us to pray for each other.

- Activity 2.10 Pray for one another and the concerns that you have talked about. You may pray in your pairs, or you may prefer to pray together as a whole group.



Close your session by singing 'The Servant Song' by Richard Gillard:

Brother, sister, let me serve you.  
Let me be as Christ to you.  
Pray that I might have the grace  
To let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on the journey.  
We are travellers on the road.  
We are here to help each other,  
Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ light for you  
In the night time of your fear.  
I will hold my hand out to you  
Speak the peace you long to hear.

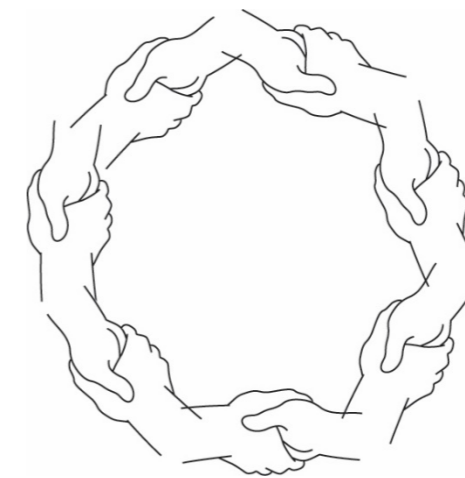
I will weep when you are weeping.  
When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.  
I will share your joy and sorrow,  
Till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven  
We shall find such harmony,  
Born of all we've known together  
Of Christ's love and agony.

## Session 3

# Hands

**Welcome and hospitality are expressions of love for others. We show God's love when we welcome others.**



### Resources

*For this session you will need:*

- A copy of the painting *The Good Shepherd* by Sieger Koder
- A3 sheets of paper and markers
- Post-it notes
- One Bible per person
- Words and music for 'Make Me a Channel of Your Peace' by Sebastian Temple