

Overview

Discipleship is personal but not individualistic. At our baptism we become part of the Church. We are commissioned to shine as lights in the world to the glory of God, and our journey of discipleship begins. How do we understand what it means to belong to and be part of the Church, and to keep focussed on the hope that we have in Jesus Christ in everyday situations? This session explores what we mean by 'church' and how we live as the church in the world.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and questions

Facilitator

Welcome everyone to the session. Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members. Offer a quick overview of this session, which is the final session in a series of 5.

Facilitator

Introduce the activity. Give each member of the group 4 or 5 post-it notes or slips of paper. Ask them to write one response to the question on each.

Activity

What does 'The Church' mean to you?

Write your responses on individual post it notes or slips of paper

Facilitator

Ask group members to share a response in turn, placing their piece of paper in the centre. Continue to go round the group until all responses have been shared. These will be used later, once the next perspective has been introduced.

Facilitator

Introduce the perspective 'Gathered and Dispersed Church'.

Perspective

Gathered and Dispersed Church

The church is most generally recognised in its Gathered Form. Here the people of God come together for worship, learning and fellowship. They come together at specific times and in specific places, in large or small groups. As a Gathered Church, people readily identify themselves as part of a community of faith. In this context people talk about 'going' to church.



The church also exists in its Dispersed form. Here, the people of God are engaged in daily living, that is 'being' church in the world.

They may or may not be consciously alongside other Christians but are working out what their faith means in the places where they find themselves. Helpful images for the church in its Dispersed form are gathered around light, salt or yeast (all from parables of Jesus): invisible, but having a profound effect on the flavour and life of the world.



Facilitator

Ask the group to sort their responses from the first activity ('What does 'The Church' mean to you?') into those which relate the church in its gathered form, those which relate to the church in its dispersed form, or somewhere in between. You may need to probe what people's intention was when they wrote a certain response (e.g. 'Sharing the love of God', 'The Body of Christ') by asking 'Do you see this as being more expressed in the gathered form or dispersed form, or equally in both?')

Facilitator

Introduce the perspective from Rick Brewer, and ask the group to think about examples of how these ideas might apply in their own situation

Perspective

Living as the Dispersed Church

"A report was requested, framed by several "church gathered" questions. I decided to answer them using a two column chart. One column is titled "Church Gathered" while the other is "Church Dispersed." I then used the two church forms as lens to focus the questions. For example, the first question asks "since the last report, how has the spirit/life of the congregation changed?" I answered the question under the "Gathered" side which produced stock answers with churchy language. When I moved the question to the "Church Dispersed," I first noticed that I needed to radically reinterpret the data. To illustrate, under the Gathered column I noted that we had three leaders facing significant medical diagnostic tests. That prompted comments about pastoral concerns and support.

When I took that data and view it through the Dispersed lens, I awakened to the fact that three committed Christians were frequenting medical facilities. While I do not yet have ways of knowing much about their experiences, the Dispersed Lens brought better questions into focus: "how does our liturgy help people "be" the church as a patient undergoing tests? How to they encounter Christ in such circumstance? What would help them be a point of God's presence, even in their illnesses? Perhaps other questions will arise.

For now, I realized that merely using the Church Dispersed frame brought a fresh standpoint from which to view the situation."

Rick Brewer

Facilitator

Ask the group to think about how focusing on the dispersed life of the church could help re-energise the gathered life of the church.

Facilitator

Introduce the discussion. Encourage the group to think about the images of salt, light and yeast and how they have seen these images in their own discipleship.

Question Can you think of a story from your own discipleship that would illustrate salt, light or yeast?

Facilitator Encourage the group to tell their stories about ways in which they have found these images useful.

Facilitator Introduce the perspective 'Whose Mission?' Invite the group to comment on how they feel about this statement and what its implications are for how we think about the church.

Perspective **Whose Mission?**

God's church falters from exhaustion because Christians erroneously think that God has given them a mission to perform in the world. Rather, the God of mission has given his church to the world. It is not the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a church in the world.

*Beyond Duty: A Passion for Christ, a Heart for Mission by Tim Dearborn
(Marc Publishing, 1998)*

Discussion **What would be different for the church if we focussed on God's mission?**

Facilitator Draw out any general points from the discussion. Introduce the 5 Marks of Mission. Many people will be familiar with these. For more detailed reading about the 5 Marks of Mission, please see

Perspective **5 Marks of Mission**

The Anglican Church has identified 5 'Marks' of mission, which should characterise the life every 'church', local, national, denominational and global.

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth

*These Five Marks of Mission were first set out in Bonds of Affection
1984 ACC-6 p49 and later in Mission in a Broken World - 1990 ACC-8 p101*

Facilitator Where is the source of energy in the church. How do we best tap into the energy of the dispersed church. How might it be if our gathering was more obviously drawing on the energy for life that arose from our encounter with God in the daily work and life.

Question **How does our experience of working with God through these 5 Marks of Mission, bring energy and hope back into the gathered church?**

Facilitator

Ask the group to read through the perspective ‘The Ground of our Hope’ and see how this compares with the previous discussion. The group may disagree with the style here, but the principal focus is on the verse from 1 Peter at the end of the passage.

Perspective

The Ground of our Hope

You must realise that perhaps the most important moment in the worship service is the moment in which you leave the church (*building*). Then it is decided whether you have understood why you spent that hour behind those walls. Do you realise that even when you were outside the walls of the church you never the less do not cease to be a congregation. Your Christian service begins quite modestly with listening to the questions of others, talking them over and holding your peace. They all have questions, the neighbour and the colleague at work, the head of a firm and the employee, the merchant, the public official, the farmer, the union official and the politician, the Marxist and the atheist. Whether or not they address their questions to us depends on whether we take them seriously with their problems, or whether we merely push our own questions and answers in front of us like a bulldozer that levels everything to ‘Christian dimensions’. We should allow their questions to confront us, and listen attentively to them. Our answers must have a solid foundation and must never be proposed on the basis of presumption or superficial views. The New Testament admonishes us ;

“Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you concerning the ground of the hope that is in you” (1Peter 3:15)

From ‘The Christian Witness in an Industrial Society’ by Horst Symanowski (Collins, 1964)

Facilitator

Introduce the question. Use this question as a way to encourage group members to draw together some of their learning over the 5 session of this course. Remind them of some of the major learning points from the previous 4 sessions. Which of the 4 previous sessions might form the ‘ground of your hope’ from this point on? How does it affirm a ground of hope for you?

Question

Based on the ground of hope quotation, what have the previous 4 sessions given you as a ground of hope?

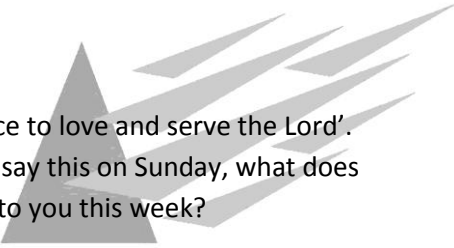
Facilitator

Introduce the final discussion to think about ways in which the church in its dispersed form could be supported and encouraged by the church in its gathered form (e.g. how we pray for each other, the groups that we belong to, opportunities to talk about our experiences etc.)

Discussion

As we return to Sunday, how best could we encourage and support each other in the challenges of living our daily lives as disciples of Christ?

During the week you might like to reflect on:



'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord'.
When you say this on Sunday, what does
this mean to you this week?

Facilitator *Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session.*

Ponder **What did you learn from this session and what difference might it make to your discipleship?**

Closing Prayer

Lord,
Whatever we build,
Give us a glimpse of glory.
Whatever we make,
Give us a sense of wonder.
Wherever we travel,
Give us a sense of reverence.
Whoever we meet,
Give us a sense of awe.
Whatever we do,
Give us a sense of achievement.
Whatever our situation,
Give us knowledge of you.
Help us to see that everything is in your care
And that you allow us to share in your glory

From 'Powerlines: Celtic Prayers About Work' by David Adam (Triangle, 1992)

SESSION OUTLINE

Think about refreshments – beginning, middle or end? We would work on the assumption that refreshments will take around 15 mins in addition to the following time framework.

The suggested timings below are based on a group of between 6 and 8 people – timings should therefore be adjusted if there are more or less in the group.

The timings given for discussion are flexible and can be reduced / extended as time allows. It is always better to ensure that there is adequate time at the end for final reflections and planning the next session, even if this means cutting discussion short.

Time for each element of the session is given, in addition to a ‘counter’ for the time taken up to that point, ending at 1 hour 30 mins.

5-10 mins (10 min)	Introductions – ensure all group members know each other Distribute worksheets to all group members Introduce the topic using the topic overview
15 mins (25 mins)	Question – What does the church mean to you Perspective – Gathered and Dispersed Sorting responses
5 mins (30 mins)	Discussion of images of the church in dispersed form (salt, light, yeast)
10 mins (40 mins)	Discussion based on the perspective ‘Whose Mission?’ - the relationship between God, the church and the world
15 mins (55 mins)	Discussion based on the perspective ‘The 5 Marks of Mission’ – different stories
10 mins (1 hour 5 mins)	Question based on the perspective ‘The Ground of our Hope’ - As we follow Jesus on Monday, what would you say the ‘ground of your hope’ is?
10 mins (1 hour 15 mins)	Discussion : As we return to Sunday....
5 mins (1 hour 20 min)	Introduce reflection for the week, and final ponder
5 mins (1 hour 25 min)	Practicalities for next session (venue, who will lead etc.)
5 mins (1 hour 30 min)	Closing Worship