WITNESSING AT WORK

Mac Leonard

Jesus loves YOU???
Part One:
Surveying the situation

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Why Witness? And what is Witnessing?

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15)

(This session is based on an address by Bishop Stephen)

Prayer
“Devote yourselves to prayer…” (Colossians 4.2)
“It is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks” (Luke 6.45)
You can’t give what you haven’t got. All ministry, and especially evangelism, is replenished by and flows from our relationship with God. Renewing our faith through, prayer, scripture and sacrament are the indispensable wellsprings of ministry. Through prayer we discern what God’s word and God’s will might be for a particular person or situation. We see how the story of Christ speaks to our stories. Prayerful listening is also needed so as to understand the context in which we minister and the people we serve.

Service
“Be doers of the word” (James 2. 22)
“Remember the poor” (Galatians 2. 10)
This is what Peter said to Paul as he set off on his great evangelistic mission. Unless our churches and our lives are a blessing to the local community, and unless we give ourselves in service to those in need then we are not the church of Jesus Christ. And unless the gospel that is on our lips is also manifest in our lives there is no reason why anyone should take us seriously. Serving our work-community is the living out of the gospel we proclaim.

Encounter
“They told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them.” (Luke 24.35)
“We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4. 20)
Every Christian has two stories to tell: the story of what God has done in Christ, and the story of what God has done in their own life. We need to grow in confidence in telling both stories, and this is an area we will explore in more detail during this Course.

Witness
“What are you discussing while you walk along?” (Luke 24. 17)
“Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8. 30)
A pivotal point on many people’s journey into faith will be an encounter with the Christian, either as an individual or in community, and this will provide the opportunity to share the Christian story. That question, ‘How can we serve the people with whom we have contact in such a way that the gospel is challenging, intriguing and appealing’ needs to be puzzled over every day so that we can witness effectively and be ready to help people find out more. Like Jesus on the Emmaus Road and like Philip on the wilderness road we need to
a) meet people where they are,
b) travel with them on their pathways, and
c) open up opportunities for them people to an encounter the Christian church and the Christian story.
Initial proclamation
“This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses” (Acts 2.32)
“Pray that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ... and reveal it clearly...” (Colossians 4.3 & 4)
'Witness' needs to have some proclamation of the Christian story woven into it. This need not always be 'a talk' – there are other ways of telling and presenting the story – but we need to learn how to do it. Often people will need to notice we are ‘different’ simply by the way we ‘are’ - this will raise questions and openings. Sometimes the answer we give to a question can spark a discussion. But the story of what God has done in Christ is the power of the gospel. We need to set it loose to do its work of renewing and redeeming.

Apologetics
“Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence” ( 2. Peter 3.15)
“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone” (Colossians 4.6)
Apologetics is that ministry of commending and explaining the Christian faith. As with so much evangelism today it is most likely to happen through dialogue. People have questions and objections to Christian belief. We need to listen carefully to what people have to say and be ready to give reasons for our hope. This again we will explore further.

Choose one of the following passages from scripture.

1. Colossians 4:2-6
3. Acts 8:26-40

Read the passage and see which words or phrases jump out at you.
Share them with each other without discussion.
Then answer the following questions in small groups:

a) What does this passage tell us about the ministry of evangelism?
b) What surprises us about it?
c) What challenges us?

Note your comments for feedback on the following page.
1. **Colossians 4:2-6**
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Why Witness at Work?

Work is work and that’s it?

With thanks to ‘Making an Impact in the Workplace’ by Lynne Thompson

How many Christians work in your workplace? Not sure? Maybe they’ve chosen to hide their true identity. Maybe your workplace is teeming with undercover Christians. Are you one of them?

In Matthew 5 Jesus commands us to make our faith evident to everyone around us. “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Take a few minutes on your own … what percentage of your life is work?

a) How many hours each week do you spend sleeping?
   - subtract this number (sleep-hours) from 168 - your answer = ‘x’

b) How many hours each week do you spend in the workplace?

c) What percentage of ‘x’ is this?
   - e.g. a ‘typical’ example: 168-(7x8) hours’ sleep=112, 38 hours’ work+112x100=33.9% of waking life at work!

If, then, we are to ‘let your light shine’ do we, should we, can we hit the ‘off button’ at work when ‘work’ is such a large percentage of our life?

Kind of Tricky

Did Jesus really mean at work? Living a high definition, transparent life in the secular workplace can get kind of tricky. It’s not like you can begin each day leading the office in prayer, or reciting weekly Bible memory verses. “Many of the tools we use at church just don’t work in a secular environment,” writes C. Peter Wagner, author of ‘The Church in the Workplace: How God’s People Can Transform Society’ (Regal). “Influence in the church is achieved through spirituality, in the workplace influence is achieved through success.” Wagner warns that although there are several opportunities for Christians to stand out in the workplace, it’s important that it’s not done in weird ways. “Learn how to draw the line. There are times to cut some slack and allow the system to operate. But you have to adapt before you have a chance to change them. Otherwise you isolate, and hide in a cubicle with Bible verses pinned to your wall.”

Plastic Image

Sometimes Christians unknowingly make themselves unapproachable by refusing to be transparent and thereby projecting a false, almost plastic, image. It leaves their co-workers believing that Christians live a perfect life. Perhaps believers fear that sharing their struggles with other people at work reveal a lack of faith. On the contrary says Wagner, “It’s O.K. to talk about your struggles and then others will talk about their struggles with you. That’s when you gain influence.” Wagner says it’s best when Christians take a missionary’s perspective when entering the workplace. “We live in two different cultures. Christians need to be like missionaries, taking their faith into a culture that is different than the church. Sometimes believers try to transfer the piety (and language) of the church into the workplace, and that doesn’t work. We have to adapt to the workplace culture.”
Being Adaptable - adapting doesn’t mean compromising faith.
Daniel, a biblical example of a man rising in power, while maintaining spiritual integrity. Daniel had to become part of a whole group of soothsayers and seers, but eventually became their leader. The spiritual principles Daniel was working with were a lot different than the principles the soothsayers were working with, and when it came to prayer, he drew the line. He couldn’t compromise on that one. (Daniel 1)

Joseph, under Potiphar, rose to the top due to his excellent abilities. “The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything he did, Joseph found favour in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.” (Genesis 39:1-6) What is obvious in this passage is that Potiphar had no doubt as to where Joseph’s ability originated; it came from God.

We know that all three had problems in their workplace: Daniel had to make friends with lions, Paul was eventually executed (although it could be termed in Salvationist speak ‘Promoted - to glory’) and Joseph ended up in prison because he refused advances from his boss’s wife! We’ll do some work on avoiding problems later.

Giving credit to God is paramount to living a transparent life that can greatly impact the work environment. “The one thing you should not do is hide the fact that you follow Christ. When you succeed, they wonder if there’s a connection. People respect that.” What convinces people is a faith which is practical - which handles life with Jesus Joy.

A vocation to ministry………?
And a final point. The word ‘vocation’ means simply ‘a call’.

Often Christians have unwittingly limited its meaning to ‘becoming a priest’.
Society has limited its meaning to becoming a teacher, a nurse (or some other job ‘serving’ others, often regardless of income).

But God’s call is ‘unlimited’ - He calls us to do whatever he wants, whatever that might be.

The problem sometimes is that we don’t see our ‘occupation’ as God’s calling.
‘To minister’ simply means ‘to serve’. ‘Ministry’ isn’t limited to doing something ‘in church’ - it means serving Christ by serving others, all the time, everywhere, and in whatever we’re doing.
It means living the love of Christ and sometimes speaking for him - He’s ‘The Boss’ 24 hours everyday - and that includes at work for ‘the boss’.

Living a transparent and authentic life means allowing your relationship with God to illuminate every environment you enter, even the workplace! “Besides”, writes Wagner, “the place to workout your faith isn’t just at church. What people do in the workplace is their ministry, just as much as singing in the choir is at church.”
Take a few minutes on your own to think about these questions ……..

- How far are you living a ‘Transparent Life’ at Work?
- Do you fake happiness even when you are sad about something?
- Have you ever shared a personal concern with a co-worker?
- Have you openly spoken about how God helped you during a tough time?
- How do your actions at work reflect your Christian principles?
- Do you have a vision for your workplace?

In groups, share your experiences of ‘Faith in the Workplace’.
What effect(s) did any ‘witness’ have?
Beating the Barriers: Religion and Employment Law


Note there may have been changes to the law since this was published.

What do we mean by ‘Barriers’? What ‘issues’ might there be?

In his book, amongst other issues, Jones refers to:

- Can I send Christmas cards to my colleagues?
- Should I be allowed time off because of Church Services/Christmas/Easter?
- Can I wear a cross?
- I am being asked to wear an immodest uniform – can I refuse?
- Can I share my faith in the workplace?
- Can I give a Christian opinion on controversial topics?
- Can I object where my employer has asked me to undertake duties that are contrary to my Christian conscience?
- My employer has asked me to provide a good or service for a client that is contrary to my Christian conscience.
- How should I convey my concerns?

And you may have experienced others!

In groups, share your experiences of any ‘barriers to witness’ which you have encountered.

Have these barriers been overcome - and if so, how
What rights do I have because of religious beliefs? Read through the following extracts and note any questions / comments.

Can I send Christmas cards to my colleagues?
This is unlikely to cause a problem. If your employer introduces a policy that says not to, then the solution is not to disregard that policy but to challenge it by entering into a dialogue to understand what drives it, address any misconceptions and identify an acceptable solution. If you were to single out people of other faiths and send cards only to them, or if a colleague has made it clear to you that they do not want to receive Christmas (or Easter) cards from you but you still send them one, then an allegation of harassment and/or indirect discrimination could be made against you.

Should I be allowed time off because of Church Services/Christmas/Easter?
Those who work in retail have specific protection under the Employment Rights Act 1996 and are able to serve written notice on their employer that they are not willing to work Sundays. Three months’ notice must be given. This exemption does not apply for those who only work on Sundays. (The same protection also applies to those in the betting trades).
The ACAS Guide states (p32) that “Staff may request annual leave to coincide with religious festivals. Refusal to grant such leave may be discriminatory if it cannot be justified by a legitimate business need which cannot be met by any other reasonable means.”

Can I wear a cross?
Generally speaking the answer has to be yes. It would be direct discrimination if the only items of jewellery banned from a workplace were Christian symbols such as a cross or an icthus fish. It might be indirect discrimination if all jewellery was banned, depending upon the reasons.
The ACAS Guide states (p33) that “organisations should try to be flexible where they can to enable staff to dress in accordance with their beliefs but still meet the organisation’s requirements”.
Can I share my faith in the workplace?
The legally “safe” advice would be to minimise any risk of ever creating a personal liability by never doing anything that someone could be offended by. One Employment Tribunal has held that the fact that it is scripture being quoted does not provide a blanket defence to allegations that those views are offensive. Nevertheless, an employer should take into consideration whether an opinion is informed by your Christian beliefs and, if so, take that into account before deciding what response is appropriate.
A principle that can be extrapolated from the DCLG Guidance is that it may be more acceptable to put something in the context of a personal view, for example, “As a Christian, I believe that…” or “The Bible says that…” rather than stating something as a bold fact without a reference point for that view. This should also encourage Christians to share their personal testimony with colleagues during such discussions, taking them on the journey travelled rather than just expressing a concluded view. From an employer’s perspective, dialogue between staff rather than confrontation maintains the desired working relationship.

Can I give a Christian opinion on controversial topics?
The legally “safe” advice would be to minimise any risk of ever creating a personal liability by never doing anything that someone could be offended by. One Employment Tribunal has held that the fact that it is scripture being quoted does not provide a blanket defence to allegations that those views are offensive. Nevertheless, an employer should take into consideration whether an opinion is informed by your Christian beliefs and, if so, take that into account before deciding what response is appropriate. One consequence of the legislation is that a person has better protection when expressing their views if those views derive from their Christian faith rather than someone whose views are not informed by their faith (or absence of faith).

Can I object where my employer has asked me to undertake duties that are contrary to my Christian conscience?
Yes. Examples could include lying on someone else’s behalf or being asked to work a lottery machine in a newsagent when you are opposed to gambling. The principle of reasonable accommodation applies. If you have been targeted to undertake such duties precisely because of your faith, this is likely to be direct discrimination. In relation to indirect discrimination, it is questionable whether lying could be seen to be a legitimate aim, but if the duty you are being asked to undertake is a legitimate aim, as mentioned above, the need for you to undertake it must be proportionate to that aim. Whilst continuing to act in a manner that is reasonable, you should object clearly, as soon as the request is made; be aware that the more you acquiesce in requests contrary to your conscience, the more difficult it may be to convince anyone of the strength of your religious convictions.

My employer has asked me to provide a good or service for a client that is contrary to my Christian conscience.
A believer is “not required to undertake action that promotes that which the essence of the belief teaches to be wrong”. Although this relates to the area of goods and services, the principle is just as applicable to an employment scenario. The DCLG states that “individuals who are concerned that the requirements of their job may be incompatible with their religious beliefs may ask their employer to be redeployed. Employers should be sensitive to the religious beliefs and perspectives of their employees and will need to be mindful of their obligations under the discrimination legislation not to discriminate against their employees on grounds of religion or belief.”

How should I convey my concerns?
Put concerns in writing, because it provides a clear record and also may enable you to express matters more fully and in a way that is not possible (or could be so easily misunderstood) if expressed for the first time face-to-face. The approach should be one of informing and indeed educating an employer (who may be completely ignorant about what Christians believe) rather than confronting. This may be the first opportunity the person you write to will ever have had to hear the Gospel, so use the opportunity and privilege wisely.
As stated at the beginning, employees should have access to a grievance procedure and that is normally the appropriate first step. A failure to adequately investigate or pursue an employee’s grievance can amount to discrimination in itself, if the failure to deal properly with the complaint was itself due to religious reasons.

There is also a more formal “Questionnaire” procedure. This allows workers to use a prescribed document to submit specific questions about their treatment and their concerns that it is discriminatory. If an employer fails to answer it or gives evasive answers, a Tribunal is likely to consider that reaction to be strong evidence in support of any claim.

Finally, it may be possible to pursue a remedy in the Employment Tribunal. Normally claims have to be brought within 3 months of the offending act. This should normally be the last resort.

It has to be understood that employers are given a certain amount of flexibility within the judicial process. There are employers who are sympathetic to Christians and there are employers who are hostile. Different decisions may be reached by different organisations facing similar circumstances and both may be equally justifiable in law. It is important to bear in mind that, in the event of a dispute, a third party may end up reading your communications. If a situation cannot be resolved and the correspondence shows an employee to have been reasonable in the face of an unreasonable employer, they are more likely to have the Tribunal’s sympathy.
What do we mean by an ‘ethical decision’?

For Christians, deciding what is the ‘right’ action is not always obvious on first glance. We should always take the Bible as a guide, but for a moment consider this: “If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.” Then all the men of his town are to stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you.” (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) It would not just be Esther Rantzen who would disagree with this biblical command!

The Bible sets out ethical principles e.g. The Ten Commandments but we need to apply these to our lives and society today. Religious leaders may not help - e.g. a Methodist Minister and a Roman Catholic Priest would give different advice about abortion to a young pregnant schoolgirl enquiring about whether she should continue with her pregnancy.

How we apply principles (ethics) to produce behaviour (morality) is like a wheel. ‘Ethics’ is the power-principle (the hub) and ‘Morality’ is using the power to get around in the world. The spokes of the wheel transfer the ethic-power to moral-behaviour: the Christian consults the Bible and Religious Leaders, but sometimes this still doesn’t bring an answer, so the Conscience needs to be activated.

There are for example, two very different philosophers who have suggested different ways to make ethical decisions.

Thomas Aquinas, AKA ‘Traddy Taboo Tommy’, said our behaviour should follow the Natural Law by following a Natural Moral Law. His ideas were ‘Deontological’ - the intention not the outcome was the important thing. His way resulted in a series of rules or Moral Laws. He still influences much Christian opinion, particularly that of the Roman Catholic church and more conservative opinion.

Joseph Fletcher, AKA ‘Jesus Joe’, proposed a ‘Teleological’ theory which judges the right action on the outcome. He based it on Jesus’ saying, ‘Love one another as I have loved you’. His theory called Situationism treats every situation on an individual basis and deals with it in the way which will bring the most loving or ‘agapaic’ result.

In the case of a young pregnant schoolgirl enquiring about abortion,

- Aquinas would have said ‘No’ - he applied the Bible to highlight “Be fruitful and increase in number” (Genesis 1) and “Do no murder” (Exodus 20).
- Fletcher would have said ‘It depends on the situation’ - what will bring the most loving outcome - Jesus himself sometimes broke ‘the rules’. 
What are the biblical principles about work?

In the Old Testament there seems to be some **contradiction about justice at work**. For the Israelites in Egypt, slavery seemed unjust: “They (the Egyptians) made their lives bitter with harsh labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labour the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.” (Exodus 1:14)

However, later in their history they seem to have seen no problem in treating people they conquered in the same way: “When Israel became strong, they pressed the Canaanites into forced labour.” (Judges 1:28)

But as their society developed attitudes began to change: “The workers laboured faithfully. Over them to direct them were Jahath and Obadiah, who were skilled in playing musical instruments: they had charge of the labourers and supervised all the workers from job to job. Some of the Levites were secretaries, scribes and gatekeepers.” (2 Chronicles 34:12-14)

The Rabbis interpreted the commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.” (Exodus 20:8-10)

However, they concentrated on what ‘work was’ developing over 600 edicts about what could not be done on Sabbath rather than emphasising the need for rest as well as worship.

But eventually they did begin to understand: “You will eat the fruit of your labour; blessings and prosperity will be yours.” (Psalm 128:2); “Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in forced labour.” (Proverbs 12:24); and “The appetite of labourers works for them; their hunger drives them on.” (Proverbs 16:26)

Some, notably the nihilist author of Ecclesiastes, questioned the value of work: “For a person may labour with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This is meaningless and a great misfortune. What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labour under the sun?” (Ecclesiastes 2:21-22) but then “This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labour under the sun during the few days of life God has given them - for this is their lot.” (Ecclesiastes 5:18) His point comes in the last chapter: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). We could say that if we leave God out of our work there is no point!

Later, the ‘justice of work’ becomes more apparent: “Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his own people work for nothing, not paying them for their labour.” (Jeremiah 22:13); “So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against those who defraud labourers of their wages,” says the Lord Almighty.” (Malachi 3:5). God wishes a fair reward.

And in the New Testament Paul, who earned his own keep as a tentmaker, introduces what has become known as ‘the protestant work ethic’: “The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour.” (1 Corinthians 3:8) and “We did not eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.” (2 Thessalonicans 3:8)

These principles have influenced today’s workplace: whether it was the ‘Cadbury’ tradition of employer or the Christian Socialists who founded the first Trades Unions the Christian ethic of ‘the workplace’ has developed in Britain since the middle of the nineteenth century and is still evident today.

So ... should all London bus drivers receive the same hourly wages? Maybe we’re back to the beginning ...... does it depend on ‘the job’ or the individual job requirements?!!!
In one sentence for each question, answer the following questions

What does “honesty at work” mean?
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How about “loyalty versus truth” with colleagues?
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How should I treat the boss?
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As a boss, how should I treat my employees?
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What does religion say about how I should work?
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Should I be a trade union activist to right wrongs?
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What should be my attitude to working overtime and/or holidays because the boss wants me to?
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What is a “work / leisure / family balance?”
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What is “a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay”?
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What decision would you make in the following cases?
What Christian principles would you use?

1. It was your birthday yesterday. You were out late celebrating and have overslept. You wake up with a headache and are very tired, your wife is ill and the kids need taking to school. Do you ‘phone in sick?

2. Your boss tells you tell a client that the job you are going to do for him will cost £200, but you know it will eventually cost much more. Do you do as your boss tells you?

3. Your friend at work wants to take an extra hour for lunch and asks you to tell anyone who wants to know where she is that she has just gone to the toilet not feeling well. Do you lie for your friend?

4. Your friend spends at least an hour of every working day surfing the internet and answering private email. The boss asks you if you know why he isn’t getting his work done. What do you say?

5. The most popular person in the office has ‘lost’ his company laptop - but you know he has taken it home and doesn’t intend to bring it back. What do you do?

How far do we agree on ‘the right thing to do’?

Feedback
Living the Love: Witness without words

“When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)

“The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 13:52)

“Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words.”
(attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi)

‘Actions speak louder than words’ is a trite saying put rather more eloquently by James: “You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?” (James 2:20). It’s obvious without a lot of thought: the way we behave as Christians will have more effect than anything we say. Actions or “deeds” are what makes us what we are - and affect people far more than anything we say.

People in the workplace - and anywhere else - are all too ready to call us ‘hypocrite’ (a Greek word which interestingly means ‘actor’). Paul in Rome said, “First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.” (Acts 26:20) and James writes, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.” (James 3:13). So what we ‘are’ is much more important than what we ‘say’.

What we shouldn’t do should be obvious!
But what are ‘the temptations’ in the workplace?

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Mac Leonard: Witnessing at Work
“The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 13:52)

Mistletoe without berries doesn’t work!

Jesus said, “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’” (Luke 13:6-9)

There are three points here:
1. The tree was expected to produce fruit;
2. The ‘man’ judged the tree by the lack of fruit;
3. The tree was given another chance.

So it is with us. We are expected to allow the Holy Spirit to fertilise our lives to grow His fruit so all can see - that’s how we will be judged by our work-colleagues - and we have the chance to let it happen so our work colleagues can see we have “been with Jesus.”

Paul writes, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

How might our work colleagues see these ‘fruits’ growing on us?
Think of at least one practical example of each.

Love

Joy

Peace
Forbearance

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness

Self-control

FEEDBACK
Before next time ……….  if you can ………

Click on ‘Resources’. Download ‘Living with other faiths - a-presence and engagement resource.doc’
(Alternatively, email Mac at macleonard@virginmedia.com to receive a copy by email.)
Read as much as you can, paying particular attention to pages 24-34.

2. Concentrate on your ‘Witness at Work Without Words’ - pray about it, and note any examples!
Part Two: Worldly-wise witnessing

Page 23 - The way our colleagues think and believe: Dealing with differences

Page 27 - Religion and Relationships at Work: Beliefs and Behaviours

Page 28 - Agnostics and Atheists: Sharing with ‘No Faith’

Page 30 - Abrahamic Alternatives: Sharing with ‘Linked Faith’

Page 35 - Vedic Variations: Sharing with ‘Other Faith’
The way our colleagues think and believe: Dealing with different ideas and beliefs

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”
(1 Peter 3:15)

Whole Group Discussion:
Why do people fight over their religious beliefs?

‘Defender of Faith’

In the 2011 Census:

- **Christianity** was the largest religious group in England and Wales with 33.2 million people identifying with the religion, a **decrease** of 4.1 million from 2001 (from 72% to 59% of the usual resident population).
- Christians had the oldest age profile of the main religious groups, with one in five (22%) aged 65 and over. People were less likely to report being Christian across all age groups in 2011 compared with 2001, particularly those aged under 60.
- **Muslims** made up the second largest religious group with 2.7 million people, an **increase** of 1.2 million (from 3% to 5% of the population).
- Muslims had the youngest age profile of the main religious groups. Nearly half of Muslims (48%) were aged under 25 (1.3 million), an increase of 505,000 since 2001.
- The number of people who reported that they **did not have a religion** reached 14.1 million people, an **increase** of 6.4 million (from 15% to 25% of the population).
- People with no religion had a younger age profile than the population as a whole in 2011. Four in ten people with no religion (39%) were aged under 25. The number of people with no religion has increased across all age groups, particularly for those aged 20 to 24 and 40 to 44.
More locally, for example:

![Change in religious groups 2001 to 2011 for Redbridge](image)

And in Newham:

![Residents by Stated Religion in Newham 2011](image)
Our reaction to these statistics can take three forms

The Defensive Approach

Our first instinct is to feel challenged and to retreat to where we feel ‘safe’. This is only natural and very understandable. We start to argue we are ‘right’, often falling back on ‘what the Bible says’ and refusing often subconsciously to listen to the points being made by ‘the opposition’.

But whilst understandable this tactic rarely works in terms of ‘witness’. Those who have different beliefs will be just as defensive. We might defend “what the Bible says” - but whoever heard of a soldier ‘defending his sword’?

The Offensive Approach

This can take many forms. One of these is to ‘choke’ people with the Bible, perhaps frightening them with verses promising eternal damnation if they don’t believe. Like us, they feel threatened and retreat for security to their own viewpoint or belief, quoting their own religious writings or other ‘authorities’. The writer to the Romans wrote, “Love does no harm to a neighbour.” (Romans 13:10) and using the Bible in this way can do just that. Instead of convincing them of the truth of the Bible we reinforce their own belief.

Another is to criticise other followers of their views. This, for example, is particularly tempting in view of current events in the ‘Muslim’ world. This approach also usually has little effect: we are not dealing with ‘them where they are’. We should be involved in ‘personal’ witness on a ‘personal’ level: in all probability most Muslims for example will disagree with such events as much as we do and will feel embarrassed and defensive rather than open to our witness.

The Conciliatory Approach

Which way does this window open? It depends on your viewpoint.

Witness is ‘sharing our faith’. Sharing involves at least two people and isn’t a one-way process. People with whom we converse will have their own viewpoint - and it may not totally contradict our own. For example, on ethical issues people of all Faiths and none share similar viewpoints - and there’s biblical foundation for this: “When Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.” (Romans 2:14-15). Similarly, in terms of religious belief, people believe in a ‘Supreme Being’, they worship and pray, they fast and go on pilgrimage to Holy Places. Maybe the best approach is to share and highlight the ‘love’ which is Christianity’s vital ingredient.
What examples of the ‘three approaches’ to witness have you experienced? Which approach do you think has worked best - and why?

The Defensive Approach

The Offensive Approach

The Conciliatory Approach
Religion and Relationships at Work:
How do religious beliefs affect people’s behaviour?

What is your experience of other people’s beliefs affecting their behaviour?

How do religious beliefs affect people’s behaviour?

One day in Tesco’s the checkout operative asked me, “Would you like me to keep your meat and dairy separate?” At a Parent’s Evening I was embarrassed as were the parents when I offered to shake the mother’s hand. A new colleague felt he couldn’t attend the end-of-term lunch.

If we are to witness to people of others Faiths and beliefs the last thing we need to do it to offend them - it immediately builds a barrier and puts us at a disadvantage. Just as some Christians might be embarrassed by being asked to join the office sweepstake or by canteen conversations about extra-marital relationships so people of other Faiths and beliefs can be easily upset by our ignorance of their beliefs.

How much do we know about what people believe? How does this affect how they behave? How does this affect how they expect me to behave? How do I best handle religious beliefs in my work relationships? How will beliefs affect relationships - as an employee? - as the boss?

These are important questions if we are to avoid embarrassment and confrontation in order to witness effectively so in the next sessions we’ll investigate in more detail because we need to avoid conflict over such sensitive issues.

Develop and perform an improvised ‘conflict drama’ reflecting religiously motivated behaviour - with an attempt to resolve the conflict.
You could consider ‘The Office Party’, ‘Boys’ or Girls’ Night out’, ‘Romance’, or any other circumstance which springs to mind!

Performance and Comment!
Agnostics and Atheists: Sharing with ‘No Faith’

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” (Richard Dawkins)

In most of Britain many people we work with might be termed or call themselves Agnostic or Atheist. There will also be some we might call ‘cultural Christian’ who tick the ‘Christian’ box in the census but rarely if ever attend church and for whom religious belief is largely irrelevant.

How we witness to them differs - as we shall discover.

Agnostic literally means ‘without knowledge’ from the Greek ‘a’ (without) ‘gnosis’ (knowledge). Generally the Agnostic is someone who may have a passing interest in religious belief but has no definite belief in a Divine Being. This may be because the whole idea is irrelevant to their lifestyle or because they have considered religious belief but in so doing have uncovered objections they cannot overcome.

Atheist literally means ‘without God’ from the Greek ‘a’ (without) theos’ (God). The Atheist is someone who cannot (or will not) believe in a Divine Being for various reasons. One may be intellectual objections, often about a literal approach to the Creation stories (although not all scientists are Atheists), on philosophical grounds concerning the need for the existence of a Supreme Being, or on emotional grounds concerning, for example, personal suffering.

Within the respective ‘terms’ there are wide differences of opinion and degrees of belief, so witness to Agnostics and Atheists needs to be very much on a personal individual level.

In many circumstances witnessing to Agnostics or Atheists depends solely on ‘living the Christian life and waiting for the opportunity’. Discussion with Agnostics often needs to overcome the ‘whatever…’: ‘Why do I need a faith in God - I’m fine as I am?’ Discussion with Atheists will involve intellect which can be difficult if the other person holds a PhD! This is where the CCS Course comes in handy as a beginning.

Unlike those of ‘Faith’, Agnostics and Atheists tend to be very self-sufficient (or think themselves so to be) and discussions about faith happen in terms of crisis.

Or was Thomas Aquinas right when he said, “To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible.”?
In small groups (ideally one-to-one) discuss one of the following ……
(it would be good if one of you were the person making the comment).

1. “In terms of doing things I take a fairly scientific approach to why things happen and how they happen. I don’t know if there’s a god or not. Just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There’s a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning.” (Bill Gates)

2. “I don’t differentiate much, except in degree, between people who believe in religion from those who believe in astrology, magic or the supernatural.” (Andy Rooney)

3. “Even now, there are still days so beautiful, I almost believe in God.” (Ann Hood)

4. “Faith does not offer a strong link between our beliefs and actual states of the world.” (Sam Harris)

5. “I was never much bothered about moral questions like, ‘How could there be a good God when there’s so much evil in the world?’” (Richard Dawkins)

6. “We rely on faith only in the context of claims for which there is no sufficient sensory or logical evidence.” (Sam Harris)

7. “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?” (Epicurus)

8. “Men never commit evil so fully and joyfully as when they do it for religious convictions.” (Blaise Paschal)

9. “We must question the story logic of having an all-knowing all-powerful God, who creates faulty Humans, and then blames them for his own mistakes.” (Gene Roddenberry)

10. “You can't convince a believer of anything; for their belief is not based on evidence, it's based on a deep-seated need to believe.” (att. Carl Sagan)

What issues did you discuss? What points were made?

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Abrahamic Alternatives: Sharing with ‘Linked Faith’

(With thanks to ‘Living with other faiths - a presence and engagement resource’ by Jonathan Evens)

One God - three expressions

There are three monotheistic faiths in the world that claim descent from the Jewish Patriarch Abraham. All of Judaism derives from Abraham (Abram). In Genesis 12:1-3 the Lord made a covenant with Abram: “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

Christianity fully embraced the covenant made with Abraham in the Jewish Bible and added a new covenant in Jesus Christ, who is believed by Christians to be divine.

Muhammad claimed to be the latest and indeed the last, prophet of the covenant God made with Abraham and, in addition, claimed that Abraham (Ibrahim in the Qur'an) was Muslim as indeed were all the Jewish patriarchs and Jesus as well. Muhammad gave the name Allah to God and claimed that Allah was the Muslim God before he was the Jewish and Christian God because, in Islamic belief, the Qu’ran existed since the beginning of the world, i.e. predated the Bible. It’s reasonable to conclude that all three of these monotheistic faiths claim to worship the same all powerful, all knowing creator God with the important distinction that Christianity believes that the divine Jesus Christ is part of a Triune God in the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

There is, then, much that we as Christians share with Jews and Muslims - and this should provide a starting point for any discussion. As Christians with a Jewish Saviour we’re familiar with Jewish belief, at least until Jesus’ time, through our Old Testament study. Here’s a more detailed account of the present situation courtesy of ‘Living with other faiths’.

Judaism

Key beliefs

The Jewish people believe that God made a covenant with Abraham, a promise that he would be their God and they would be his people. The three key elements of Judaism are:

God: God exists; God is one; God is not in bodily form; God is eternal; God knows the deeds of human beings; God punishes the evil and rewards the good; God will send a Messiah; and God will resurrect the dead.

Torah: the Torah (Teaching or Direction) is of divine origin; and the Torah is eternally valid. The Torah contains 613 commandments or mitzvot which are seen as the revelation of God and the basis of the covenantal relationship between God and the people. The tradition is seen as a living one, the interpretation and application of which is collected in the Talmud, which is organised into two parts, the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah contains prayers and laws and the Gemara comments on, and discusses, the Mishnah. The legal material in the Talmud is known as Halakah, whilst the non-legal materials are known as the Aggadah. Community life is centred on the interpretation and practice of the Halakhah.

Israel: Jews must worship God alone; God has communicated through the prophets; and Moses is the greatest of the prophets.
Key practices

**Prayers/Worship:** Three daily prayers are stipulated – Shaharit (morning service), Minhah (afternoon prayers) and Maariv (evening prayers). Communal prayer can take place anywhere and does not need a rabbi to officiate but, in the Orthodox tradition, can only be said when a group of ten or more Jewish males have been convened. Tephilin (phylacteries) are worn for morning prayers. These are two strap-on leather boxes containing parchment sections of the scriptures. Tallitot (traditional prayer shawls) may also be worn. The Shabbat begins about half an hour before sunset on the Friday evening and ends at nightfall on the Saturday night. During Shabbat it is forbidden for Jews to engage in any activities which are considered as work. This general rule has been variously interpreted by different Jewish traditions, e.g. Orthodox Jews may not drive their cars on Shabbat as this entails making a spark in the engine. This is seen as synonymous with starting a fire, which is considered to be work. Progressive Jews do not deem this as work and therefore do drive.

**Fasting:** Yom Kippur is a day of fasting. A 24 hour fast is observed by devoting to prayer and worship and seeking forgiveness.

**Diet:** Jewish food regulations are known as kashrut (fitness). Food is either kosher (permitted) or treif (forbidden). Animals with split hooves which chew the cud, like sheep, cows and deer, are permitted as are birds (excluding birds of prey), if there is a tradition of the bird being kosher. Eggs are kosher if they come from kosher fowl. Eggs with blood spots may not be eaten. Fish with both fins and scales are permitted. All fruit and vegetables are acceptable, as long as they are clear of insects. Food which contains, or has been cooked in, products from non-permitted animals is unacceptable. For meat to be kosher it must have been humanely slaughtered by a shochet (a qualified slaughterer) working under the supervision of the Beth Din (religious court). Kosher foods are marked with a seal (hechsher) to show that they are kosher. Jewish law prohibits the mixing of milk foods with meat foods. Separate sets of kitchen utensils are used for the two types of food and a time lapse is observed between one type of food and the other. Glass (but not Pyrex) can be used for both types of food. Fruit and vegetables are considered parve, neither milk nor meat products and able to be eaten with both. Generally vegetarian food and disposable plates, cups and cutlery are acceptable. However, Orthodox Jews will require separate meals prepared in a kosher kitchen. There are special food requirements during the festival of Pesach/Passover. A local synagogue should be contacted to obtain details.

**Greetings and Etiquette:** There are no fixed forms of greeting. Orthodox Jews would not expect overly physical displays of affection between those of the opposite sex. A very Orthodox Jew will not touch any woman other than his wife and immediate family. Orthodox Jewish men wear a skull cap all the time. All Jewish men wear one in the synagogue. Orthodox women wear a wig or have their hair covered outside the home. Liberal Jews may not be distinguishable by any dress code, but they may choose to wear a Star of David.

**Islam**

It comes as a surprise to many Christians that we share much with Islam. As well as the ‘Old Testament prophets’ Jesus features in the Qur’an - his birth is related, and there is the promise that He will return. There is unfortunately much current misunderstanding about Islam, so here’s a more detailed account of the present situation, again courtesy of ‘Living with other faiths’.

**Key beliefs of Islam**

The literal meaning of the word ‘Islam’ is Peace and Submission. It implies a peaceful way of life based on Submission to the will of God/Allah. The Islamic faith is followed by many Muslims throughout the world, and contains many schools of thought.

The birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him - often abbreviated to PBUH) is Makkah (Mecca) in Saudi Arabia. The Holy Qur’an is the Book which they believe to be the Divine Revelation from Almighty Allah, the final testament and source of guidance for mankind. The Arabic text was preserved during the life of Prophet Muhammad. Qur’an covers all aspects of life; from history of nations, prophets and ideas to teachings on international relations, worship, economics, politics and personal hygiene.
Key practices

Prayer/Worship: There are five basic practices known as ‘5 Pillars’:
1. Declaration of faith (SHAHADAH). This is made by verbally pronouncing the words: ‘I bear witness that there is no god but God (Allah in Arabic) and that Muhammad (Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), was His prophet and messenger’. Belief in oneness of God is the most important principle of Islam.
2. The mandatory five daily prayers, called Namaz/Salah. Adult Muslims are expected to pray five times each day; before sunrise, at noon, midway between noon and sunset, at sunset and at night. These prayers are obligatory and therefore can be offered anywhere. They are also offered in congregations in all the mosques at set times. Muslims face KABAH (a cubical building in Makkah built by Prophet Abraham). To ensure the correct direction, Qibla direction finders are available. It is important to offer the facilities for prayer as they may feel that it is too much trouble and not ask. Friday afternoon prayer is the weekly congregational prayer.
3. Fasting during Ramadan (one month of abstaining from food and drink from just before dawn to sunset). Ramadan occurs 11 days earlier each year, and is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. Seriously ill, pregnant or breast feeding mothers, menstruating women, people on a journey and elderly people in poor health are exempt from fasting.
5. The giving of alms (ZAKAT).
6. Pilgrimage to Mecca once in life if it is affordable (HAJJ).

Diet: Alcohol, pork and meat of animals not killed in the ritual way are forbidden for Muslims. Animal products such as fat, gelatine and rennet of such animals are also not allowed. Halal (allowed) meat is obtained by slaughtering the animal with the pronouncement of God’s name. All vegetarian food is therefore allowed and is the safest and simplest option. Whilst eggs and fish can be eaten, they should not be prepared in an area where pork or other non-Halal meat has been prepared.

Greetings and Etiquette: When two Muslims greet each other they might say “Assalamu Alaikum” (peace be upon you). Modesty discourages physical forms of greeting (kissing, hugging etc), especially between members of the opposite sex. In some Islamic countries, such as Morocco, young men may have close friendships and hold hands in public. You should offer to remove their head, known as Hijab, and wear loose dress. In some traditions women cover their faces too. Many Muslim men grow beards as a religious requirement and some devout ones also keep their heads covered as part of dressing. However it is an individual choice, although they are often worn during prayer. Since Muslims represent many Eastern and African cultures, a lot of cultural clothing is visible.

With both religions - as with Christianity - there are many ‘forms’ we might call ‘denominations’ which makes it impossible to say, ‘Jews believe’ or ‘Muslims do’.

In Judaism there are three main streams: Orthodox, Reformed, and Progressive. These groups hold different opinions on many things. Orthodox Jews would not use their cars on Shabbat, or open their fridges unless the light were disabled because this would be ‘work’: Progressive Jews would see no problem with either action, and would use instruments in Sabbath worship which again Orthodox Jews would not.

There are many variants of Islam with the best known being Sunni and Shia who broke from each other when Muhammad died in the year 632, leading to a dispute over succession to Muhammad as a caliph of the Islamic community spread across various parts of the world. Today, there are differences in religious practice, traditions, and customs, often related to interpretation of Shari’a Law. Although all Muslim groups consider the Quran to be divine, Sunni and Shia have different opinions on ‘Hadith’ - the ‘sayings of Muhammad. As Islam has become more ‘Westernised’ other differences in practice - for example interpretation of ‘modesty’ - have also occurred.

A final important point is a difference in approach to people who are not part of their Faith. It is possible although not easy for someone to ‘become a Jew’; Islam on the other hand is very much a proselytising Faith.
Note - or perhaps highlight in the text - the similarities and the differences between Christianity and Judaism and Christianity and Islam.

Christianity and Judaism - similarities

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Christianity and Judaism - differences

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Christianity and Islam - similarities

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Christianity and Islam - differences

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You are in conversation with a Jewish or a Muslim colleague who says, "God cannot be limited so Jesus could not have been God in human form." How might you respond?
Hinduism is the oldest of today’s major religions, having its roots in India around 2500 BC. Siddharta Guatama (the Buddha or ‘Enlightened One) was a Hindu who developed his strand of belief around 500 BC. Sikhism on the other hand is the youngest, founded by Guru Nanak around 1500 AD and established by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. Sikhism firmly believes in one God; contrary to what you might think Hinduism also believes in one Supreme Spirit; some Buddhists share this Hindu belief but a belief in God is not an essential part of other Buddhist belief. All believe in reincarnation.

**Hinduism** is the name given to the religion that originated in India. The word Hindu came about as a mispronunciation of the name of an ancient river in India called ‘Sindhu’.

**Key beliefs:**
Hinduism is often misunderstood to be a polytheist religion (i.e. believing in many almighty Gods and Goddesses). Hinduism is in fact a ‘pluralistic religion’ that suggests that God can be thought of and approached in a variety of ways. This teaching is central to Hinduism. It emphasises that, as we are all different, the way we will think of and approach the ultimate reality (God) will necessarily be different.

**Dharma:** The name given to religious pursuits. It can mean ‘righteous living’; sometimes it is compared to the ‘cohesive force that holds society and civilisation together’. The deeper meaning of the word Dharma is to ‘Search for the innermost nature of everything - external and internal’.

**Concept of God:** Hinduism being a pluralistic religion offers a vast variety of concepts of God. Broadly these can be divided into three categories: God with form and quality; God without form; and God beyond the form and the formless. Hinduism does not say that any one approach is better than another is. The choice depends on the individual.

**‘The Sanctity of life’:** This principle of non-violence, called Ahimsa, is central in Hindu teachings. It teaches respect for living things extending into the animal and plant kingdoms. This teaching comes naturally from the philosophy of Hinduism.

**Hinduism claims many founders.** They are called ‘Rishis’, which literally means one who has seen God. Hinduism claims that the message of spirituality is refreshed in all times and in all countries again and again by seers called ‘Rishis.’ Hinduism suggests that as spirituality is an empirical subject, the proponents of spirituality cannot be restricted to ancient times. It puts forward the idea that just as prophets of the past experienced God and offered spiritual teachings to mankind, prophets continue to be born in all ages and in all nations. They continue to refresh the message of spirituality. Many Hindu families will show affinity to some such contemporary figure.
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There is a vast range of scriptures. Some, like the Vedas from which we gain the generic term ‘Vedic’, relate the spiritual experiences of the Rishis and are considered to have a higher authority. Some, like the mythological stories, are called the Puranas and are considered to be secondary. The Bhagavad Gita is considered by most Hindus to be the most authoritative scripture in their religion. This text is a spiritual dialogue given by Krishna and explains the philosophy of Hinduism and how it can be made practical and adopted in daily life.

**Key practices**

**Prayer/Worship:** Hinduism teaches that it is the heartfelt love for God that counts more than any strict formal codes that may be adopted in any ritualistic practice. Hence the rules of worship or prayers can vary a great deal from family to family. The prayer that all Hindus consider to be central is called the ‘Gayatri’. The Gayatri translates as: “Let us meditate on the glorious effulgence of that supreme being who has created the universe; may she enlighten our hearts and direct our understanding.” Yoga is also a form of worship. The word yoga is often associated with postures and physical exercises. However it has a deeper meaning. It means ‘Pathway of communing with God through meditation’. Yoga practised as ‘a pause’ before starting any activity is both interesting and can be a good tool to introduce the idea of self-discipline.

**Fasting:** Fasting for Hindus is like a vow to avoid certain foods at certain times. These times could be particular days of the week, of the lunar month, and of the year. Hindus fast (particularly women) to show their devotion to a particular deity and for the well being of themselves and their family.

**Diet:** Many Hindus who come from Gujarat or from Tamil-Nadu may be vegetarian. This means that they do not eat meat, fish or eggs. However cakes or biscuits containing eggs are considered acceptable by most of them. Nowadays quite a few Hindu families residing in the UK (including some families from Gujarat and Tamil Nadu) have adopted meat-eating habits. The only meat they will not consume is beef as the cow is considered to be a sacred animal.

**Greetings and Etiquette:** “Namaste” is the common Hindu greeting. Hindus traditionally do not shake hands when greeting but do not object to doing so. Hindu men cover themselves from waist to knee. Most wear western dress for work, but some wear traditional dress. It is not acceptable for a Hindu woman or girl to have uncovered legs. Women wear a Sari, Shalwar-Kamees (loose fitting trousers and long top). Some married women wear a Bindi (red spot) on their forehead, or have a red streak in their hair parting as a sign of being married. There are strong family ties, inviting whole families for dinner and standing together during good and bad times. When washing themselves Hindus prefer to use running water.

**Buddhism** is the way of life for the people who follow the teachings of Buddha. He is worshipped not as a God, but as the Founder of a Way of Life.

**Key beliefs:**

Buddha is believed to have found the middle way between luxuries and asceticism, called the Eightfold Path to enlightenment, thus, the faith symbol of an eight-spoked wheel. The eightfold path comprises of:

- Right Understanding;
- Right Aspiration;
- Right Speech;
- Right Action;
- Right Livelihood;
- Right Effort;
- Right Mindfulness; and
- Right Concentration.
The object of following the Eightfold Path is to depart from worldly thinking, which is unwholesome (akṣula) and to travel the spiritual road to wholesome thinking and action (kusala). When this happens, craving will cease and the person achieves freedom from the force (karma) that causes rebirth (nirvana). Rebirth happens because craving and desire fuels us to be reborn again and again.

There are also three principles known as the three jewels:
- The Buddha - the historical Buddha and the spiritual ideal of enlightenment;
- The Dharma - the teachings and practices which lead to human enlightenment;
- The Sangha - the spiritual community of the people who are practising the Dharma.

Buddhists believe in reincarnation, and that their actions in this life will affect the quality of the next, they therefore accept all responsibilities for their actions. There is no 'God' to be worshipped, but the act of worship is a way of acknowledging the human ideal.

Key practices
Prayer/Worship: Buddhists will worship wherever they can, although they do meet in temples called Viharas, which is often a room in a large house. The room has only a carpet and cushions, and is otherwise bare. Buddhists can worship anywhere, but it is preferable to provide peace and quiet for meditation and chanting. Private family meditations are commonly undertaken on daily basis.

Fasting: On days of fasting, Buddhists do not eat before 12 noon. Local Buddhists are unlikely to practise fasting on a regular basis. In the west, fasting is practised mostly by monks and nuns.

Diet: Many Buddhists tend to be vegetarians due to the emphasis on avoiding intentional killing of a living being. There are different practices with regard to the eating of meat. For example, whilst many Tibetan Buddhists eat meat, Chinese Zen is strictly vegetarian and in Japanese Zen and Theravada Buddhism, monks and nuns are allowed to eat meat if to the best of their knowledge animal has not been specifically killed for them. Meat is never served in monasteries. In Chinese forms of Buddhism garlic and onions are also avoided as they are thought to create heat in the body, thus making meditation more difficult.

Greetings and Etiquette: In Buddhist countries the normal form of greeting is to place the hands together in a prayerful manner and bow. Buddhists in Western countries normally adopt the usual styles of greeting found there, like shaking hands. There are no religious requirements for particular forms of everyday dress for lay Buddhists but general etiquette is to dress discretely, modestly and unobtrusively.

Sikhism
Sikhism originated in the State of Punjab in India some 500 years ago, founded by Guru Nanak.

Key beliefs
Sikhs believe in one God, and in many cycles or rebirth. They respect equality of all people, regardless of caste, colour, creed or sex.

The one God is known by many names including Ram, Mohan, Gobind, Hari, and others. But two names used in worship are Satnam (the recitation of God's name) and Waheguru (Wonderful Lord).

A Sikh Temple is called a Gurdwara, a place for speaking about God and for public worship. It is a place for meditation, divine knowledge, bliss and tranquillity. Its focal point is the HOLY GRANTH SAHIB (the Sikh Holy Book), wrapped in a costly cloth, and placed on a platform under a canopy. Prayers are read five times each day.

Sikhs believe that an individual should make every effort to overcome anger, greed, pride and passion, and should work hard to earn a decent living.

Sikhs recognise three levels of service: physical service, which is being of assistance to those who require help; mental service, which involves enlightening others about God and righteousness; material service, in the form of financial contributions to noble causes. Sikhs are very tolerant of the view of others, seeing all as friends.
Key practices

Prayer/Worship: Prayers are usually read five times each day. At the Gurdwara, a special sweet (Karah Parshad) is blessed and shared. It is important that if any is brought in for a patient, he/she should be allowed to eat it regardless of any special diet. As an act of faith, baptised Sikhs wear the five K’s:

- **Kesh**: The practice of keeping the hair uncut which is the distinctive sign of Sikh identity. Men tie up their long hair and keep it under a turban. Some women may also choose to wear a turban. Different styles and colours do not have any significance except personal choice. Kesh is treated by Sikhs with utmost respect as it is a symbol of identity and commitment.
- **Kangha**: A small comb, which is worn in the hair at all times. Though it is used to keep the hair organised and clean, it symbolises orderliness.
- **Kara**: This is a steel bracelet or ring, worn on the right wrist. Kara is seen as a reminder of the universality of God and a symbol of allegiance to the brotherhood and the Guru.
- **Kaccha**: A special type of underwear garment (male shorts made from cotton) which is knee length. It is both a symbol of readiness to be a combatant to protect the weak and oppressed as well as of modesty and moral restraint.
- **Kirpan**: A short sword or dagger which symbolises the readiness to defend oneself and protect the weak and oppressed.

Fasting: There are no universal fasting requirements. However, some Sikh women may choose to abstain from salt on the day of the full moon for cultural reasons.

Diet: Many Sikhs tend to be vegetarian, and many will not eat fish or eggs, or any products made with these. Any non-vegetarian Sikhs will not eat beef and some will not eat pork. They do not eat Halal meat. It is important to tell people what meat is contained in the various dishes e.g. shepherd’s pie. Most Sikhs do not smoke or drink alcohol. Only vegetarian food is served in the gurdwaras.

Greetings and Etiquette: When encountering a group of Sikhs it would be normal to begin by greeting the eldest first. Sikhs greet each other by putting their hands together and bowing, in respect for the divine in the other person. There is no objection to shaking hands. Some Sikhs may hug people of their own gender. Sikh families have strong traditions about modesty. Some women veil their faces in the presence of men who are older than their husbands, but this is a cultural variation and not a Sikh requirement. The home is considered holy and you should offer to remove your shoes.

Note - or perhaps highlight in the text - the similarities and the differences between Christianity and Hinduism, Christianity and Buddhism, and Christianity and Sikhism.

**Christianity and Hinduism - similarities**

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**Christianity and Hinduism - differences**

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Christianity and Buddhism - similarities

Christianity and Buddhism - differences

Christianity and Sikhism - similarities

Christianity and Sikhism - differences
You are in conversation with a Hindu, Buddhist or Sikh colleague who says, “I don’t need Jesus to forgive me. I am doing my best to come back as a better person and at some stage I will reach what you call heaven.” How might you respond?