

LENT NOTES 2012 FROM THE LEPROSY MISSION

Transformation through community

All quotations from NIV translation unless specified

Preparation

You'll need a large sheet of paper (flipchart size) and a thick felt pen to list the different communities people belong to.

Print off the Community Quotes at the end of this study and cut up the sheet to separate the quotes (you'll need to give these out during the study).

Look at the Prayer Options at the end of the study and decide which one you want to do.

If Option 1, you need to think about where you are going to walk. If Option 2, you'll need a jigsaw with a few more pieces than there are members in your group (you might like to make your own jigsaw).

Read and think about Acts 2:42-47 and Mark 2:23-27

Introduction

Jesus transforms. He has great plans for the transformation of our lives, and those of the people we come into contact with throughout our communities. We are called to be in the world, in amongst our neighbours, colleagues, friends, family and strangers, but how can we offer ourselves within these communities, as instruments of transformation for Jesus to use?

What is a community?

Activity We all belong to different communities. List as many as you can, covering all aspects of life (neighbourhood, sports, families, internet, hobbies, jobs, politics etc).

- From this list and your own experience, how would you define a community? What things are essential to make a community and what aspects are optional?
- What do you need to do, if anything, in order to be part of a community?

Our ideas about what makes a community can be quite subjective, with different definitions and ideas. Perhaps it might be helpful to look at what other people have said about community and what it means to them.

Activity Distribute the community quotes around the room or the group. Give people a chance to read them and then come back together.

- Which quotes did you like / agree with?
- Which quotes did you dislike / disagree with?
- How have these quotes changed your ideas about what a community is and what membership of it entails?

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Bible Communities

For many of us our church can be a place of community, somewhere that we take part in different activities together, where we share acts with other people, where we have a common identity and perhaps a common purpose. By looking at the book of Acts we can see how church community began after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

The fellowship of the first believers occurs after Pentecost, which was highlighted by the filling of the Holy Spirit and a powerful sermon from Peter. This showed the beginning of the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the church. Then the church grew quickly through Peter and John's bold witness, and through the love of the believers.

Activity Read Acts 2:42-47

- Which aspects of church have we kept and which have we lost from this original church community?
- Verse 47 talks of the community praising God. In what ways does a Christian community differ from a secular one?
- Verse 47 goes on to say that the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. What is the link between the nationwide decline in numbers of church attendance and the status of 'community' in the country and in the church?

These early Christians recognised other believers as brothers and sisters in the family of God, sharing all that they had to enable all to benefit from God's gifts. It can be tempting, particularly if we have material wealth, to cut ourselves off from one another, taking care of our own interests and providing for and enjoying our own little piece of the world. But we must remember that we are called to live in community with one another.

Church Communities and Their Witness

Activity Read Mark 2: 23-27

The Pharisees had become hung up on their interpretation of the rules and regulations of the Sabbath and the Jewish law, but Jesus had a different perspective.

- What was Jesus trying to get across to the Pharisees when they challenged his behaviour on breaking the Sabbath rules?
- Are there any rules or regulations within a church community which may limit participation (dress code, seating plan, service time etc)? In what ways does this happen in your church?
- A friend of mine was told that he could not organise a Messy Church service in the sanctuary area in case it got dirty. What would have been your response?
- If Jesus came to highlight the importance of 'relationship' how does the church community, and we as individuals, strike the balance between rules and relationship?

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Jesus did not say that the laws and traditions should be ignored, or that we can do what we want with no thought of the consequences. Instead he spoke of love and acceptance and he built relationships of trust and encouragement. When he challenged behaviour it was done through this message of love and those who came into contact with him were transformed because of it.

Look again at the quotes about community. A number of them talk of action. If we as churches are interested in the transformation of our communities – be it physical, emotional or spiritual, then we have to be prepared to get our hands dirty and get stuck in.

We are the instruments for the transforming power that God wants to use through us. However, as Jesus reminds us, it all starts with relationship. If we become too fixed on the rules that we as Christians live by then we can alienate and leave people feeling judged and unloved. This is not to say that the laws and traditions should be ignored, but that we must communicate a message of love and acceptance. When we do so then we will see the transformational power of Jesus at work in our communities. And we may be surprised at who is transformed!

- What can you do personally, either on your own or as part of the wider church mission, to enable transformation in one of the communities that you belong to (see the list you made at the beginning of the session)?

To close your time together use one of the prayer options below:

PRAYER OPTIONS

Option 1: Local Community

If it's appropriate, go on a walk together in the local community and pray for what you see – schools, parks, libraries, shops, bus stops, work places, cafes, pubs, homes, places of fun and safety, places of neglect and fear. Pray for the people you see and meet, the strangers and those known to you. Pray for the community groups and all the different types of 'community' in the local area.

If it's not appropriate then perhaps pray using a map of the local area and pray through the map street by street.

Option 2: Jigsaw

You will need a jigsaw with about the same number of pieces as the group, plus a few spares (you might like to make your own jigsaw by using a picture of something pertinent to the group or area in which you live).

Put the jigsaw pieces in a basket and pass them around the group, along with a pen for everyone. When everyone has a piece lead the group through this meditation, pausing for as long as you think appropriate.

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'You each have a jigsaw piece. Look at the shape.

We have all been given special gifts and talents that we can use to help others, a bit like the lugs on your jigsaw piece.

Ask God about the talents you have. Thank him for them.'

(Pause)

'You each have a jigsaw piece. Look at the image on it.

Now think about where the piece fits into the bigger picture.

Ask God to show you the best ways to use those talents.'

(Pause)

'You each have a jigsaw piece and so does everyone else.

Now think about the other pieces of the jigsaw and the people who have interacted with you and helped you.

Thank God for their gifts and pray for them for a while.'

(Pause)

Now write your name on your jigsaw piece and come and place it down in the designated place.

We can see that there are pieces missing from the jigsaw. Let us pray for the people who are missing today because they are ill

(Pause)

People who are too busy or stressed to come (pause), people who have left or have lost their faith

(Pause)

and the people we know who we would love to come and join us but for one reason or another aren't ready to yet

(Pause)

If you wish to, come and write the name of one or several of these people on a jigsaw piece and add it to the picture.

'Lord Jesus, come and touch these people wherever they may be.'

Amen.

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COMMUNITY QUOTES

The community stagnates without the impulse of the individual. The impulse dies away without the sympathy of the community. *William James*

In every community, there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart, there is the power to do it. *Marianne Williamson*

Keep in mind that our community is not composed of those who are already saints, but of those who are trying to become saints. Therefore let us be extremely patient with each other's faults and failures. *Mother Teresa*

A world community can exist only with world communication, which means something more than extensive short-wave facilities scattered about the globe. It means common understanding, a common tradition, common ideas, and common ideals. *Robert M. Hutchins*

If you were all alone in the universe with no one to talk to, no one with which to share the beauty of the stars, to laugh with, to touch, what would be your purpose in life? It is another life, it is love, which gives your life meaning. This is harmony. We must discover the joy of each other, the joy of challenge, the joy of growth. *Mitsugi Saotome*

We don't accomplish anything in this world alone ... and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something. *Sandra Day O'Connor*

The challenge of social justice is to evoke a sense of community that we need to make our nation a better place, just as we make it a safer place. *Marian Wright Edelman*

Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing. *Rollo May*

Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. *Margaret Mead*

A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm. *Henrik Ibsen*

A community needs a soul if it is to become a true home for human beings. You, the people must give it this soul. *Pope John Paul II*

The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others. *Gandhi*

We will surely get to our destination if we join hands. *Aung San Suu Kyi*