

The Church and Experience

Some practical ideas for encouraging real-world faith

Philip King and a variety of others at St. Matthew's Church, Oxford



This short booklet describes some practical ideas for helping church members better link their faith to their daily lives. Most of the ideas are for use in church services; one is for use outside of a normal service. These ideas have been tried and tested in a local church in Oxford, and some very practical details of how they can be made to work are given.

The aim is to help congregation members explore and deepen their faith, and develop more links between it and what they do day-to-day. Most of the ideas also help congregation members get to know each other better too – part of the process of mutual support in our faith.

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Acknowledgments

The material in this booklet is the result of ideas that have been tried over a period of several years at St. Matthew's Church, Oxford. Many congregation members have contributed to the ideas and helped to shape them. Particularly involved have been Revd Steve Hellyer, Vicar of St. Matthew's, Revd Mike Rayner, Revd Michael Moynagh, Jonathan Winter and Philip King.

We hope these ideas are useful for other churches. Please spread them around as you see fit! Comments on them, or your stories on how they've been used in your church, are very welcome – to Philip King (kingpjc@gmail.com or via St. Matthew's Church, Marlborough Road, Oxford).

Introduction



Imagine local church members being better equipped to relate their faith to their daily lives. Imagine them knowing that what they do, day to day, is as important to God as their Sunday church activities. Imagine them being resourced, enabled, supported and equipped through their church activities for what the week ahead has in store for them. Imagine them learning more and more how to apply the values of God's kingdom to all aspects of their weekday activities – work, relationships, family – and expecting to see God at work in all these areas.

Just imagine for a second what a difference that would make – to the world around us and to ourselves.

This short booklet is about some practical ways that this sort of vision might be helped to become more of a reality. It contains ideas, tried and tested in a local church, to help congregation members explore and deepen their faith, and develop more links between it and what they do day-to-day. Most of the ideas also help congregation members get to know each other better too – part of the process of mutual support in our faith.

You might want to dive straight into a few of these ideas – in which case, why not pick one of the following sections and start there. You can always come back to this introduction later if you want. But if you'd like to know a little more of the thinking behind some of the ideas, then keep going with this introduction, as it sets the scene a bit.

The ideas in this booklet are a response to the hunger that many Christians feel to find more links between what they do in Sundays in church and what happens for them in the rest of their day-to-day lives. We've become good at compartmentalising our lives – we've separated faith and religious activity from the rest of life, but this leads to dissatisfaction. If the values of the Christian gospel are true, surely they should apply to all of life? And is God only interested in my Sunday activities? – surely he's concerned about all the things that I do? Indeed, much teaching in both the Old and New Testaments is about God being passionately concerned with

how people live their day-to-day lives. So can we find ways to join our faith back to the day-to-day – to join Sunday back to Monday, as it were?

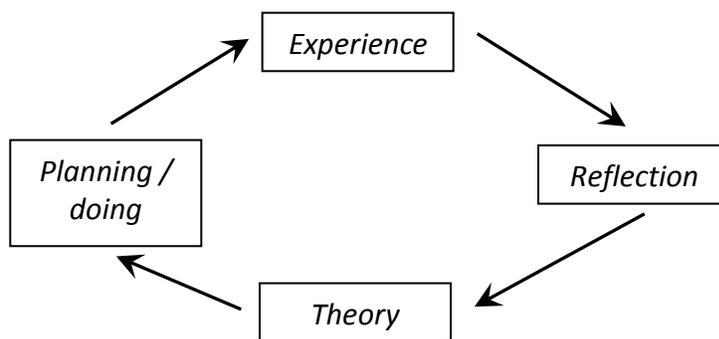
This dissatisfaction experienced by some Christians is a two-way thing. It's about recognising that the values of our faith should be relevant to our daily lives. It's also about taking what happens in our daily lives and wanting to know where God is within this. We want to learn more about how to apply the things we are taught in church in the day-to-day. And we want to take our day-to-day experiences and ask, 'What do these experiences mean for my faith? What is God saying to me through them? How do I relate the joys and difficulties of everyday life to my faith?'.

In church we are often good at doing just one of these things. Typically within our services we will have one or more Bible passages read out. Then someone will give a sermon on the passages which helps us understand them better and, hopefully, gives us ideas about how to apply what we've learnt in our daily lives.

But we're not good at doing things the other way round in church. We don't often have opportunity to say 'This is what's going on in my day-to-day experience. I want to think about this more, and work out what it means for my faith'.

This second thing – starting with experience and looking to see how it relates to our faith – is becoming increasingly important in our culture. It is less and less the case that people respond to being told what to believe. Things that have traditionally been sources of authority for people – the church, the bible, vicars, etc – are no longer held up as authoritative in the way that they used to be. Instead, people's subjective experience is increasingly becoming authoritative for them. And so, within the church, we need to look harder at how we can engage with our experiences and then bring them into conversation with our faith.

In the 1980s, David Kolb produce a simple model of how people learn through their experiences. He suggested that people start with an experience – something happens to them. For them to learn from this, they think about it and reflect on it. They come up with some ideas about why things happened as they did – a theory. This theory helps them to work out how to act in the future, and they try again. And this then leads back to having another experience, and so on.



In our normal church services, we're good at doing part of this process. We start with 'theory' – a bible passage that we get to understand better through the sermon. The preacher might tell us how to apply this theory to our daily lives – the planning/doing part. We then might go out and have an experience. But we don't often have opportunity, in the context of our faith, to reflect on that experience and apply it back to what we learnt in church.

This is perhaps most true for churches in the Western world. In other parts of the world, for example in South America, people do start with their day-to-day experiences, often of poverty or injustice, and then look to see what the Bible and their faith has to say about these. They actively link their experience to their faith.

All of the suggestions in the following sections of this book are about helping people to join up their experiences with their faith. They're about allowing all the parts of the learning circle in the diagram above to be a part of our learning as Christians. 'Tomorrow at 11', 'sofa sermons', 'Friday dinners' – all are about linking directly and explicitly our faith with our day-to-day lives and experiences. 'Zoned services' are also about helping us explore our faith more experientially and allowing not just the theory and planning / doing bits of the above cycle into Sunday mornings. This is particularly true for the 'community zoned service' idea.

We hope that these ideas are useful to you. The specific ideas themselves may not be right for you and your context. They've worked well in a particular size and style of church located in a particular community at a particular time. So they are likely to need adapting for other churches/locations/times, etc. But we hope they are an encouragement to help our church members grow in their faith and in how they apply it day-to-day in their lives – so that we might all see more of God's kingdom values in our world.

Please note: there is a full introduction to zoned services in the Grove Booklet no. 181 'Liquid Worship' by Tim Lomax and Michael Moynagh (see www.grovebooks.co.uk).

Sofa Sermons



What's a sofa sermon?

A group of two or three congregation members discuss a topic of contemporary interest from a faith perspective during the sermon slot in a church service. The aim is to help the whole congregation think further about the topic and how their faith relates to it.

A sofa sermon isn't about giving congregation members more comfortable places to sit during a service! Rather, it's about a different way to do the normal sermon slot. It's a way to help a congregation explore important issues from a Christian perspective, and to get to know a few congregation members a bit better in the process. Sofa sermons are an effective way of relating real-life issues and experiences to Christian faith.

A sofa sermon involves two or three people – we'll call them 'sofa guests' – answering questions and talking about a topic. It's called a 'sofa sermon' because, when we've tried this in a church service, we have used a couple of sofas that the people being interviewed sit on in front of everyone. There's also a chair person, who can ask questions, keep the conversation going and keep things to time (the chair person is also allowed a sofa, not just a chair, if one is available!).

For perhaps around half an hour, the people on the sofa talk about the topic of the service. They will have been chosen because they have particular, but different, experiences of the topic. Topics that have been used include disability; death and dying; teenagers; mental health; science and faith; poverty – there are many others, and they will change depending on what is relevant to a congregation at a particular time.

The sofa guests will normally have chosen one or two bible passages that they feel are relevant to the topic. These are read out, and then the chair person will briefly introduce the topic and say who is on the sofa. The sofa guests then introduce themselves and say why it is that they are sitting on the sofa that morning – what is their relationship to the topic being discussed. And then, over the sermon period, they will each respond to various questions from the chair and discuss with each other in front of everyone.

One of the aims is to give congregation members new insights into the topic. For example, people might realise that it is more complicated than they first thought; or that different

Christians hold different views on it, and that that's OK. They might see how faith relates to the topic in new ways. They might be given new ways to think about the topic from a Christian perspective – they might find their own views of it changing.

We find that sofa sermons are a very good way of seeing how the sofa guests' real-life experiences relate to their faith, and vice versa. Because they have often wrestled with a particular topic and how it relates to their faith, they are able to give real insights that are very valuable in helping congregation members in their own faith journeys.

But also as a result of a sofa sermon, congregation members get to know the people on the sofa a bit more. They will learn, perhaps, about what the sofa guests do during the rest of the week. They will learn about some of the things they've been through, and how their experiences relate to their Christian faith. They will be able to pray for the sofa guests in the future because they will learn about some of the difficulties that the guests might have. They will be able to have some interesting conversations with the sofa guests afterwards.

Because this getting to know people is a part of what happens in a sofa sermon, it can be helpful for the sofa guests to be members of the congregation themselves. This isn't always possible – sometimes it might be good to invite an expert from outside the congregation – but sofa sermons can be particularly effective when the guests mainly come from within the church family.

The sofa guests shouldn't have a purely academic discussion of the topic. Normally, the guests are chosen because they have particular personal experience of the issues. For a sofa sermon on the topic of 'teenagers' for example, the church youth worker, a parent of teenagers and two teenagers themselves were sofa guests. For 'disability', congregation members who had particular experience of disability – through either being disabled themselves, or through working with others with disability – were sofa guests.

At the end of the sofa sermon time, the chair will normally say a few concluding thoughts. It might then be appropriate to have a short time of quiet to allow congregation members to reflect on what they've heard and to pray; or there might be an appropriate song.

A few practicalities for sofa sermons

The topic for a sofa sermon needs to be chosen well in advance, and the sofa guests and chair need to be booked for a particular day. It can be a daunting experience for some of the guests to be talking in front of the congregation! So it can help if the sofa guests and the chair have met together before the day of the sofa sermon. They might like to have a meal together beforehand, where they can discuss the topic a bit themselves. This will help them to get to know each other and what their experiences are of the topic. It will begin to highlight key questions that the chair can ask them. They might like to plan an outline for the discussion. And it allows them to choose the bible passages that they would like to be read on the day.

It helps if other parts of the service are linked in some way to the sofa sermon topic. Those choosing the songs should know about the topic; the person leading prayers or intercessions could also think in advance of suitable prayers.

On the day itself, there is a little bit of setup required before the service – the places where the sofa guests and chair will sit during the sofa sermon need to be set up, for example. If the church uses microphones to enable congregation members to hear, these will need to be arranged in such a way that they are accessible to the sofa guests – it is preferable if microphones don't have to be passed around, as that can hinder discussion.

Zones!



What's a Zone?

During part of a service, the congregation visits different areas of the church, or zones, each of which allows them to explore the topic of the service in different ways. The aim is to give people new insights and to experience the bible and their faith, and God, in new ways

Using zones is a rather different way of using part of a normal service. It's worthwhile spending a short time thinking about why they can be useful and helpful to people, as it can take people some time to see why something like this could be a good idea!

Zones can be used instead of the sermon slot within a normal worship service instead. Bible passages are read as usual, and then a very short – 5 minutes only – introduction to the topic is given. Set up around the church are 6 to 8 different areas – zones – which the congregation can then explore during a 30 to 40 minute period. There might be a discussion zone, where a small group can talk about the topic and the bible passages; a quiet reflection zone with prompts for prayer and meditation; a creative writing zone with ideas for how to write a psalm or prayer on the service topic; an art zone to allow reflection on works of art relevant to the bible passages; a zone where people can watch a video of someone talking about the topic; a zone where a monologue or short drama piece based on a bible passage is read out and discussed; a zone encouraging people to think about how what they've learnt applies to their daily lives and so on.

So why is this a good idea?

- ***People like to learn differently.*** If we go back to our 'learning circle' discussed in the introduction, although all parts of this circle help us with learning, each of us has our own favourite point at which we like to join the circle, as it were. Some of us like the facts and figures behind something. Some like to understand the theory of what's going on. Some like to share ideas and discuss things. Some like to dive in and try something. Some like exploring creatively through art or poetry. And so on. A sermon is one way of

learning – but it's not necessarily everyone's favourite way, or the way they most engage with. Sermons can leave those who like to try things out or those who start by reflecting on their experiences a bit high and dry. So one benefit of zones is that they allow people to explore the topic of the day in ways that best suit them.

- **Zones can challenge people's ways of thinking.** Zones can provide people with new insights because the different activities on offer naturally lead to different ways of looking at the bible passages. For example, reflection on a piece of art suddenly gives new questions to people – 'I didn't think they would be dressed like that'; 'I always pictured Jesus standing, but the artist has drawn him kneeling – I wonder why?'. People begin to realise that their own understanding of a passage may not be the only way to think about it. They are encouraged to explore it differently and to think about it in new ways. And so they can learn new things about God and grow in their faith.
- **Zones encourage deeper exploration.** Zones enable people to actively explore the passages and topic. The act of physically moving to one or more zones encourages involvement. That people can choose the zones that suit them best also encourages them to actively participate in the service.
- **Zones encourage people to be involved.** Zones allow a variety of congregation members to participate in the creation of a service. Normally each zone is put together by a different person – precisely because different people like to think about things in different ways. But this means that quite a few people have had to think about the topic, and have been a part of putting the service together through making a zone.
- **Zones start new conversations.** There is a certain informality about the zone time. People can move between zones as they wish, and as they do this, they talk to each other. One of our experiences is that the conversations they have are often different from what they would have at other times, over coffee after the service, for example. The conversations are often about the topic of the service and about what people are getting from the different zones. People also talk to others who they wouldn't normally speak to. It's rather true, however we might think otherwise, that after a service people tend to talk with those they know. Zones give them an opportunity, an excuse, to talk to new people – it's something that happens naturally within and between the zones.

Zones allow new experiences of the bible passages and the topic – and of God. And they enable people to get to know other members of the congregation a bit better as they talk about their experiences.

A few practicalities for zones

Zones do take a bit of thinking about and preparation, and probably a bit of trial and error too.

It is worthwhile considering the topic and passage for a zoned service carefully. Bible stories with strong characters, parables and events provide good material for a zoned service because works of art based on the passage can easily be found, and people can engage creatively and imaginatively with the passage in a variety of different ways. An example zoned service based on a passage from John's gospel is given in Appendix 1.

The topic and bible passages for a zoned service need to be thought about a fair way in advance, to allow ideas for zones to be generated and the zones created. Congregation members can be asked if they would like to create a zone. Once a list of potential zones is drawn up, some thought needs to be given to where each zone will happen. Typically they will all happen within a single worship space – the body of a church. Quieter zones are best put close to each other, and 'noisier zones' – discussion or video zones, for example – put in a different part of the church. It might be possible to use a vestry or other room for a more reflective zone. But the noise of one zone disturbing another is a problem that sometimes has to be solved with a bit of trial and error!

The other reason to plan the service in advance is so that congregation members can be told what is coming and what they should expect. It can be a bit disconcerting to arrive expecting a traditional sermon only to find that these strange zones are happening instead! There are some further thoughts on putting new elements into a church service in Appendix 4, but giving people lots of warning, explaining what will happen and why, and inviting them to be involved, will all help when zones are introduced.

It is helpful to produce a sheet for the congregation to have on the day which lists the different zones and gives a 1-sentence description of each. The person doing the 5 minute introduction to the topic can briefly say what each zone is too. It can be helpful to have a simple map of the church with the position of each zone marked, so that people know where to go for the zones they've chosen.

The 5 minute introduction to the topic is designed to highlight key themes or issues which the congregation can then explore further in the zones. It can be most helpful if this introduction asks questions rather than gives lots of answers – it's meant to whet the appetites of congregation members and get them thinking about what they want to explore further during the zone time.

Some people may not want to visit zones, for a variety of different reasons. So it can be an idea to produce a set of questions on the topic and the passages and print these along with the zone descriptions and map of the church. Some people can then stay in their seats and use the time to think about the questions and pray. The questions come in handy in some of the zones too – for example a discussion zone or a meditation zone.

As mentioned above, the zone time can be fairly informal. To encourage this, so that people feel they can talk with each other between zones, why not provide coffee during the zone time if coffee is something that your church normally does before or after a service.

The zone time could be 40 minutes long, split into two 20 minute halves with a brief signal – a bell, or a very short piece of music – at the half way point. Although people can move freely between zones at any time, some find it helpful to go to two zones and to know when they've had half the zone time.

A 40 minute zone time is normally longer than most church sermons. This does mean that, if the service isn't to run on too long, it may be necessary to shorten other items in the service. The zone time needs to be carefully planned into the service so that all the elements fit together within a normal service time (or perhaps a slightly extended service time). In a 1.5 hour-long services, with careful planning and good time-keeping on the part of the person leading the service, it is possible have a zone time plus sharing of the Eucharist, together with other normal service items (some sung worship, brief intercessions, etc) within this time.

It can be helpful to have a set of three zoned services on consecutive weeks, rather than one-off zoned services. For example, a set of three zoned services exploring passages from John's gospel; or a set looking at Advent themes. This is because it can be a fair bit of work to plan and set up a zoned service, and having three in a row means that the zones can be re-used with perhaps only small changes across the three weeks. People also tend to get into the 'zone zone'! – once they've worked out what they enjoyed in the first week, they come better prepared to know how best to use the zone time in subsequent weeks.

At the end of a zone service, or set of services, why not ask the congregation for feedback on what's worked well, what they enjoyed, what didn't work well and could be changed for next time. A simple set of feedback questions is given in Appendix 2.

Community Zoned Service: Listening to the Community



What's a Community Zoned Service?

A zoned service, as described in the previous section, but in which a few members of the local community who aren't regular attendees at the church are invited in as guests to talk about the community, the church and how they relate to each other. The aim is to think more about how the church is involved with the local community and get ideas for how the church – community relationship could be further developed.

This service is overall very similar to that described in the previous section. The difference is that the zones are all focused on how the church and local community are involved with each other. The service could be called 'Listening to the community, being a good neighbour'.

A few members of the local community who aren't normally church members are invited to participate by being part of small discussion groups within the zone time. For example, the guests at one community zoned service were two local people living near the church, a local councillor and the head of the parish primary school.

Four of the zones were discussions involving these local community members. We asked a congregation member to chair each group, and primed them with the following questions to help to get the discussion going.

- How would you describe our community?
- What do like about it?
- What would you change if you were able to? What issues does the local community face?
- What things do you think are important for the people of the community?
- What to you think the role of the church is in the local community?
- Do you think religion is important for people of this area? If so, how?
- What role does spirituality in the lives of people in this community?

In addition to these four 'special guest' discussion zones, we also had:

- A reflective prayer zone, with a focus on praying for the local community
- A bible zone – using the story of the Good Samaritan to reflect on the theme of being a good neighbour in the community

And we made sure that plenty of coffee and biscuits were available for the congregation and our community guests!

A congregation member could be asked to take some notes in each of the discussion groups. This means that people's thoughts on what the community was like, the role of the church within the community and ideas for things we might do as a church in the future are captured for later reflection and discussion.

This service is a very practical way of helping congregation members think about the local community and their involvement within it. It is about listening to the experiences and concerns of local community members who do not normally come to the church. It is about discussing with them the needs of the community and how the church can help with these – as well as celebrating the ways that the church is already involved in its local area.

Tomorrow at 11



What's Tomorrow at 11?

A member of the congregation is briefly interviewed during a service about what they do during weekdays and how they relate their faith to this. The aim is to encourage the congregation to think about how they relate their faith to their daily lives, and to help congregation members get to know each other better.

Tomorrow at 11 takes the form of a short slot within a service – maybe only 5 minutes or so – within which a congregation member is asked to say something about what they do during the week – specifically, what will they be doing ‘tomorrow at 11’ – assuming that this, most likely, will be a Monday morning at 11 o’clock!

Tomorrow at 11 is a way of helping congregation members relate their faith to what they do during the rest of the week. The person being interviewed is asked to briefly describe what it is that they do on a normal weekday. They don’t have to say exactly what they will be doing on Monday morning at 11am – although thinking about that might help some people to describe what it is that they do.

After describing what they do, they might be asked how they feel their faith relates to this. Do they find it easy to relate their faith to what they do during the week? Are there any challenges to them doing this? How does their faith influence what they do – and vice versa? And, finally, they can be asked if there is anything related to what they do that they would like prayer for.

The questions and answers might prompt those listening with the congregation to think more about what they will be doing ‘tomorrow at 11’, and how their own faith relates to this. It helps to bridge the gap between what is done in church on a Sunday and what people do the rest of the week. It values people’s daily activities as things that are God-given and as places where we should expect to see God at work.

The short interview also enables the congregation to find out a bit more about one of its members. Even in fairly small congregations, it is surprising how little people know about what each other do during weekdays. This might lead to some interesting conversations after the service, perhaps. And the person being interviewed knows that others in the congregation will be praying for them over the next week – or perhaps congregation members can be asked to

remember the person being interviewed at 11 o'clock on Monday and to briefly pray for them then.

A few practicalities for tomorrow at 11

Tomorrow at 11 is a short slot that could be fitted into most services fairly easily. It might be appropriate to have a Tomorrow at 11 slot once per month, say. It is best if the person being interviewed is 'booked' in advance of the service, as this gives them a bit of time to think about what they want to say. The person interviewing them can prepare a few questions in advance, such as those mentioned above, and could share these with the person being interviewed beforehand, so that the person knows what's coming!

A wide variety of congregation members could be interviewed in Tomorrow at 11 slots. It doesn't have to be limited to those who have paid employment, but can include those looking after children or other relatives, or those who do voluntary work, for example.

Faith and Real Experience Dinners (FRED!)



What's a Faith and Real Experience Dinner?

A group of friends meet monthly over dinner, to reflect on the connections between daily work and the Christian faith. The purpose is to learn from, encourage and support each other in ways that changes not only ourselves, but also our work and work organisations.

Meeting over food is always a good way to get conversations going! FRED is a friendly and informal way for a group of people to talk about faith and daily life. A typical evening has a broad structure to it, but within this the conversation can be allowed to wander freely as people see fit.

The evening revolves around perhaps 6 to 8 people meeting for dinner, perhaps in someone's house. It starts with some pre-dinner 'nibbles' and drinks, during which one person will spend perhaps 15 or 20 minutes telling the others what it is that they do during weekdays. This can include a description of their work, where it is, what they do, etc. It can also include how they feel their faith is related to their work – how does the one shape the other. There might be ways in which they naturally relate the two – but there might also be ways in which they find it hard to relate them, or tensions and challenges in how they relate faith to daily life.

It is helpful to have one person to 'facilitate' the evening. This can be fairly informal – but it is a good idea for someone to remind people at the start of the evening what will happen, to keep an eye on the time, and to make a note of key points that the group might want to discuss.

Everyone then settles down to dinner. The facilitator may want to briefly remind everyone of a small number of points that the person sharing their weekday life raised – particularly those things which they find harder to relate their faith to. But then the conversation can flow freely around the areas of faith and daily life that emerge. One important point is that the evening should not just be about the person who shared their daily activities. All of those present can think about how what they've heard relates to their own daily lives, and can share this – so that the focus isn't always on the person who shared at the start.

Appendix 3 has some ideas for questions that could be introduced by the facilitator to help people think about how faith and the work issues being discussed might be related.

As desert approaches, the facilitator can ask the person who shared their weekday activities whether there is anything in particular that they would like the rest of the group to talk about – perhaps something that’s not yet been discussed, or a key issue to focus on.

At the end of the evening, perhaps during coffee after the meal, it can be helpful to have a very short time of silence for those present to reflect on what they have talked about and to pray. A candle could be lit in the middle of the table (assuming the dinner wasn’t candle-lit already!). The facilitator can signal an end to this time in some way – perhaps the group says ‘the Grace’, or the Lord’s Prayer, together. They group then agrees who is going to share their story at the next meal, so that they can prepare for the next FRED evening.

An informal dinner provides a very good way for people to talk about their faith and their daily lives with others they know. We always find that real, challenging issues emerge, and are often surprised by the depth of conversation. And we’ve got to know each other better too through FREDs, and can remember the things we’ve learnt about each other in our daily prayers.

A few practicalities for Faith and Real Experience Dinners

A little bit of thought and preparation needs to go into a FRED, but once people get used to the idea of what happens the evenings run very smoothly.

Around 6-8 people is a good number for a FRED group. Not too big to make dinner impractical; but big enough for there to be a good conversation with various views. We have let a given group run for three or four months – three or four dinners – and then asked group members if they want to continue and whether there are others they would like to invite. A single group can grow to two groups, and then maybe three . . . A set of three or four dinners is not too much for most people to be able to commit to, allows people to get to begin to get to know each other, but makes the group(s) then open to others wanting to join in.

The person sharing their daily activities and the facilitator need to be chosen in advance for each evening so that particularly the sharer can prepare what they want to say.

Dinners are normally held in someone’s home (the ‘host’). We find it works well if the host prepares a simple main course, and asks others who are coming to bring ‘nibbles’, drinks, bread, salad, a desert, etc. This makes it a shared meal that everyone has contributed to. Just beware of hosts trying to out-do each other with their main courses, as can happen!

It is a good idea to have an outline timetable for an evening, and one of the facilitator’s jobs is to keep the evening roughly to time. A typical timetable might be:

19:30	People arrive
19:45 – 20:15	Someone shares their daily activities over ‘nibbles’
20:15 – 21:00	Main course, with people talking about the key issues and themes
21:00 – 21:45	Desert/coffee, original sharer might pick one or two further issues
21:45 – 21:50	Short time for silent prayer and reflection
21:50 – 22:00	Details for the next FRED evening sorted out. Help the host to clear up!

It can be helpful to have a few ‘ground rules’ for the evenings. Discussions can raise sensitive issues, so it is a good idea for the group to agree that the details of what is shared and discussed should remain confidential within the group. As mentioned above, the person sharing their daily life shouldn’t be the focus for the whole discussion, but more of a prompt to enable others to talk about key themes and issues and how they experience these. The aim isn’t to problem-solve for the sharer, unless they explicitly ask this. As with any conversation, everyone should be encouraged to speak, and people should be encouraged to ask questions of others as well as giving their own opinions. The facilitator can briefly remind everyone of these things at the start of the evening.

The role of the sharer is to help the group understand what they do in their day-to-day life, how they and their colleagues go about it, and to share any initial thoughts or questions they have about the connections between their personal faith and their work. They might share:

- A typical day in their working life
- An incident or challenge they have faced recently
- Some overall big themes in their work

They do not need to have a strong faith themselves, or well thought-out theology of their work – it’s up to the whole group to think about these things!

Appendix 1: Some questions to help think about work or other life situations from a faith viewpoint



Some questions to help reflection on work (or any other) situations from a faith perspective:

- Where is God present in this situation?
- Why do I think this?

- What can we learn about God from this situation?

- How can we know what the will of God is in this situation?

- Where are there glimpses of God's Kingdom in this situation?

- What is positive or good within the situation? What is negative or problematic?

- What does it mean, in this situation, to be acting justly?
- What does it mean, in this situation, to be acting mercifully?
- What does it mean to be walking humbly before God in this situation?

- Does reflection on any theological themes give us new insights into this situation – e.g. where can we see evidence of (or a lack of):
 - liberation
 - reconciliation
 - salvation
 - creation
 - incarnation
 - . . . (what others?)

- What passages, events or stories from the Bible are relevant to the situation?

- Are there things from Christian tradition or practice that are relevant to the situation?

Appendix 2: A practical example of a zoned service



Nicodemus

The following service took place in St. Matthew's Church, Oxford, in June 2010. It was one of four zoned services each of which focused on a passage or character from John's gospel. This service was about Nicodemus, who we meet three times in John: in chapter 3, when he and Jesus have a night-time conversation, then briefly in chapter 7, and finally in chapter 19 when he helps with Jesus' body after the crucifixion.

Service outline with rough timings

10:30 Welcome and introduction, opening songs, children's slot, etc.

10:50 Bible passages are read

10:55 5 minute introduction to the topic

11:00 Zone time

11:20 Zone time half-way point signal

11:40 Zone time ends – often with a song to bring people back to their seats. Other normal elements of the service take place.

12:00 Service ends

Bible passages

John Chapter 3, verses 1 – 15; Chapter 7, verses 45 – 52; Chapter 19, verses 38 – 42

Key themes (highlighted in the 5 minute introductory talk)

- Nicodemus appears only in John's gospel, but we meet him three times
- He was a Pharisee, a leader, a member of the Jewish council, most likely wealthy
- He wants to see Jesus for himself. He comes at night – why would he do this? Night also as a symbol in John's gospel for not understanding.
- The theme of being 'born again' or 'born from above' – what do we understand by this? How does it relate to John ch. 1 vs. 12-13.

- Why do we meet Nicodemus three times in the gospel? Has he changed and if so how? Nicodemus as an example of someone journeying in their faith, growing in relationship with Jesus, moving from questions to action, from darkness to light . . .

Questions, printed in the service sheet, for reflection, prayer, discussion:

- Nicodemus was on a journey of faith in John's gospel. How would you describe his journey?
- Are there ways you can relate his journey to your own? What or who has been important in helping you understand more about Jesus?
- Are there further ways that you think we, as a church, can help others on their journeys of faith? Perhaps you know of someone who is seeking to understand more about Jesus – you might like to pray for them now.
- Do you find the idea of being 'born again', or being 'born from above' helpful or not? Why? What do you understand by the phrase 'born of water and the spirit' in Ch. 3 vs. 5?
- Nicodemus' faith could be seen through his actions at Jesus' burial. How do you recognize Jesus' work in others?
- If there are questions you would like to ask Jesus to help you in your understanding of him, you might like to pray about these; and perhaps think who you could talk about them with – friends, family, your fellowship group . . .

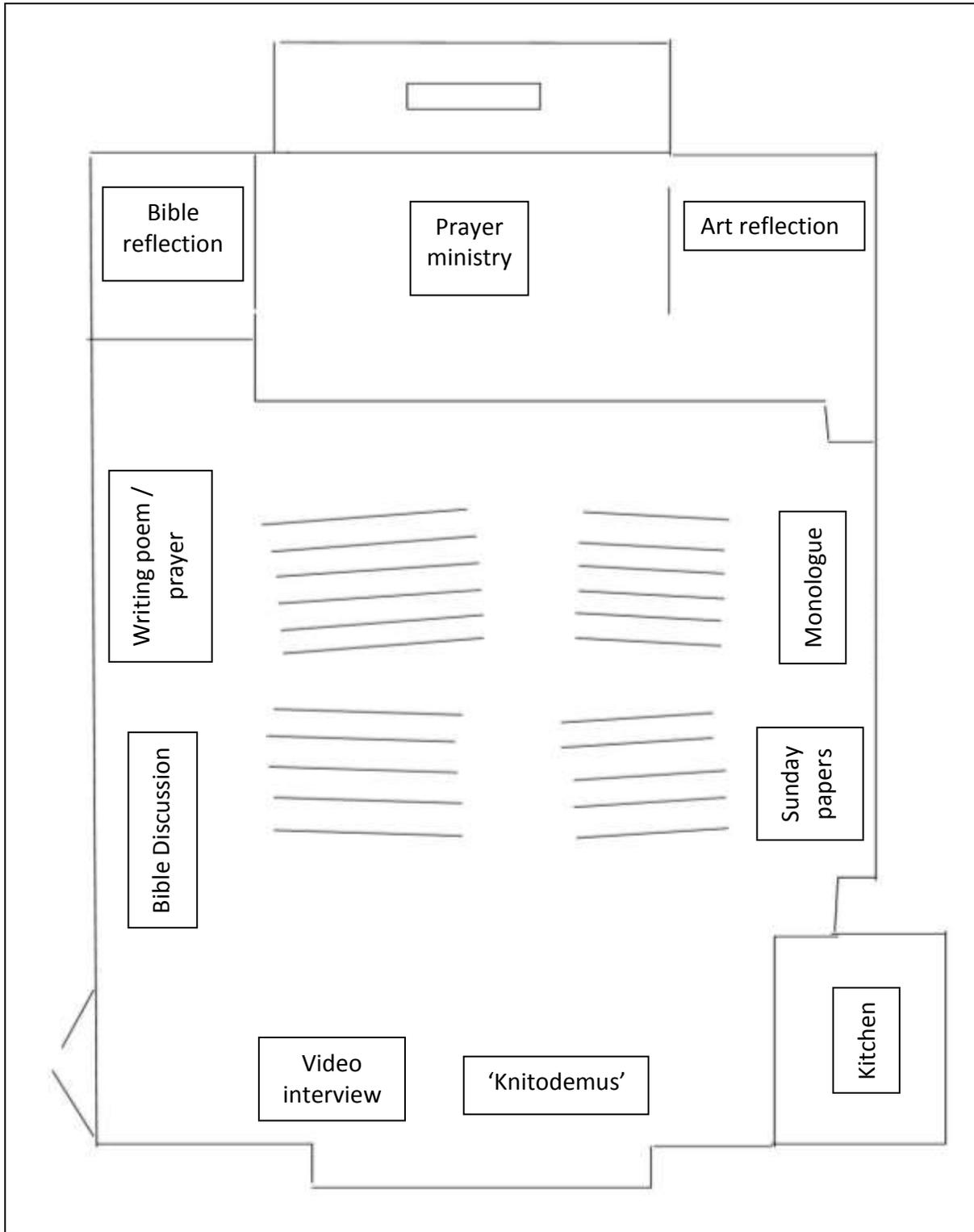
The zones

The following zones were set up in the church for people to move freely between:

- *Encounters with Jesus in pictures*: a chance to reflect on the passages from John's Gospel by looking at pictures of the encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus by artists from the second century to the present day.
- *A monologue*: 'Nicodemus comes clean'
- *Video Interview*: an interview with a member of the clergy talking about what we can learn from the passages.
- *Response to Jesus*: Write a poem, psalm or prayer in response to the Gospel story.
- *Bible discussion*: A chance to talk with others about the themes in today's passage.
- *Quiet bible reflection*: A way of reading, reflecting and praying using today's passage.
- *Coffee and papers*: Please feel free to help yourself to a coffee during the zone time. There will be Sunday papers available in the sofa area by the Traidcraft stall.

There was an additional zone for this service as well. In the week before the service, several members of a small knitting group which normally met on a weekday in the church sent emails to the service organiser. The group members were knitting squares for blankets for a charity working with AIDs orphans in Soweto. But they felt a disconnect between this activity and Sunday worship services, and asked if they could have a knitting zone. So – of course we had a zone called '*Knitodemus*'! And there was lots of knitting going on, not just by normal members of the knitting group, together with some chatting about the theme of the service whilst the knitting was happening!

Map of the church showing zones



Appendix 3: some thoughts on introducing different elements into a church service



Introducing different elements into a church service, such as zones, sofa sermons or Tomorrow at 11 is not straightforward!

If you're reading this booklet, chances are you are already fairly open to introducing new elements into a service or doing something fairly different such as a zoned service. But there may be many people within your congregation who would, at least initially, look quite horrified at the idea! So a gentle, prayerful and thoughtful approach may be needed.

One thing to think about at the start is 'How did I get to where I am now'? If you are fairly open to trying new things in services, have you always been that way? If not, how did you get to where you are now? What made you realise that such things might be good ideas? It is helpful to remember your own journey. Partly because it will enable you to let other people, who aren't as far along the road in their thinking as you are, also go on their own journey of discovery. Partly because, as you reflect on what helped you, you might think of things that you can do to help others.

People need to know why it might be necessary to do things differently. Is this just the vicar or church leadership wanting to be trendy? Or is there a real, deeper reason? 'We've done things as they are for many years, and it's served us well – why change now?' is a good question that may get asked. And people may well be absolutely right – what's been happening in the past may well have done a very good job over the years. And it may still be working well now, in many ways. It's just that things have changed outside the church – the way people think, their lifestyles, their search for spiritual things – the sort of things discussed in the introduction – and so there's a need to do things differently within the church.

Be wary of criticising what's happening at the moment. It may well have served the church well for many years, and it should be honoured. And those who've been involved with things for many years may hear the criticism as a complaint against them, however unintended.

Rather, help people to see what things could look like in the future. What is it that you are really aiming at? The aim isn't to just do new things; or just to appeal to contemporary culture. Rather, it's about helping people grow in Christ, relate their faith to their daily lives, establish Kingdom values in the world around them, develop better connections between Sundays and Mondays - those sorts of things. Set out an attractive future that you're wanting to help those in your church move towards.

'Imagine starting your normal weekday activities on a Monday morning knowing that what you did on Sunday in church is supporting you and helping you. Imagine feeling that what you're doing on Monday is as important to God, and as relevant to his Kingdom, as what you did on Sunday in church. Imagine finding God at work in your weekday activities. Imagine being at home at the end of a weekday and saying to your family 'I just want to share something of what happened to me today – I got a little glimpse of God at work'. Imagine going to church on a Sunday morning knowing that what you're going to do fits and is naturally related to what you do during the week. Imagine how all that would feel . . . well, that's what we're wanting to try to do'.

As mentioned above, people will go on their own journey of discovery as they begin to think about changes to a church service. Some will welcome new things straight away, and be frustrated that they can't happen immediately, at next Sunday's service if not sooner! Others will slowly warm to the ideas as they think about them. Some will need to experience the new things for themselves and get to understand them before they find that they're OK with them. And some – normally just a few – might never agree with the changes that happen.

This process happened with the zoned services when they were tried out in St Matthew's Church. There were people in every category – from those wanting to press ahead quickly, to those who disliked the zoned services initially but are now fans of them, to a small number who feel that we shouldn't be doing zoned services even after several years of trying them. With the latter group, it's very important to keep talking with them, for them to know that they are valued and respected members of the congregation, to listen to see if there are changes that could be made to help them adapt – but also to recognise that they may never accept the changes and that that's OK.

People need to feel involved in the changes that are being proposed. People on the church leadership body will need to go on their own journeys to understand what is happening. There might be lots of talking about why changes are needed and what could happen. People will have ideas on what would work well within their own context – the ideas here have worked well in the local church they've been tried in, but that doesn't mean they will work in other churches – at least not without some changes.

The wider congregation need to know what's going to happen and why. They need to have time to think about it, give comments on it, and be invited to be involved in creating what happens.

Having some trial events can help. A single service with a different element, and then inviting comments and feedback, learning from what happened, further discussion with the congregation and leadership, before trying again with appropriate changes. There's an element of trial and error – things never work perfectly the first time. It can take quite a while for the right formula to be found, for how to make best use of the church space to be discovered, etc.

Help people to understand why changes might be needed . . . get them involved in shaping what those changes are . . . keep listening to those who object, as they might have good points that will make things better . . . do things in stages, have some trial attempts . . . all these things can help as new things are introduced.

A good book on thinking about change in a church context is 'Leading Change in the Congregation' by Gilbert R Rendle, Alban Institute, 1998.

Appendix 4: a simple questionnaire for after a service or event



After a zoned service, sofa sermon or Friday dinner, it can be helpful to ask people how they thought things went. This can be an encouragement, to know what people valued. It can also give pointers for things that could be changed or developed for the event to work even better next time. For a Friday dinner, this could happen at the end of the evening. For a zoned service or a sofa sermon, very short questionnaires can be made available with a box near the church door for people to put them in. Don't make questionnaires too long, otherwise they won't get filled in! Also, do report back to the congregation the following week or next time you have a similar event to say how you've used the feedback that they've given.

Space for your thoughts on [insert church name] 'zoned' service today [or sofa sermon, etc]

1. Thinking about what happened in church today, what did you particularly value, or enjoy, or were excited about?
2. Were there parts of what happened which helped you encounter God, or which you found useful for your faith?
3. Were there aspects of what happened today which you found unhelpful?
4. If you could change one thing for when we next do [zoned service, sofa sermon, etc], what would it be?

Thank you for filling this in!