



## **UNIT J: We believe . . .**

## Contents

UNIT J: We believe . . . . .	J1
Reading before Session 1.....	J4
Further reading before Session 1 .....	J8
Session 1 : God in Trinity.....	J11
Preparation for Session 2 : God in Trinity.....	J13
Further (optional) reading for session 2 : We believe in One God.....	J14
Session 2 : God in Trinity: God the Father Almighty.....	J16
Preparation for Session 3: God in Trinity - The Holy Spirit .....	J18
Session 3 : God in Trinity - The Holy Spirit.....	J20
Preparation for Session 4 .....	J21
Session 4 : The Life of the Church.....	J24
Preparation for Session 5. The Future Hope .....	J25
Session 5 : The Future Hope.....	J27
Assignments: .....	J31

## We believe

**Introduction:** This unit will look at what Christians declare that they believe and at some of the objections that have been raised against Christianity. You will be encouraged to think about what you believe, and whether those around you may agree or disagree with this.

### Pattern of each session:

We will begin each session with a look at the Trinity, the distinctive belief of Christians. In the light of belief in one God in three persons, we will then look at God, creating, redeeming and sustaining the world in the first three sessions. Building on this, the remaining two sessions will examine what Christians believe about the Church and about the future.

Do listen out for what you hear about the Christian faith from people around you and in the media, so that our understanding of how to explain our faith is responding to the questions people ask.

### Outline of Sessions

1. God in Trinity : The Lord Jesus Christ
2. God in Trinity : God the Father, Almighty, Creator
3. God in Trinity : The Holy Spirit
4. The Life of the Church
5. The Future Hope

### Further Suggested Reading to follow up the work of this Unit

- Alister E. McGrath, *Theology for Amateurs*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1999. Lively and Engaging.
- Richard Holloway, *Crossfire: Faith and Doubt in an Age of Certainty* (Collins 1988). The author describes this as 'an attempt to give a personal account of the Christian religion, to show the way in which one man holds it'.
- Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Blackwell, 2nd edition 1997). A scholarly book, invaluable for those who are interested in the history of theology and doctrine. A useful reference book, rather than for reading from cover to cover.
- Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Essence of Christianity: A Fresh Look at the Nicene Creed* (SPCK 1996). A clearly written book, up-to-date and fairly accessible.
- Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God, Belief in an Age of Scepticism* (Hodder 2008) A modern defender of Christian faith
- Francis Spufford *Unapologetic, Why, despite everything, Christianity can still make surprising emotional sense* (Faber and Faber, 2013) Witty, personal defence of why Christianity works as a way of life.
- Paul Fiddes *Participating in God* (Darton Longman and Todd, 2000) is a beautifully written book that describes how the believer joins in the life of the Trinity.
- Wm. Paul Young, *The Shack* (Hodder, 2008) Controversial, Stimulating, Read it for yourself!

## Reading before Session 1

**Sources of Revelation:** You may remember from the first unit of this course we can expect to learn from God in four ways. As the Church of England was formed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries,

- **Scripture** was important as part of the Reformed character of the Church; it was the authority against which certain Roman Catholic practices were measured and found to be wrong. The Thirty-Nine Articles affirmed that 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation' (Article VI).
- **Tradition** was important; it was used both to assert that the Church of England lacked no essential part of the faith and order of the worldwide church; and to prevent the more extreme Protestants, or Puritans, from demanding a complete break from the past. The leaders of the emerging Church of England examined the work of the theologians of the early centuries of the Church more than any other church in Europe. Tradition is seen, though, in canon law<sup>1</sup> as subsidiary to Scripture: 'The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the holy scriptures and in such teachings of the ancient fathers and councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said scriptures' (Canon A5).
- **Reason** was important as an element of the culture of the post-Reformation world. Some of the first Anglican thinkers – such as Richard Hooker (died 1600), John Locke (1632–1704) and Samuel Butler (1612–80) – used sound principles of rational learning, along with moderation in argument, to defend the Anglican position against its enemies both within and without. It is founded in the belief that our brains are God given and, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, may be used in God's service.

To these three sources of revelation, John Wesley added a fourth:

- **Experience** Wesley believed that we cannot have reasonable confidence about something unless we have experienced it personally and he was assured of both justification and sanctification because he had experienced them in his own life. As the healed blind man said: "One thing I know; I was blind, but now I see." (John 9:25).

The experience of communities, not only of individuals has been very influential in the development of understanding about the Christian faith. When we listen to the voices of believers around the world and to groups who have been marginalised we understand that God speaks in and to particular contexts and experiences. The varieties of creeds that follow demonstrate this. As you read them try to imagine the kind of Christian community that would say them.

- (a) I believe in Jesus Christ,  
Born of a common woman,  
Who was ridiculed, disfigured and executed,  
Who on the third day rose and fought back;  
He storms the highest councils of men,  
Where he overturns the iron rule of injustice.  
From henceforth he shall continue  
To judge the hatred and arrogance of men.

(Creed written by Canaan Banana, former president of Zimbabwe)

---

<sup>1</sup> the laws governing the Church of England

(b) An African Creed

We believe in the one High God, who out of love created the beautiful world and everything good in it. He created man and wanted man to be happy in the world. God loves the world and every nation and tribe on the earth. We have known this High God in the darkness and now we know him in the light. God promised in the book of his word, the bible, that he would save the world and all the nations and tribes.

We believe that God made good his promise by sending his son, Jesus Christ, a man in the flesh, a Jew by tribe, born poor in a little village, who left his home and was always on safari doing good, curing people by the power of God, teaching about God and man, showing that the meaning of religion is love. He was rejected by his people, tortured and nailed hands and feet to a cross, and died. He lay buried in the grave but the hyenas did not touch him, and on the third day he rose from the grave. He ascended to the skies. He is the Lord.

We believe that all our sins are forgiven through him. All who have faith in him must be sorry for their sins, be baptised in the Holy Spirit of God, live the rules of love and share the bread together in love, to announce the good news to others until Jesus comes again. We are waiting for Him. He is alive. He lives. This we believe. Amen.

Donovan *Christianity Rediscovered* SCM, 1982 (second edition) p. 163.

- (c) We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.  
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

(*The Nicene Creed*, written in AD 381)

(d) We believe in God

Maker, Redeemer and Sustainer of Life  
without beginning or end,  
whose life-giving love was let loose on the first Easter Sunday  
and whose life-giving love we share and proclaim here today.

We believe in God

who gave up the divine life and submitted to the darkness and terror of the grave  
and who enters with us into every darkness and terror we shall ever face.

We believe in God

who raised Christ from the death of the grave to glorious new life  
and who raises our lives from sin and despair to newness and hope again.

We believe in God

who met the grief-stricken Mary in the garden and called her into hope by the uttering  
of her name,  
and who meets us in our grief and gives us courage to hope  
again by tenderly calling our name.

We believe in God

who sent Mary out from the garden to be a witness and apostle of the resurrection,  
and who commissions us like Mary, to be bearers of hope  
and good news to the world.

We believe in God

Maker, Redeemer and Sustainer of Life,  
without beginning or end,  
whose life-giving love was let loose on the first Easter Sunday  
and whose life-giving love we share and proclaim today  
to all women and men, wherever and whoever they are,  
loved, blessed and called by God,  
without beginning or end.

(From the St Hilda Community, *The New Women Included*)

(e) A Creed from Iona

We believe in God,  
who has created and is creating,  
who has come in Jesus to reconcile  
and to make all things new.

We trust God,  
who calls us to be the Church;  
to love and serve others,  
to seek justice and to resist evil,  
to proclaim Jesus,  
crucified, dead and risen;  
our judge and our hope.

In life,  
in death,  
in life beyond death,  
God is with us:  
we are not alone.  
Thanks be to God.

(f) A Worker's Creed

I believe in you, worker Christ, light of light and true only begotten of God, who to save the world in the humble and pure womb of Mary was incarnated.

I believe you were beaten, mocked and tortured, martyred on the cross while Pilate was praetor, the Roman imperialist, unscrupulous and soul-less, who by washing his hands wanted to erase the mistake.

I believe in you, friend, human Christ, worker Christ, victor over death with the immense sacrifice, you engendered new hope for liberation.

You are risen again in each arm that is raised to defend the people from the rule of the exploiter in the factory, in the school.

I believe in your struggle without truce. I believe in your resurrection.

(From *The Nicaraguan Campesinos Mass*)

(g) Creed of Transformation

I believe in God  
Who didn't create the world as something finished  
as a thing which has to remain the same for ever  
who doesn't rule by eternal laws  
which are irrevocable  
nor by natural order of poor and rich  
experts and uninformed  
rulers and helpless.

I believe in God  
who wants the conflict among the living  
and the transformation of the existing  
by our work  
by our politics.

I believe in Jesus Christ  
who was right when he,  
an individual who cannot do anything,  
like ourselves,  
worked on the transformation of all things in  
existence  
and perished doing it.

Looking at him I realise  
how our intelligence is crippled  
our fantasy suffocated, our efforts wasted  
because we don't live the way he lived.

Every day I fear that he died in vain  
because he is buried in our churches  
because we have betrayed his revolution  
in obedience and fear of the authorities.

I believe in Jesus Christ  
Who rises into our lives  
in order that we may be freed  
from prejudice and arrogance,  
from fear and hatred,  
and may carry forward his revolution  
towards his kingdom.

I believe in the spirit  
who came with Jesus into the world,  
in the community of all nations  
and in our responsibility  
for what will become of the earth,  
a valley of misery, starvation and  
violence  
or the city of God.

I believe in just peace  
which can be achieved  
in the possibility of a meaningful life  
for all men  
in the future of this world of God.

(by Dorothee Sölle)

(h) A Canadian Creed

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God:

who has created and is creating,  
who has come in Jesus,  
the Word made flesh,  
to reconcile and make all things new,  
who works in us and others  
by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church

to celebrate God's presence,  
to love and serve others,  
to seek justice and resist evil,  
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,  
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,  
God is with us.

We are not alone,  
Thanks be to God.

(From the Anglican Church in Canada)

---

## Further reading before Session 1

### 1. God in Trinity

#### **Distinctiveness of Christian faith: Trinity**

It has often been argued that the Trinitarian nature of God is discernible in both Old and New Testaments, even though the doctrine is not explicitly set out in the Bible. So in the Old Testament, we find the distinct persons of God described as:

- **The Word of God** – God's speech is presented as existing separately from God, yet originating from God. The Word of God confronts people with God's will and purpose, bringing guidance, judgement and salvation (e.g. Psalm 119:89; Psalm 147:15–20; Isaiah 55:10–11).
- **The Spirit of God** – used in the Old Testament to refer to God's presence and power within creation (e.g. Gen 1:2).
- **Wisdom** (especially in Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes), a female figure, separate from God yet dependent on him (e.g. Proverbs 1:20–23; 9:1–6; Job 28:12–28), portrayed as active in creation (especially in the apocryphal book of Sirach, chapter 24).

The Jewish people, however, were distinctive in their conviction that there was only one God, though they used different names at different times and circumstances. The Shema, fundamental to Jewish faith, recited at morning and evening services, at the end of each day and at the time of death is "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord." (Deuteronomy 6: 4). This was the tradition in which Jesus and his followers were raised.

As Jesus' followers listened to Jesus they believed at first that he had come to reform Judaism, not to overturn or replace it. And Jesus himself taught them that he had come to fulfil the Law, (Matt: 5, 17-20). In the end it was such a radical reform that the Jewish Christian community was not able to sustain its links with other Jews and by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century the distinction between Judaism and the followers of Jesus was clear. But Christians believe there is continuity and that when we say we believe in 'God the Father' we are affirming our belief in the God of the Jews, and so the God of what is for us the *Old Testament*, and the God whom Jesus called 'Father.'

The radical, earth shattering new awareness of Jesus' followers was that Jesus shared in the divine nature and that the Spirit sent from God to give life was also divine. The writers of the New Testament had begun to think in this terms – see Romans chapter 8, for example – but it took several centuries for the Church to agree on what it wanted to say about God. See the additional reading 'We believe in one God' pp for an account of this.

Refreshing your memory by looking back at the notes from Units C and D on the person of Jesus is also recommended at this point.

Language - To talk of 'three persons' is misleading if we think of human persons, each with a separate physical body. When we talk of God as 'Father' or 'Son' or 'Spirit' we are using language we can understand to describe God who is greater than our language can cope with. It is helpful, though, to realise that each of those words are not names like Elizabeth or Mark, but relationships and describe how they relate to each other and to us. We are not expected to understand God, as though God were some kind of puzzle we are meant to be solving, but to join in that relationship in God's life and God's mission.

## 2. Jesus Christ

Look back at as much as possible of the work you did in Units C and D on the life and work of Jesus.

- 1 Look up and read a selection of hymns on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Some suggestions are given here – but feel free to choose whatever hymns you like from the particular book you are using.
    - What picture(s) of atonement or salvation does each offer?
    - What words best describe the feelings and responses of the hymn-writer (the 'I' of the words)?
    - Which is your own favourite hymn? Is your choice down mainly to the music, or its connection with a particular occasion – or does it speak to you of salvation in a way that you can identify with?
-

### Suggested hymns:

- There is a green hill
  - When I survey the wondrous cross
  - And can it be that I should gain
  - Thine be the glory
  - O sacred head sore wounded
  - My song is love unknown
  - My Jesus I love thee
  - There is a redeemer
  - In Christ alone
  - How deep the Father's love for us
  - From heaven you came, helpless babe
  - Come and see, come and see
- 

### What they said then

Jesus was a Mediterranean Jewish peasant – agreed by many even today to have been a ‘good man’, accepted by Muslims as a prophet, as he was by many Jewish people of his own day who saw him as Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the other prophets (Matthew 16:14).

As far as the Roman authorities of his time were concerned, Jesus was a small-time trouble-maker. They were forced to change their views when the movement called after him grew rapidly – after his death. His followers were accused of many things, including cannibalism – because they spoke of feeding on his body and blood in Holy Communion – and atheism, because they did not accept the Roman gods.

Most of what we read about Jesus comes from the New Testament writings, but there are a few references in other writings:

- **Tacitus** (a Roman historian born in AD 56) records in his Annals that the Emperor Nero blamed Christians for the burning of Rome:
- **Nero**: punished with the utmost cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowds styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate.
- **Josephus** (a pro-Roman Jewish historian, living towards the end of the first century AD) wrote that Jesus was ‘the Christ’ who rose from the dead – though gives no evidence or source for this statement.
- **The Talmud** (an ancient commentary on Jewish teaching) acknowledges Jesus as a Jew, referring to his miracles, his teaching and his disciples. He is described as a false teacher who was executed.

# What we believe

## Session 1 : God in Trinity

Jesus, the image of the Invisible God.



Opening worship

Group Activity: Based on your reading and on your experience collect together as many descriptions of God as you can. This could be done in small groups or all together. Include description of all three 'persons' of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- ↳ Tutor Input: The tutor will talk about the difference between figurative language and literal language. Most, perhaps all language about God is figurative, as we use things and people that are similar to God in some way to describe someone who is beyond our description. Illustrate this with the words and phrases that the group has chosen.

Paul Fiddes suggests that it is as we engage in prayer, mission, pastoral care and so on that we understand God better. (*Participating in God, DLT 2000*)



In small groups share the insights about God's nature that you have learned from participating in these activities. Try to be specific about the way that your thoughts or actions have changed as you have prayed, told others about your faith, or cared for others.



Coffee

### 1. We believe in One Lord, Jesus Christ

In the New Testament, the main source of Trinitarian belief was the growing recognition of the divinity of Christ. The seeds of the belief are found in gospel passages such as at the baptism of Jesus: 'And just as [Jesus] was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved"' (Mark 1:10–11).



In small groups:

- 1 "Who do you say that I am?" Read Mark 8:27–33: Jesus questions the disciples about his identity.
  - Thinking back to your work in Units B and C about the prophets and John the Baptist, what do you think people saw in Jesus that caused them to give him these identities (verse 28)?
  - From this passage, what did Jesus think was important about his identity (verses 30–32)?
  - Which of the hymns that you looked at expressed these truths about Jesus?

## **2. The death of Jesus**



Divide the passages between the groups. Look at passages allocated to your group and then answer the following question

- Group a) *Mark 10:42-46; Hebrews 10:11-14; 1 Peter 2:21-25*
- Group b) *John 12:23-28; Romans 3:21-26; Revelation 5:6-12*
- Group c) *Matthew 20:20-28; Romans 5:6-11; Hebrews 10:5-10*
- Group d) *Ephesians 2:11-21; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; 1 John 4:7-11*

*What images or ways of understanding the crucifixion are contained in these passages?*

## **3. He rose again**

If our belief is based on the cross alone then, as St Paul writes, 'we of all people are most to be pitied' (1 Corinthians 15:19). The cross and resurrection are two parts of one saving act of God. Does the fact that Jesus defeated death by being raised to new life add anything to each of the four ways of understanding Jesus' death?



Prayers: You may like to use Philippians 2:5–11 as a basis for prayer. This may be an early Christian hymn to Christ.

## Preparation for Session 2 : God in Trinity

'We believe in one God.....the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.'

### Core Reading:

#### 1. The One God: The Trinity and salvation

The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann, in his book *The Crucified God*, argues powerfully that the cross is central to a Christian understanding of the Trinity – not just of Jesus. This approach has become widespread in the aftermath of the two terrible world wars of the twentieth century, which in different ways plumbed new depths of brokenness, misery and pain. If God could intervene, but doesn't, is God a monster? If God can't intervene, is God really a god? Moltmann wrote:

*A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any human. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. He is also a loveless being. (J. Moltmann, 1974, *The Crucified God*, London: SCM.)*



***Do you agree that suffering and love go hand-in-hand?***

The cross of Christ represents not merely the death of Jesus but God's identification with the suffering of the world in the suffering of Christ. Thus for Moltmann the crucified Christ calls for a revolution in the concept of God. For Moltmann:

*"God and suffering are no longer contradictions," but "God's being is in suffering and the suffering is in God's being itself, because God is love." (Moltmann, *The Crucified God*.)*



How easy do you find it to think of worshipping a suffering God? How does the idea of suffering love fill out the picture of God as victorious king, or righteous judge – God almighty?

#### 2. God the Father:

*Look up as many as these verses as you can, to see them in their context.*

The Jewish people address God as their Father. God is the head of the family, who both loves and guides the family members, and gives them their identity and role. Following Jesus' example, Christians also call God Father, so we can know that God is compassionate (Psalm 103:13-14) and corrects and teaches us (Prov 3: 12, Hebrews 12: 6), is the giver of all good things (James 1: 17) and sends us out in mission (John 20: 21).

The Jews also described God in terms usually used for a mother: Isaiah 42:14, Isaiah 49:15, Isaiah 66:13, Psalm 131:2, Hosea 11 1-8. This does not mean God is male or female - God is an eternal Spirit: Deuteronomy 33:27, Psalm 102:27; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 1: 8. Many other religions had both gods and goddesses and there were sexual relations between them to create and sustain the world. The Jewish religion was most unusual in asserting that God, who is given both male and female characteristics, is neither male nor female, but a spirit. God does not have a body, and has no gender.



Is the description of God as ‘Father’ a helpful one for you? If not, what other image would you use to describe God’s care, guidance and commissioning of us?

### 3. The Maker:

Declaring that God is the creator of the world is an assertion that no-one or nothing else has power over us. Some surrounding tribes, for example, believed the sun and the moon were gods – Genesis 1 asserts that God made them and Psalm 121: 6 declares that they cannot hurt us the people of God. What powers might we be tempted to think are in control of the world? Multinational companies? Market forces?

- Look back at the reading for Unit B, Session 2, especially pp. 7 and 8 of ‘Introducing the Old Testament.’ *Science and Faith*. How would you now explain your belief that God is the creator of the world to a 21<sup>st</sup> century enquirer?
- Belief in God as creator has inspired many believers to care for our planet. Look at the following websites:

<http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/>

<http://www.speak.org.uk/>

<http://www.arocha.org/gb-en/index.html>

<https://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/greening-the-church>

Is there material here that you could use to help yourself or your church to be more environmentally responsible?

### Further (optional) reading for session 2 : We believe in One God

**Introduction:** Among early attacks on Christianity was that Christians claimed to be monotheists like the Jews but actually worshipped Jesus as well as God the Father. This can be found in the attacks of Celsus and Trypho, answered by Origen and Justin Martyr respectively.

The theology of the *Logos* (Word) followed the teaching in the fourth Gospel (John 1:1-14). Many Greeks thought of *Logos* as the rational principle creating and sustaining the world. Similarly in the OT *Wisdom* is seen as sharing in creation (Proverbs 8; Wisdom 7:7 - 8:8). Now St John writes of *Logos* as being there from the beginning, one with God, sharing in creation and revealed to the world in human form in the person of Jesus: ‘the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us’. **Justin Martyr** (c. 150) used this theology to explain how Jesus was the unique Son of God, truly one with him and yet distinct.

**Arius:** In the early years of the fourth century a prominent presbyter of Alexandria, Arius, began teaching that the Logos did not exist from eternity. According to Arius, Christ was sinless and similar to God the Father, but not of the same nature. He argued that Christ was the Logos incarnate, but he was capable of change and suffering; therefore the Logos was not equal to God. An eloquent preacher, he used various verses of the Bible out of context to support his views. Arius believed that God created the universe through the Son, but that the Son was only a creature made out of nothing. As a creature the Son was not eternal but had a beginning. The famous phrase used by the followers of Arius was ‘there was once when he was not’.

About 318 Bishop Alexander of Alexandria sent for Arius but was unable to get him to change his views. A synod in 321 excommunicated Arius, who then moved further east, gaining the support of Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea and another Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia.

On the surface, *Arianism seemed to provide a simpler faith*, removing the problems of Trinitarianism. Eventually the theological differences between the largely Arian east and the orthodox west obstructed Constantine's aim of promoting unity in the Empire, and in 325 the Emperor called the **Council of Nicaea**, which condemned the views of Arius. A creed was formulated and signed by all bishops present except two (the two who had supported Arius eventually signed it!). Arius' excommunication was upheld, and bishops who had not accepted the '**creed of Nicaea**' (not the same as the Nicene Creed) were also excommunicated.

**Two key phrases were used in the creed of Nicaea:**

Jesus Christ is 'begotten not made'

Jesus Christ is 'of one substance with the Father'. The word used to mean of one substance was *homoousios*. The word does not appear in the Bible but was a word Arians had already declared unacceptable.

Arianism did not die out but gained considerably in strength, eventually subsiding in the east at the end of the fourth century but continuing in those parts of the west under Gothic and Vandal rule into the sixth century.

**Athanasius:** Athanasius was born in Alexandria, approx..300. During his boyhood he was taken into the household of Bishop Alexander, gaining a good education. In his early twenties he wrote *Contra Gentes*, a defence of Christianity 'against the pagans', and *De Incarnatione* (On the Incarnation), which related incarnation to redemption and has been regarded as a major theological work ever since. When the Council of Nicaea was called in 325 Athanasius was a deacon and personal secretary to the bishop, whom he accompanied to the council. We do not know whether any of the phrases suggested for the creed came from Athanasius or were suggested by him to Alexander, but he would certainly have encouraged clear thinking and precise doctrinal statements.

When Alexander died in 328 Athanasius was elected to take his place as **Bishop of Alexandria**. His zeal for the Church and strong opposition to any kind of heresy led to charges being made against him, but he could disprove them. Unfortunately for him, however, Constantine allowed Eusebius of Nicomedia, an Arian bishop, to return from exile and was persuaded by him to recall Arius. Eusebius worked hard to remove the bishops who opposed Arius and managed to get Athanasius exiled in 335. During his episcopate Athanasius was exiled five times, but for the decade from 346 he was able to build up the Church in Alexandria in peace before he was exiled again.

Athanasius was able to spend his last seven years in Alexandria, dying in 373 aged 77. Although his death removed from the Church a great defender of orthodoxy, four other great Christians came to prominence about that time and did much to uphold the Nicene faith. They were Basil 'the Great', Bishop of Caesarea, his brother Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus (these three are known as 'the Cappadocian Fathers'), and in the west, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan.

Athanasius was a man of deep faith and of enthusiasm for the Faith. At times he seemed to stand alone against the tides of Arianism, which gave rise to the phrase *Athanasius contra mundum* (Athanasius against the world). His greatness lies in his unswerving support of the faith that was hammered out at Nicaea and expressed in the creed of Nicaea. That creed - as revised at the Council of Constantinople in 381 - is in its essentials the one still used at the Eucharist in east and west.

It might seem to us that the arguments over obscure phrases at these councils were a waste of time, but, the points at issue were crucial to the Christian faith. Is Jesus Christ merely a super creature sent by God, or is he really God revealing himself to us?

*Katherine Sladden ed. Philip Ritchie*

## Session 2 : God in Trinity: God the Father Almighty



Opening worship : 'We believe in one God.....the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.'



1. Small group discussion.

- Gather feedback from members of the group on the idea of God being one who suffers. Do group members find this a comfort, to know that God understands and has shared in their pain – or alarming that God might be weakened because of love for humankind?
- Moltmann wrote in the context of many people saying they could no longer believe in God. Is this the case amongst the communities in which the group members live – or is it more likely that their colleagues and neighbours have a different faith? How would group members talk about a suffering God with these people who do not share a Christian faith?

2. Using flip chart sheets, a white board, or other large display area, create a list of characteristics of the kind of fathers we would love to have and another of the characteristics of the Fatherhood of God. How do these compare? Are there any differences?

↳ The tutor should give some input about what was expected from a Father in Jesus' time.



Coffee

3. If God made a 'good' world, what should we be doing as Christians to celebrate, or struggle to defend, its 'goodness'?

*Look at the lists of suggestions in the Additional Resources material. (from the websites listed there)*

- Each group to decide on one action for each individual to take and one for their church to do.

- Decide how you could present your ideas to your church. What further information would you need and who would you need to persuade to make a change?
- Each group then to explain their choices to the rest of the group.



Closing worship: finish with prayer to God the Father and prayer or reflection the Love of God

## Preparation for Session 3: God in Trinity - The Holy Spirit

### **We believe in one God... the Lord, the Giver of Life**

#### **Core reading**

For the first disciples, nurtured in the central Jewish belief in the oneness of God, the concept of Trinity must have been very hard to accept. But of course they did not learn about the *idea* of Trinity – instead they *experienced* its meaning as they gradually came to recognise Jesus as part of God’s very nature, and as they felt the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In the New Testament, Trinitarian belief stems from what was revealed about God through the coming of the divine Son and the gift of the Holy Spirit:

**1.** The early followers of Jesus were able to look at their Jewish heritage to see how the Spirit of God had been described in their Scriptures. The single Hebrew word *ruach* may be translated by three very different words: breath, wind and spirit.

#### *Spirit as wind*

In both Old and New Testaments, a parallel is drawn between the power of the wind, and the mystery of its presence, and God. For example, the wind is a redemptive force in Exodus 14:21, where it parts the Red Sea, allowing the people of Israel to escape from Egypt; and in John 3:5–8, Jesus compares the life of the Spirit to a wind blowing. Israel’s geographical position, with the Mediterranean Sea to the east, and great deserts on the west, meant that winds were either gentle, cooling and rain-bearing, or harsh, searing and powerful. This reflected two aspects of God’s character: his justice, judgement and power on one hand, and his gentle loving care on the other. (Look up Psalm 103:15–18, or Isaiah 40:7–8 for biblical examples of this.)

#### *Spirit as breath*

The Spirit is closely associated with life itself, as you will have seen in some of the Bible references you have just looked at. The metaphor of God as Spirit thus emphasises that God is as essential to life as breath is – able even to bring the dead back to life (Ezekiel 37: 5 – 10).

#### *Spirit as charism*

The term ‘charism’ (or ‘gift’) means the filling of an individual with the Spirit of God, enabling them to perform tasks which would otherwise have been impossible. The Old Testament often describes wisdom as a gift of the Spirit, as well as prophecy, and gifts of leadership of military skills. The New Testament letters describe a range of ‘charismatic’ gifts which come from God’s Spirit.

**2.** Jesus’ followers’ understanding of the role of God’s spirit also developed new meanings. Study the following Bible passages, making notes on the characteristics of the Holy Spirit that emerge from them:

Luke 3:21–22  
Luke 4: 18, 19  
John 14: 25  
John 20:19–23

Acts 2: 1-21  
Romans 8:1–17, 26–27  
1 Corinthians 12:1–13  
Galatians 5: 22-25

### 3. Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament

Spiritual gifts are God-given graces (special abilities, offices, or manifestations) given to benefit and build up the body of Christ and to enable the Church to carry out God's mission. There are many examples of gifted individuals and groups but the following passages refer specifically to the spiritual gifts:

Romans 12:6-8

1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28-31

Ephesians 4:7-13

1 Peter 4:10-11

There are clearly a variety of gifts, probably overlapping. Some are roles in the Christian community:

- an apostle, a leader and planter of churches,
- A prophet, who speaks God's word,
- An evangelist, a witness for Jesus,
- A pastor, who cares for the Christian community,
- A teacher, who helps people grow in knowledge of God.

Some gifts are not about roles but about what Christians do to reveal the power of God. Some involve speech: prophecy, speaking in tongues and interpreting tongues, some are displays of God's grace: wisdom, faith, healing and miracles and some are supernatural insight: words of wisdom or knowledge and discerning of spirits.

Some other gifts that are mentioned reveal the character of God as God works through his people. They meet human needs through service, giving, encouragement and exhortation, merciful action and efficient administration and leadership.

It is very sad indeed that the subject of spiritual gifts has been the cause of such dispute in the church since they are given by God to enable each person to grow together as His people in the world. The greatest gift of all, for which each Christian must pray, is the gift of love (1 Corinthians 13).

**4. Write down a few lines on your own experience of the Holy Spirit in your Christian life. Be prepared to share this – or take something with you to the group that helps you to experience God's Spirit.**

## Session 3 : God in Trinity - The Holy Spirit



Opening prayer – an *epiclesis*

This session will concentrate on how Christians have *experienced* the Holy Spirit, rather than how they have *understood* God's spirit.



In small groups. How many different ways of knowing the presence of God's Spirit did you find in your reading before the session?

What do you think gives people confidence that they had known God's spirit in their lives?

### ***Spiritual Gifts:***

- ↳ Tutor input - The tutor will give some input on the discernment of gifts, and their relation to Christian vocation. The SHAPE course, which has been widely used in the diocese, is based on this. ([www.chelmsford.anglican.org/faith/finding-your-ministry](http://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/faith/finding-your-ministry))



Coffee

***Inspiration*** When Christians talk about the inspiration of the Spirit we are talking about God breathing in us – an awe inspiring thought! One form of prayer, indeed, is simply to focus on our breathing and pray for God's indwelling and, on the out breath, cleansing of us.

The rest of this session may be used to explore the creative, inspiring work of God. Since God's spirit brings us together, all activities should involve the active participation of at least two people. Taking the topic of 'God inspiring the Church' you could:

- Draw, paint or make images of what an inspired Church community might look like
- Gather words and images for a montage on the theme or the beginnings of a poem
- If musical, compose some music on the theme,
- *Other ideas?*



*Plan closing worship using the objects and ideas that group members have brought*

## Preparation for Session 4

### The Life of the Church

#### Core Reading

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity doesn't only affect what we know of God, but also our relationships with each and especially with our fellow believers. Early theologians, known as the Cappadocian Fathers, were the first to put this in clear form. They were Basil the Great (330-379), Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (c.332-395), and Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389). Realising that relationship, communion and community are utterly central to God's nature they argued that any understanding of what it means to be alive, human or divine, must also depend on being in relationship. It isn't just that we are better persons when we are in relationship with others, but that our very identity and existence depends on them. We are the shape we are, the kind of person that we have become, because of others. Dependence on others isn't a state of immaturity which we grow out of, but a constant fact about what it means to be a human being. Another picture which has been used to describe the Trinity is the image of a dance: each person has their own steps, their own part to play, which can't be played without the others also doing their steps. We are each part of the whole, not separate individuals, but called to participate in the life of God.

**1. The Church as community.** With this in view, the church is seen as a community of believers who are growing closer to God and to each other. We have been told many times that the Church is more than a building; it's people. But not just any bunch of people, otherwise we could gather for coffee and biscuits and leave out the praying bit of our worship! The Church is a gathering of people who have been forgiven by the work of Jesus and are growing closer to God and each other. So it should witness in its own structures and relationships to the nature of the God who is worshipped and served.

Leonardo Boff is a Brazilian, a Franciscan priest and a Roman Catholic professor of theology. His writing expresses the radical beliefs of liberation theology, and one of his finest books is called *Trinity and Society*.

*The form of social organisation we have at present cannot be pleasing to God, since most people have no place in it. There is little sharing, less communion, and a great weight of oppression placed upon the poor. They are crying out for justice . . .*

*The Church is more the sacrament of Trinitarian communion the more it reduces inequalities between Christians and between the various ministries in it, and the more it understands and practises unity as co-existence in diversity.*

*The poor reject their impoverishment as sin against Trinitarian communion and see the inter-relatedness of the divine 'Differents' as the model for a human society based on mutual collaboration – all on an equal footing – and based on individual differences; that society's structures would be humane, open, just and egalitarian.*

Belief in three persons in one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is not just a matter of fine-sounding phrases, or a wholly dark mystery, but implies a radically different way of seeing human beings as well as God.

- Jesus criticised the tendency of some of His disciples to think in terms of a hierarchy amongst His followers (Mark 10: 35-45). This is a very easy trap to fall into! Do you see this happening in the way your local church, deanery or diocese is organised? What can be done to resist the temptation? (*Remember each of us is part of this system – this is not just an opportunity to criticise others!*)

**2. The Creed** speaks of the church as One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

**One Church:** In John chapter 17 Jesus' prayer is recorded. He prays that that his disciples may be "one, even as we are one." He is praying that his followers will be united with each other and with God. The present day church is included as those who will have faith because of the disciples' witness.

Looking around the Christian scene today the idea that the Church worldwide might be united seems a forlorn hope. One of the features of the most dedicated Christians has been a tendency to disagree with each other - perhaps because their faith has meant so much to them. Christians have not hesitated to torture and kill each other in order to establish their own understanding of Jesus' teachings. But there have also been many efforts to bring Christian together, which in the last one hundred years have sprung both from a desire to be united as the Gospel was preached to developing countries and as a reaction to the horror of the world tearing itself apart in two World Wars.

One of the fruits of these ecumenical conversations, assisted by the easing of communication between East and West after the end of the Cold War, has been insight into the Orthodox Church's understanding of this passage. For many this has been experienced through an appreciation of Rublev's icon. (There are many reproductions of this in Google images). It depicts the three angels who visited Abraham at the Oak of Mamre (see. Genesis 18, 1-15), but the painting is full of symbolism and often interpreted as an icon of the Holy Trinity. One significant feature is the openness of the group of figures and the apparent invitation to join in the circle of fellowship. The Orthodox Church has maintained belief in the capacity of human beings to be incorporated into the life of the Trinity - to be one with God. And as Christians are united with God they are, almost as a by-product, brought closer to each other.

To speak about the 'One-ness' of the Church is, therefore, to speak about the future as well as the present. It is both something to work and pray for now and the gift of God to be received in the future.

**A holy Church:** The Church's claim to be holy also seems implausible at first sight. One of the common objections to Christianity is that the Church, far from fostering the holiness and fellowship of love, has been responsible for religious wars, persecution and intolerance, as well as an abuse of power and responsibility, in the past and in the present.

Here are the views of two present-day theologians – views which are different but overlapping – on what we mean by describing the Church as holy.

*1 Set apart :* In ordinary English the term ['holy'] has acquired associations of 'morality', 'sanctity', or 'purity', which often seem to bear little relation to the behaviour of fallen human beings. The Hebrew term *kadad*, which underlies the new Testament concept of holiness, has the sense of 'being cut off', or 'being separated'. There are strong overtones of dedication: to be 'holy' is to be set apart for and dedicated to the service of God ...People are 'holy' in that they are dedicated to God, and distinguished from the world on account of their calling by God. A number of theologians have suggested a correlation between the idea of 'the church' (the Greek word for which can bear the meaning of 'those who are called out'), and 'holy' (that is, those who have been separated from the world on account of their having been called by God . . . (Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, page 488)

**God's holy people:** The Christian Church ... is a divine institution. In its essence, it consists of those who are being conformed to Christ and united with him in a Spirit-inspired and energised community, whose internal fellowship and outward service and care reflect something of the eternal love of God. The Church is holy just because it is the principal vehicle and instrument of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work in the world. Despite its all-too-human fallibility, the Church ... is the people of God on earth. It is holy because the holy God is making God's people holy. (Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Essence of Christianity*, page 150)

The church, it would appear, has two natures. These might be described as a divine and a human one, or the ideal church and the actual. The images that are used to describe this are slightly different - it might be that the impure elements will be cut away and destroyed or that each of us is an unfinished piece of work and God will bring His work to perfection. The first idea has led some people to try to establish a pure church in this life, usually by getting rid of people they disagree with, the second has encouraged a tolerant attitude to differences of opinion and behaviour.

**A Catholic Church.:** The word 'catholic', as used in the creed, does not mean Roman Catholic. It comes from the Greek *kath' holon*, which means 'referring to the whole', its Latin form (*catholicus*) coming to mean 'universal' or 'general'. As the Church developed, so did the way in which the word was used, so that by the fifth century, when Christianity was firmly established throughout the Mediterranean world, 'catholic' came to mean 'embracing the whole world'.

The idea of catholicity came under the spotlight again at the Reformation. Protestant writers argued that the essence of catholicity lay not in church institutions but in matters of doctrine. The Church of England claims to be both catholic and reformed – i.e. maintaining continuity with the teachings of the apostolic church, while having abolished non-biblical practices and beliefs.

**An Apostolic Church:** The basic meaning of 'apostolic' is 'originating, or having a direct link with, the apostles'. It does not so much refer to continuity in church structures as to continuity in faith and mission. According to McGrath, the use of the word 'apostle' in the New Testament has two related meanings:

- someone who has been commissioned by Christ, and charged with the task of preaching the good news of the kingdom;
- someone who was a witness to the risen Christ, or to whom Christ revealed himself as risen.

The Nicene Creed, in declaring the Church to be 'apostolic', seems to be emphasising the historical roots of the gospel, and the continuity from Christ, through the apostles, from generation to generation, to the Church today – the people of God who continue to do Christ's work in the world. The historical creeds are one way in which that continuity has been maintained.

There is clearly division between denominations about what 'the apostolic faith' actually means (for example, differences remain in areas such as infant or adult baptism, the nature of priesthood, the orders of bishop, priest and deacon, the consecration of women as bishops, and many others). Nevertheless, what unites members of the Church, faith in Jesus Christ, is far more important, than what divides them.

The Church reminds itself it is a body which is commissioned and sent out every time words of 'dismissal' are said, such as: "Go in Peace to love and serve the Lord!" This may mark the end of the formal worship, but it is the beginning of service in God's name.

## Session 4 : The Life of the Church



### Opening worship

1 **The Nature of the Church** The reading done in preparation for this session has focussed on the worldwide Church. The session itself asks you to think about your local church in the light of this reading.

- St Augustine of Hippo wrote that the Christian Church is like a hospital. What do you think he might have meant?
- What other types of organisation, community or club does your own local church resemble, and in what ways?

2. "We are the body of Christ, in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body. Let us then pursue all that makes for peace and build up our common life." These words, often spoken at the introduction to sharing God's peace with each other, describe the Christian community. To what extent do you think it is important for the Church to fit in with today's culture, or to be different from society? Try to think of specific examples of each, such as the use of money, or the way members treat each other.

3. In the second Eucharistic prayer in Common Worship the church prays that God will "Gather into one all who share this one bread and one cup." To what extent is it essential that a Christian church is open now to all ages, genders, classes and ethnic groups?



### Coffee

4. **The purpose of the Church** What is the church for? It seems clear from the Gospels that Jesus wanted to gather and create a community, not just individuals, who followed him. But why?

Here are some possibilities, with some verses to illustrate them:

to worship God (John 4:23; Rev. 4:10,11),  
study His Word (2 Tim. 2:15 - 17; Acts 2: 42),  
pray (Acts 2:42),  
love one another (John 13: 34,35; Gal. 6:2),  
help others (Rev 2: 19,1 Corinthians 16: 1,2),  
partake of baptism and the Lord's supper (1 Corinthians 11; 33, Acts 10, 44-48).  
to learn how to live as godly people (Titus 2:11-12),  
and to be equipped for the work of ministry and mission (Eph. 4:12; Matt. 28:18-20).

- Is there anything to add to this list?
- Spend some time considering what attitudes and actions would help the local church to fulfil each of these purposes.



Prayer – Using the words of dismissal: "Go in Peace to love and serve the Lord!"

## Preparation for Session 5. The Future Hope

### Core reading

Christians have spent much time and energy trying to discern what happens when we die. Who will spend eternity with God? Does hell exist? Will God's love overcome all resistance? Each of the following positions are held by Christians in this country –a single congregation might contain people who hold each of these views! And each can find some support in the Bible.

- 'I believe that the love and grace of God must ultimately conquer every human heart. In the end, *all* will be saved'
- 'I believe that while God *desires* everyone to be saved, God's will can be frustrated by human choice.
- 'Just because we no longer tend to see hell as a place of flames, darkness and weeping, this does not mean that hell does not exist. I believe that hell is separation from God, freely chosen by those who do not believe in Christ.'
- 'I believe in "conditional immortality" – in other words, hell does not involve eternal punishment; it means ceasing to exist.'
- 'I believe that, by the choices they make in their life, many people would not *want* to be in God's presence for eternity. Human beings have a real choice: God limits his own power and will not overrule the decisions people make for themselves.'
- 'I believe that those who die unrepentant will have opportunities after death to respond to God's love.'
- I believe that there will be judgement of us all, based on the way we have lived our lives.
- I believe in eternal life for those who (in the words of the funeral service) have 'died in the love of Christ.'

How important is it that Christians agree with each other on this subject?

Though Anglicans believe that Scripture is paramount, the statements of faith that have derived from Scripture have not attempted to cover everything that could be said on the subject.

### What do the Creeds say?

In fact, the Creeds affirm the hope that Christian believers have, without stating what will happen to others.

I believe in.. the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting." Apostles Creed.

"We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen." Nicene Creed.

**The 39 Articles** are clear that people are justified by faith in God; there is nothing that anyone can do to earn their salvation (Articles 10 and 11). They are also clear that “Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping, and Adoration, as well of Images as of Relics, and also invocation of Saints,” is “repugnant to the Word of God.”

### **What do the funeral liturgies say?**

In Unit F the idea that the Church’s beliefs are expressed through its liturgy was explained. This is summed up in the Latin phrase *‘lex orandi, lex credendi’*. So what do the funeral services of the Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship say about the Christian hope?

The Book of Common Prayer only contains a service for the burial of the dead. Those who are not baptized, have been excommunicated or have committed suicide are not to receive this service. The ‘sure and certain hope of the resurrection’ is promised for those who place their hope in Christ’s victory over death. The living are encouraged to pray that they remain faithful to God, resisting the temptation to fall away. They are not to mourn, ‘as men without hope,’ but rejoice that the deceased shares in ‘perfect consummation and bliss.’

In contrast, there are many services available within the provision of Common Worship <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/pastoral/funeral.aspx>

The service is designed to meet several aims:

“to remember before God our *brother/sister N* ;  
to give thanks for *his/her* life;  
to commend *him/her* to God our merciful redeemer and judge;  
to commit *his/her* body to be *buried/cremated*,  
and to comfort one another in our grief.”

The variety of prayers and readings gives the minister opportunity for choosing the theological approach. Some emphasise that God’s promises are for those ‘who believe’ or ‘those that fear him,’ while others emphasise God’s ‘infinite mercy’ and ‘mighty power’ over death. Notes that accompany all the Pastoral Services (Healing, Marriage and at death) describe the journey that all people, regular church goers or not, are on and the need to provide opportunities for each person to take a step closer to God.

**So do we all need to agree?** The website of the Church of Ireland (the Anglican Church in Northern Ireland and the Republic), <http://ireland.anglican.org/information/12> expresses well the Anglican position that there are some things we can legitimately disagree about and some things that we are taught as Christians to believe.

**Now read**, as preparation for the group session, the following passages:

The resurrection of the dead : I Corinthians 15: 12-28

The life of the world to come : Revelation 21: 1-8, vs. 22-22:5

## Session 5 : The Future Hope



Opening worship



### Whole Group:

This is a session which may raise painful issues for group members, as they remember people they have loved who have died. In the opening prayers ask God to surround the group with love and care and enable each person to be sensitive to the needs of others.

1. Look at the following poems and songs, often chosen for funerals. (The tutor may need to divide them between the group members). Which of these, or parts of them, express Christian ideas?

### Poems:

Do not stand at my grave and weep  
I am not there. I do not sleep.  
I am a thousand winds that blow.  
I am the diamond glints on snow.  
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.  
I am the gentle autumn rain.  
When you awaken in the morning's hush  
I am the swift uplifting rush  
Of quiet birds in circled flight.  
I am the soft stars that shine at night.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry;  
I am not there. I did not die.

*Mary Elizabeth Frye*

Death is nothing at all.  
I have only slipped away to the next room.  
I am I and you are you.  
Whatever we were to each other,  
That, we still are.

Call me by my old familiar name.  
Speak to me in the easy way  
which you always used.  
Put no difference into your tone.  
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed  
at the little jokes we enjoyed together.  
Play, smile, think of me. Pray for me.  
Let my name be ever the household word  
that it always was.  
Let it be spoken without effect.  
Without the trace of a shadow on it.

Life means all that it ever meant.  
It is the same that it ever was.  
There is absolute unbroken continuity.  
Why should I be out of mind  
because I am out of sight?

I am but waiting for you.  
For an interval.  
Somewhere. Very near.  
Just around the corner.

All is well.

*Canon Henry Scott Holland*

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on that sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

*Dylan Thomas*

## **Songs**

The road is long  
With many a winding turns  
That leads us to who knows where  
Who knows where

It's a long, long road  
From which there is no return  
While we're on the way to there  
Why not share

But I'm strong  
Strong enough to carry him  
He ain't heavy, he's my brother  
His welfare is of my concern  
No burden is he to bear  
We'll get there

And the load  
Doesn't weigh me down at all  
He ain't heavy he's my brother  
He's my brother  
He ain't heavy, he's my brother  
He ain't heavy, he's my brother

For I know  
He would not encumber me  
He ain't heavy, he's my brother  
If I'm laden at all

*Songwriter Marcus Congleton*

I'm laden with sadness  
That everyone's heart  
Isn't filled with the gladness  
Of love for one another

## **You raise me up**

When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary;  
When troubles come and my heart burdened be;  
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence,  
Until you come and sit awhile with me.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains;  
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas;  
I am strong, when I am on your shoulders;  
You raise me up to more than I can be.

*Writer: Rolf U. Lovland*

## **You'll never walk alone**

When you walk through a storm  
Hold your head up high  
And don't be afraid of the dark

At the end of the storm  
Is a golden sky  
And the sweet silver song of the lark

Walk on through the wind  
Walk on through the rain  
Though your dreams be tossed and blown

Walk on walk on with hope in your heart  
And you'll never walk alone  
You'll never walk alone

When you walk through a storm  
Hold your head up high  
And don't be afraid of the dark

At the end of the storm  
Is a golden sky  
And the sweet silver song of the lark

Walk on through the wind  
Walk on through the rain  
Though your dreams be tossed and blown

Walk on walk on with hope in your heart  
And you'll never walk alone  
You'll never walk alone.

*R. Rogers/O. Hammerstein*

- What are the hopes expressed here? For what are the poets or songwriters grateful?
- What is there in the Christian story which matches some of these hopes and thanks?

## 2. Group the following statements into

- a) Those that all Christians should agree on
- b) Those which you think all Christians should disagree with
- c) Those which church members may hold different views on.

(You might like to write these on post- t notes and invite people to place them on three flip charts, or find some other way of allowing people to express their opinions freely.)

- The love and grace of God will eventually save all people.
- Hell does exist, but it is empty
- Humans can reject God
- Hell does exist
- Those who don't believe in God will cease to exist
- We should continue to pray for people after they die
- The way we live our lives now is the most important consideration
- We should pray to past saints to help us now
- We must share our faith with people now, whether this means they go to heaven or not
- Talking about death will put people off the Christian faith
- *Any other statements*

The group may well not be able to agree about what they should agree on! To what extent does this matter? Does disagreement impede the mission of the Church?



Coffee

**3.** In what ways does or should our hope of eternal life affect the way we live as Christians today? Groups can look at subjects such as the way we use our money, the decisions we make about our careers, the way we raise our families and the way we spend our time.

After the subjects have been divided between the members (and there may be additional or alternative subjects) ask each sub group to discuss the issues and then have time to report back to the other groups.



The group may like to finish this unit with the service of compline, the service of Night Prayer. The words can be found at <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/daily2/night/compline.aspx>

## Assignments:

- Imagine that you are writing a guide for visitors to a church. How will you explain the central position given to pictures and statues of a near naked man dying in agony? Write about 1500 words for an article in the guide.
  
- Does making the Creed a central and regular feature of our worship exclude those who cannot agree with it all? Is this a good or a bad thing? You can submit this assignment as a written piece of about 1500 words or a recorded talk, lasting between 10 and 15 minutes.
  
- A prominent MP has described himself as a 'classic Anglican', 'not that regular in attendance and a bit vague on some of the more difficult parts of the faith.' \* In 1500 words, describe what advantages and disadvantages this kind of member provides for the mission of the Church of England.

*\*Found at <http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2014/17-april/comment/opinion/my-faith-in-the-church-of-england>. Accessed 4.6.14*

## **Unit L God's Mission and our calling**

Aim: to understand what God is doing in the world and to find our place in that mission.

### **Preparation for Session One:**

The final ten sessions of the CCS are not separate modules, but fit together. They will help you to understand God's activity in the world and your place in it. They begin by asking 'What is God doing in the world?' Many of the previous units have examined what God has done in the past and so increased understanding of the character of the God we worship. The units on prayer and on the sacraments have explored the work of God in the life of the believer. The unit on Christian decision making has asked how we can know how to act in a way that reflects God's care for us. Having seen how Christians have expressed their faith in the past and how we pray and make decisions, we now look at our part in God's mission.

In many ways these units bring together all that has been studied so far. As you do them you will need to look back at previous work and you will also be asked to look around you and see what God is doing. But you will also be asked to look forward and ask yourselves the question: 'What next?' Where do I, and my church, fit into God's mission?

### **Outline of Sessions**

Session 1 God's mission

Session 2 Sharing Good News - stories

Session 3 What is the Gospel?

Session 4 What questions do people have?

Session 5 Responding to enquirers.

#### *Half term break*

Session 6 Growing as disciples

Session 7 Responding to human need by loving service

Session 8 Transforming unjust structures of society

Session 9 Safeguarding the integrity of creation and sustaining the life of the earth.

Session 10 Listening to God's call

## 1. The Mission of God

What is God's mission? What is God's plan for the world? This is how the letter to the Ephesians puts it:

*God has 'made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ'* (Ephesians. 1:9-10).

When Paul speaks of 'God's will', he does not (usually) mean God's personal guidance for our *individual* lives, but his great purpose for the whole world, throughout all time and space. He calls this a mystery because it hasn't been revealed before the time of Christ, but now can be known to all people. God's plan is to bring healing and unity to the whole creation in and through Christ. The mission of God is to redeem the whole of creation, broken by sin and evil, into the new creation, populated by the redeemed from every culture, through the cross and resurrection of Christ.

Mission, then, is primarily the activity of God, driving this purpose forward through love and bringing it to its glorious conclusion. Our contribution is to listen to God's call us to participate in this great plan.

### It's God's World

Christian disciples need to know about the world around them because it is God's world: God loves this world and chose to reveal himself through the historical person of Jesus. Belief in the incarnation: the em-bodi-ment of God is a uniquely Christian insight; it is what makes Christianity different from any of the other faiths. Through it we learn both that God has become part of this world, and that the world may be a means of understanding God better.

Learning about the earth, for example, will tell us more of God's character as creator, learning about all of human life will open our eyes to truths about God in whose image we are made. And learning about those with whom we feel no affinity or affection may be the most effective way of understanding truths that were closed off to us!

We need, of course, to be well informed about the world in order to be faithful to God's call to join Him in mission to it, both in prayer and in action. The task of ministry cannot be carried out in ignorance of the lives of those around us. The study of the Bible should have shown how much of it is concerned with the hazardous calling to live as God's faithful people in an often hostile world. Occasionally the people of God were called to separate themselves from surrounding culture, such as when intermarriage was forbidden (Ezra 9:1,2), but for the most part the calling was to transform society by the purity and faithfulness of their lives.

This is not to say that Christians have found it easy to be involved in the world's affairs, and different approaches have been taken. It is worth reflecting on the contrast in the New Testament between Paul's situation as he describes it in Romans 13: 1 – 7, and John's situation as described in Revelation 13. The traditional explanation of the difference between these two passages is that Paul is talking about a time before Rome's persecution of Christians and that John reacts to a very different time when Christians and being imprisoned, threatened and persecuted by Rome.

For Paul, Rome is one of the governing authorities ordained by God as a guarantor of justice in the world. Paul's personal experience, as recorded in Acts, is that Rome is his protector. He is a Roman citizen and uses this fact as a defence against persecution by his own people the Jews. In the end he appeals to the Emperor in just the same way as we might appeal to the House of Lords for a final judgement. No wonder Paul saw Rome as being part of God's plan. Some might even accuse him of being compromised by the protection he received from the Roman Empire. By the time that John was writing the situation was very different. Beginning with the emperor Nero (who ruled from AD 54 – 68) Christians fell under suspicion of treachery and were persecuted. Church leaders were asked to swear allegiance to the emperor as a god and the emperor began to be given divine status. In John's mind the emperor is now, in effect, claiming to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords and it is the responsibility of the faithful to resist this.

If we take these two scenarios we are left with questions for our own age. Do we live in a time when political authorities are, as in Paul's imagination, there to provide a fabric of justice in which human diversity can flourish and where dissent can be expressed, or do we live in a time when those in power claim our obedience in every part of our lives. Some of these claims may be subconscious – the call to be consumers, for example. Two options, of adaptation or of retreat are still possible, so we should ask whether we or our churches are compromised by our participation in contemporary culture, with all the benefits it brings, or have retreated from effective engagement and, consequently, are not forces for good? The challenge for most of us will be to live in the world with a distinctive, Christian, lifestyle.

- Take time at this point to reflect on your position with regard to the world around you. Do you see it as essentially un-Christian, hostile to the Gospel? Or as a place where Christians may learn more about God? Or somewhere in between, perhaps relating to different parts of your life in different ways?

- Can you identify parts of your non Church life where the values and attitudes make it especially difficult to act as a Christian? Conversely, are there parts of your non-church life where you find Gospel values such as patience, hospitality and selflessness better expressed than in church?

## 2. The Church and the World

Now ask these questions for your own church. Listen to words spoken in your Christian community, both at Sunday services and during the week. Are any of the three attitudes described above reflected in what you hear? If so, what do you think are the reasons behind these attitudes?

- If you listen to the intercessions at your church, there will often be prayers for "the world," and "the community around us." As you listen to them, does it sound as though the person leading the intercessions assuming that the members of the congregation are part of the world and the local community or separate from it?

- Sometimes there is a sense of distance between the church community and others in the neighbourhood. "*They're only using the church, for baptisms and weddings,*" for example. Or criticism: "*they just think of Christmas as a time to enjoy themselves.*" What is being implied about the speaker's attitude to the community who are not regular attenders at church services?

- One can also sometimes detect a sense that the church, (and God), is a refuge from the world. Before prayers someone might say: "*Let's just still ourselves and leave our troubles behind as we turn to God...*" We are encouraged to concentrate on God, not on the world around us.

- Do any of the songs and hymns you sing in church indicate an attitude to society at large? What, for example, is Patrick Appleford's hymn, "*O Lord all the world belongs to you*" saying about God, the world and the church?

- Begin to look around your church building. Is there evidence of engagement with issues in the local, regional or national community? Look at your notice board and the information you are handed as you enter church. Examples of engagement might be involvement in a local regeneration project, or prayer for someone in government.

You will have noticed that we are asking you to observe what is happening at your local church, and to listen attentively to casual conversations around you. These may be sights and sounds that have become so familiar to you that it is hard to notice them: exploring the world around us is hard work! You will need to try to listen to well-known phrases as though you had heard them as a stranger, and to think about your conversations with people well known to you.

But do be persistent, and honest, in this preparation. You are not being asked to criticise what your fellow church members say or do, just make a note of what we all do without thinking!

### 3. The Mission of God's People, the church.

There have been many attempts to define and describe the mission of God's church. In 1984 the Anglican Consultative Council began to develop a "mission statement" for the worldwide Anglican Communion, and the bishops of the Lambeth Conference adopted these "**Five Marks of Mission**" in 1988. They were then adopted by the General Synod of the Church of England in 1996.

"The mission of the church is the mission of Christ

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

See more at: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/mission/fivemarks.cfm>  
The breadth of this statement witnesses to the immense scope of God's care for the world.

Mission obliterates the sacred/secular divide. There are not parts of our lives that God is interested in and parts he is not. We are all 'mission partners' called to carry God's message to the world in all the places we find ourselves. The scope of God's mission is also a reminder that no-one can do it on their own – we need each other. And that is what the Church is for.

So God calls all of us to participate in mission and gives us each particular gifts that equip us in a specific area. So, for example, all of us need to be ready to bear witness to our faith, but some are specifically gifted as evangelists. All of us are to be ready to do acts of kindness, but some have a gift for healing. All should speak up for what is just and right, but some are specifically called to work in political and judicial advocacy, or in tackling global poverty, hunger and disease. All of us should live responsibly in our use and care of creation, but some are called and equipped to pursue environmental biology and do ecologically appropriate scientific research and advocacy.

For Anglican Christians God's mission is about transformation – transforming individual lives, transforming communities and transforming the world. As we follow Jesus Christ, we believe that God's mission is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit in three ways: through the Bible, through the tradition and life of the Church, and

through our own listening, praying, thinking and sharing as we respond to our own context.

The Anglican Consultative Council has noted, though, that "The first mark of mission, is really a summary of what all mission is about, because it is based on Jesus' own summary of his mission (Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:14-15, Luke 4:18, Luke 7:22; cf. John 3:14-17). Instead of being just one of five distinct activities, this should be the key statement about everything we do in mission."

See more at: <http://www.archbishopofyork.org/pages/five-marks-of-mission.html#sthash.yWPIMd7w.dpuf>

(Sessions 2-4 will focus on this first mark, proclaiming the Good News.)

### **For further Study**

Gordon Lynch, *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*, 2005 Blackwell Publishing).

*Called to New Life: The World of Lay Discipleship*, Church House Publishing 1999

Edited by Cathy Ross and Andrew Walls,

Bosch, David *Transforming Mission* - Orbis Books (USA); New edition (Dec 1992)

The report, *Mission-shaped church*, Church House Publishing. 2003.