



Inspiring Unity: course outline

The journey week by week

Taster Session

The session aimed to offer potential participants a feel for the content and approach of the course and to agree how and when it could take place.

During the evening there was:

- An opening and closing

reflection

- An outline of the course given
- Names placed around a centrepiece with a candle and open Bible
- An explanation of how the course had come about and shared memories of the journey so far
- Flip chart exercise on hopes – what a good course would look like to you
- Outline of course
- Personal reflection
- Music.

Session1: A Point of Departure

“Take us from where we are,
to where you want us to be.”

(from ACTS Commitment Prayer used as closing reflection for session 1)

The session aimed to re-engage participants with a journey of understanding to value diversity in unity. Expected outcomes for participants were:

- To reconnect with the outcomes of work over the past three years
- To identify their contribution and how it had affected them
- To identify hopes and anxieties for the next stage.

Participants were invited to introduce themselves by sharing something about themselves, what they were passionate about and what group they had been part of. They were provided with quotations from the ‘In Wi’ the mix’ project reports and invited to reflect on these appreciatively in small groups. Then they were asked to share their feelings, anxieties and hopes now. They were introduced to the principles of non-judgemental listening. The evening closed with the prayer of commitment ‘we commit ourselves to travel this journey with you as pilgrims and not as strangers’ (ACTS 1990).

Session 2: Images of God and Human Behaviour

The overall aim of the session was to explore the relationship between images of God, self-image, behaviour and relationship with God and how these can change. Intended outcomes for participants included:

- To reflect how their own images of God changed in the course of their lives, what triggered these changes and the impact they had
- To consider developments in the understanding of God in the Bible and human progress and what this means for behaviour
- To be aware of how the image we have of God affects our behaviour.

After hearing the song, 'Come as you are', participants were invited to look at pictures of chairs and note which they would identify with God and which themselves! They had a variety of visual images of God to look at and they shared which reflected their younger image of God and which was their image now. Then they were given an input and handout on developing understandings of God over time and in the Jewish-Christian traditions. They were invited to reflect upon their learning about God, themselves and the work for unity.

Session 3: Biblical Images of God and Lectio Divina

The aim of this session was to explore and pray with Biblical images of God to notice their effect on self and relationship with God and others. Outcomes for participants were intended to include:

- To identify the feelings that favourite Biblical images of God evoke
- To become aware of the diverse images of God in Scripture and what they mean for their understanding of God
- To experience Lectio Divina as a method of praying Scripture.

In this session participants shared in pairs and then in the larger group, their favourite Biblical stories about God. The core of the session was a led Lectio Divina on Psalm 23 and the 'homework' included praying with Biblical images of God and writing a personal statement.

Session 4: Self Awareness: Who Am I? Made in the Likeness and Image of God

The aim of the session was to encourage participants to become self-aware in the light of their Christian identity and human journey and to reflect on what this means for behaviour and work to inspire unity.

Intended outcomes for participants included:

- To become aware of their essential human identity and what this means for attitudes and behaviour and for work to inspire unity
- To consider the potential for change in attitudes and behaviour.

Activities included finding a picture card to express something of who you are and hearing from others in the group what they recognise of you in the picture. Then

individual and group discussion using a four quadrant handout, based on the Johari window, to consider:

- Who is the God in whose image I am made?
- How do I reflect these qualities?
- In what ways am I still in process?
- What does this say about inspiring unity?

Session 5: Building the Kingdom of God

The aim of this session was to explore the nature and experience of community and the call to become community in the light of the Kingdom of God. The intended outcomes for participants were:

- An appreciation of their communities and where they may be called to be Kingdom builders
- An awareness of the radical nature of Kingdom values and their relevance to the challenges in community today
- Understanding of where they feel drawn to deepen their work to inspire unity in their local communities.

After a review of the last session and homework, participants worked in small groups using conversation cards, to talk about what fosters community. A modern rewording of the Beatitudes was then the basis for considering how Kingdom values might be at work in communities today. After an input on Jesus's radical reframing of the Kingdom of God, the group had some quite reflection and were asked, as homework, to consider where God was calling them now.

Session 6: The Kingdom of God and Justice

The aim of this session was to explore the relationship between the Kingdom of God, communities of difference and justice. Intended outcomes were for participants to:

- Acknowledge legacies of bitterness in communities
- Consider the place of justice in overcoming divisions
- Appreciate the value of dialogue in overcoming divisions within and between communities
- Consider how stumbling blocks to reconciliation can become points of transformation.

After asking where people had felt themselves called in this work, the group considered a (fictional) monologue of a person who was outraged by something that had happened in her church and discussed in small groups and then together, how this made them feel and how they might respond. There was then an exercise to consider how there can be different perspectives on the same situation. Finally, each person was asked to select a stone to represent the stumbling block or challenge they perceived to the work of peace and justice in their community. They were asked to take this away and during the week to think of a word of reconciliation liberation or justice to write on the stone.

Session 7: Drawing the Threads Together and Thinking Ahead

The aim was to recap on the course and encourage concrete thinking on moving forward. The intended outcomes were for participants to:

- Consider the cost of work to inspire unity
- Identify their own desires and strengths for the next stage of the journey
- Identify the resources they have in their communities to support this work
- Identify what the course has meant to the individually and as a group
- Be encouraged to work as a group with less reliance on the facilitators.

For this session we met around a table. Participants were offered the chance of taking their previous evaluation forms and asked permission for photographs to be taken. After the stilling, last week's stones were brought to the table and participants presented their liberating words to counter the burdens the stones had represented. Between sessions they had been asked to watch an extract from the film 'Two Sided Story' about bereaved Palestinians and Jews meeting to share their stories. There was discussion about how this made participants feel and the cost of reconciliation. They then worked individually and as a group on the strengths and resources in their communities, what else was needed to take the work forward and who else could help. The contributions were displayed on the wall. During tea and cake everyone took a prayer slip with a name in to pray for another member of the group. Next each person selected a picture card to explain what they felt ready to do now. Visual reminders of the course were offered and people reflected as a group and individually about the gifts and learning they had received. Future filming was discussed and the course ended with people passing a candle from hand to hand and a closing blessing.

“It laid a foundation and enabled us to understand and tackle any unity issues.” Course participant