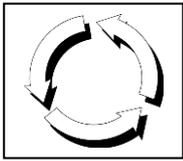


## JOURNEY TO FAITH: Evangelism as Heartbeat not Hiccough in the local rural church

### PARTICIPANT'S RESOURCE MANUAL

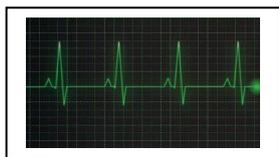
#### Introduction



Cycles, season and rhythms form patterns that are familiar in rural areas. However when it comes to considering sharing our faith this is often viewed as something needing an expert team to come in 'who do this sort of thing.' We may fail to reflect that if we are to contract a 'harvesting team' there is a job of work to be done beforehand, ground to be cleared, prepared and planted. In this enterprise there is a task for everyone.

Good as can sometimes be to have a 'team' or even an individual 'evangelist' join you for a season, for example a couple of days, a weekend or perhaps even a week, it can appear that evangelism, i.e. the sharing of faith with friends and neighbours, is some sort of bolt-on extra. When this is viewed as an 'extra' activity, all too often those amongst the church community who are so-minded get all excited and busy during the 'mission/outreach', whilst others try and keep their heads down and look forward to when it is all over and life can resume back to 'normal.'

Evangelism, the sharing of our faith through words and actions, is the high calling of the Church for as we read in Romans 10:1 *'How, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one in whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?'*



Evangelism as a heartbeat endeavours to weave the sharing of our faith into the very fabric and life of the church, to become part of its very DNA, to be found in every warp and weft. It seeks to build up an expectancy that we will find amongst the community of faith those who are following a path of exploration leading to confessed faith (Romans 10:10) and then living out their life as a disciple of Christ in the fellowship of the Church: *"...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."* Ephesians 4:13

*Recommended reading:* Grove Evangelism Series Ev75 (2006)  
*'Conversion Today'* by Gavin Wakefield

#### Initial Reflection



This two-session course is called *"Journey to Faith"*.

What does the image of 'journey' imply for you?

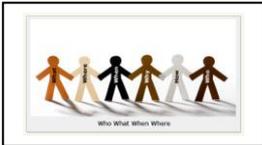
Why do you think the course might be described as a journey?

SESSION1:  
WE'RE ALL PART OF THE STORY

**Aim**

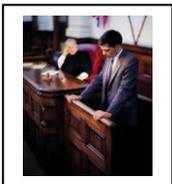
- To help you gain confidence in your faith as an individual and as part of a local church community
- To discover ways in which you can articulate your faith and invite others onto the Christian pilgrim path.

**Six Serving Men**



Rudyard Kipling's well-known poem "Six Serving Men" follows the story 'Elephant's Child' in his 'Just So Stories'. It can be found at in the Journey to Faith resources section.

These six serving men are: *What, Why, When, How, Where and Who*. All have a real value when placed against the life and the activities of the local church. In particular when it comes to evangelism the prior question of 'Why' is very pertinent. Why would we want someone to confess faith and become a disciple of Jesus? Reflecting on the 'Why' question will then help in the 'How', 'Where', 'When', 'What' and 'Who'.



The second important question is 'Who' and whilst not everyone is called to be an evangelist, all are called to evangelize, to bear witness and to share their faith in both words and deeds. Indeed once we are known as people of faith - and this will very often be very evident in a rural community (i.e. known as someone who at least goes to Church regularly) - then following on from that, our lives will be a witness ... whether we like it or not. As people watch and observe our lives, that 'witness' could be for both good or ill, i.e.

we can be as much a bad witness as we can a good one. Hopefully our actions and our lives will back up what we confess as disciples of Jesus to such a degree that interest might be engendered. Then we need to be prepared should we be asked about the hope that we have: *"But always in your heart set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."* 1 Peter 3:15

The "Six Serving Men" can also be used as a tool to help in local church discussions about evangelism, witness and sharing of faith. The poem and notes to help with such small groups discussions are included in the full module pack.

*Recommending reading: Grove Evangelism Series Ev 96 (2012)*

*'Evangelisting: Recovering the Art of Listening in Evangelism'* by Tim Sumpter

### Question to ponder

Jesus talks of his followers being both salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16).

- Salt, amongst other things, only does good when it is thoroughly dispersed into its surroundings. How might this be true for us?
- Light is something that is both noticeable and shows people both path and obstacles. How might this be true for us?

### Let me tell you a story



Most people if asked to recall a sermon probably would only be able to recall at best a few key points from any sermon they have heard. However if the preacher used a story to illustrate a point then that story has a way of embedding itself in the memory and most probably would be remembered long afterwards. Being a good Jew Jesus knew well the power of story, not only to illustrate and teach about the kingdom of God but also the story of Israel. Retelling this story was an integral part of being Jewish. Not only did they regularly rehearse their story through the great festival like

Passover, they thought of themselves as very much part of that story. That story continues to this day, and the good news is that the Gentiles have been invited in to share the story of God and be part of that story which will one day culminate in the conjoining of heaven and earth. This has been made possible through Jesus. See Ephesians 2:11ff.

*“But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.” (verse 13)*

Therefore we have a story to tell, our own story of our journey to faith, the local church story with its own unique history, plus the story of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. All of this feeds into the Big Story of God’s redemption of the cosmos, when at last there will be no need to pray ‘The Lord’s Prayer’ because it will have become a reality!

### The Bible as Story

In the back pages of *The Message* (by Eugene H Peterson) there is an excellent outline of this Big Story entitled ‘*The Story of the Bible in Five Acts*’.

Also recommended: [The Book of God: The Bible as a Novel](#) The Bible as a Single, Powerful Story. Here is the entire story of the Bible, narrated by master storyteller Walter Wangerin Jr.

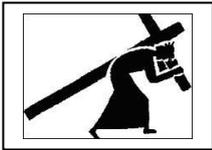
### Our personal story (Sometimes referred to as our testimony)



Our own journey to confessed faith is unique and we may have moved from little or no knowledge or faith in God, to embracing and confessing faith (Romans 10:10) in a short time frame and through dramatic circumstances. Others’ journeys will have been much longer, a deepening awareness and then eventually moving onto to an owned faith.

We need to think through this journey carefully because we will encounter people who are at each and every stage of the journey to faith. We seek to meet them exactly where they are and then to help them take the next step which might only be a small move. For example if someone has no previous experience of Church attendance it may not be the best thing to invite them along to a Sunday morning Eucharist. It may be right, but it needs careful thinking through and maybe other steps put in place first to help them make that journey.

## The Jesus Story



It is of vital importance that Jesus is put into his historical Jewish context; his story only makes sense when set against the hopes and aspirations of the Jewish nation over thousands of years. It is also valuable to gain an understanding of Jesus' world, i.e. the larger political map across the world but especially around 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine. Jesus is not plan B because plan A failed, Jesus is part of the one overarching plan by which God will bring together both earth and heaven.

## The Church Story



The important thing to remember is every Church was at one time a 'church plant' – someone at sometime felt moved by God to raise up a dedicated building in which the people of faith could meet and worship God. So our own churches have a story to tell, of faith and faithfulness. (Though for some the building itself becomes more important than the life-changing message that it has helped proclaim down the years.)

## Mapping our personal story

In mapping out our own journey to faith, two fictional characters can help us - by their names - to understand just how varied are individual's pathways to an owned faith.

BEN:

- Before
- Encounter
- Now & Next

This would normally be for those who have come to faith in later life, those who perhaps have had a very direct conversion experience. We do however need to be cautious of making too much of the 'before' and not everyone needs to have a huge catalogue of a life of reckless debauchery!

ANN:

- Always known God
- Needing to develop an owned faith
- Now and Next

This would be the normal pattern for those who are unable to remember a time without engagement with a faith community. Those we might say are 'cradle Christians.' Though there might not be a 'date' on which they can claim to have been converted they will be able to speak of having moved from a vicarious faith to an owned faith. At some time they have made a deliberate decision to engage and seek to know God at a personal level.

It is also important that your story has something of what God is doing in your life now, and hints at the future i.e. hope:

HOPE - Holding Onto Past Experiences ... as we look beyond today to tomorrow

## Five things that contribute to an experienced faith

A useful way of considering this process is based around five stages all beginning with the letter B. Although they can form a natural sequence - Befriending, Belonging, Believing, Behaving and Blessing - each one of these stages can act as a gate into the faith community.

### Befriending:



There is often a natural assumption that rural villages and areas are friendly. However as we see an increasing number of gated communities, weekend or holiday residents and commuter villages it is not always that easy to develop meaningful friendships. The church should also be one of the first to befriend those who may not find a ready

welcome, newcomers, migrant workers and those living in social housing for example. There will often be community events or 'hubs' where it might be possible to develop friendships, the pub or school, the W.I. or a Village Pantomime Group or the shop. What needs to be teased out is the difference between friendliness and friendships. We all ought to be friendly but it is only with a small selection of people that we will develop genuine friendships and they may take some considerable time to grow into anything meaningful. In a rural context however we do need to be very aware of anything that smacks of 'targeting friendships' *"The bonds of affection in friendship will shape one's way of witnessing – make it respectful, considerate, and loving. The value of friendship militates against any sort of witnessing that will be deeply disrespectful and harmful of the other ... Christians ought to take how they would witness to a friend to be paradigmatic of how they should witness in general."* (Miroslav Volf)

### Belonging:



This is a very contentious issue in a rural context and can clearly mark out the different theological positions of the Church of England (in Christendom mode) and Methodist, Baptist and Independent Evangelical Churches. In the C of E the nearest we come to a membership list is the Electoral Role, but the given understanding is that every person in the parish is to some degree, by default a member of the Church and comes under its care (cure of souls). In or Out theology and what that means and how one gains entry or exclusion needs to be rigorously debated and thought through. There is still enough truth in the old adage that says, 'in urban areas people belong to the Church whereas in rural areas the Church belongs to the people.' That is why some find the idea of the 'Back to Church' initiative difficult to embrace, because how can you call people back to somewhere they have never left, even if they do not regularly attend they still belong.

### Believing:



Another potentially contentious issue is that in a process of evangelism, there would often be marked out a point of crisis, a decision and declaration, as in Romans 10:13. And earlier in Romans 10:9ff it talks about a confession of the tongue, i.e. giving verbal assent and a belief in the heart, i.e. both heart and mind, intellect and emotions are involved in embracing faith.

### Behaving:



Max Lucado in his book 'God Thinks You're Wonderful' (Thomas Nelson USA, 2003) says, *"God loves you just as you are but loves you enough not to leave you that way."* If we embrace Christ as the pioneer and author of our faith then we should see a change in our behaviour as we become more Christ like. It could be argued that those who have walked a long time with Jesus ought to be the ones who most strongly reflect Christ like qualities, setting an example to the next generation. Having a particular date when a person embraced or began to belong to a Christian community can help as an annual marker and subsequent check up. The recent upsurge in 'new monasticism' may be of help here as we call each other to account in our covenanted relationship. This is much in the same way that the Methodist Class system called members into a mutual accountability and confessional.

### Blessing:



Bishop Tom Wright is one amongst many who make much of the Churches call to be the New Israel and to be a blessing to the nations after the promise given to Abraham, Genesis 3:12. This is the high calling and purpose of the Church, to fulfil God's once for all plan that through a dedicated people His will and purpose may be made known, 'a light to the Gentiles.' That we might evidence a realized Lord's Prayer with God's name being held in honour and His Kingdom coming upon earth, a foretaste of the time when heaven and earth will be conjoined. In real terms this has wide ramifications for any Christian community as it seeks to understand and come to a common mind of what God's will is for any given situation. This may lead the Church into difficult areas as it follows it's Lord in an embrace of the weak, the marginalised and the vulnerable, as it sings out Mary's Magnificat it may well find itself at odds with those who hold power, wealth and authority.

These 5 Bs represent ways in which the individual experiences their “Journey To Faith”; different things that they encounter or become involved in that draw them onward.

## SESSION 2 HEARTBEAT NOT HICCOUGH

### Aim

- To help individual Christians and local churches recognise how they can make intentional evangelism an ongoing element of the life of their church
- To reflect on ways of including evangelism and witness as the heartbeat of the church's life – not a bolt-on extra for extra-special people or occasions.

### Sowing, Reaping, Keeping



We have stressed the importance of evangelism as the heartbeat of the local rural church; and the desire that everything that the Church does works towards the end that people may come to know Christ and serve Him in the fellowship of the Church, i.e. become disciples of Christ. However not everything the Church does can be counted as 'evangelism'.

Nevertheless, everything the Church does can be viewed as a stage towards that greater goal. In rural terms we might think of sowing, reaping and keeping. A valuable tool in reflecting on this 'process' is to identify what we do as the church in 5 categories that contribute to intentional evangelization. Helpfully these come under headings that all beginning with the letter I.

#### **Involvement:**

What are those activities in which we are involved as a Church in the local community?

#### **Introduction:**

What activities do we have where the Christian faith and Jesus is purposefully yet sensitively introduced?

#### **Invitation:**

When do we as a Church offer a direct invitation for people to respond to the call of God upon their lives?

#### **Induction:**

How do we help mark out that someone has made a decision to follow the path of Christian discipleship, either in a renewed sense or for the first time?

#### **Instruction:**

What teaching and training do we have set in place both to help those new to the faith and to deepen the life of the community of faith both individually and corporately?

You can reflect on these 5 Is in more detail, including useful examples of what a local church might include in each of the five 'steps'. More detailed notes to help with such reflection are included in the full module pack.

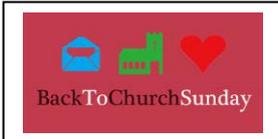
These 5 Is represent what the church does and experiences (collectively or through individual Christians) in drawing others along their "Journey To Faith".

## Season and Cycles



These are familiar concepts for most of those who live in a rural context. In the supplementary resources, you will find two outlines that offer a cyclical approach to the Church Year. One is based around the Back to Church Sunday initiative and the other expands upon that with various additions and focuses more specifically on the life of the rural community & church.

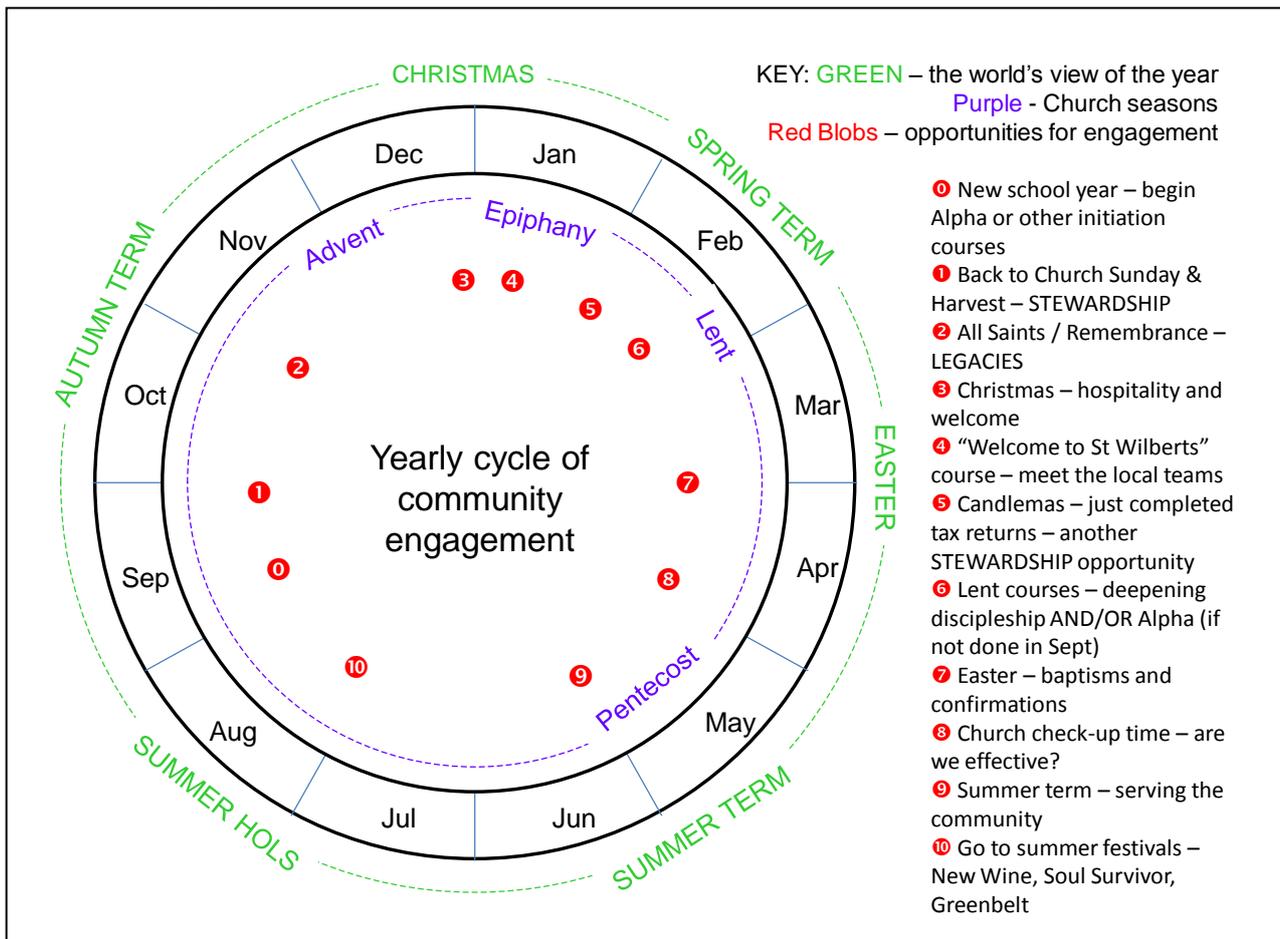
## Back to Church Sunday



This has proved to be a valuable tool and a way we can invite our friends along to Church on a given Sunday. We can of course do this any Sunday, but having a national focus helps add something extra and it doesn't feel as strange or even as strained as it might at other times. One aspect of rural living is that our movement will often be noted. Very often it will be known if a person attends

Church or Chapel. This can be enough to put people off making that initial step across the threshold. However if they are accompanied by a friend and 'everybody is doing it' it can ease the difficulty.

## A Rural Church Cycle



The life of many rural communities and churches lends itself to the adoption of a very helpful yearly cycle that strengthens the links between the local church and the community it serves. It also makes the most of opportunities and events that are already part of the ongoing life of the community.

This lends itself to easy adaptation for a specific local church and community, which might include regular items like:

- The village fair or fete
- A church patronal festival

But it is also able to incorporate quite easily events and circumstances that are irregular or unique, and yet are of great significance for the community:

- The opening of a small affordable local housing development
- The presence of seasonal or migrant workers from e.g. Poland

During the second session of the course itself, you should have done some work with this Rural Church Cycle. A template of this (both as a Word document as a Power point slide) that your own church can adapt & add to is available in the full module pack. You could start by including some of the examples that you considered in session 2 of the course.

When thinking about what you could include in your local 'church cycle' in this way you may want to reflect more deeply on the nature of your local church and the community it serves. (As during the first training session, when you were invited to draw your community and its key features and people.) There are several ways of doing this, and the full module pack contains a list of simple potential tools that you might use as a local church. You can find a more comprehensive profiling tool, *Equipping for Rural Ministry*, on the Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre website.

### Third Agents



The use of 'third agents' – non-local facilitators or speakers - are also linked in with the rural 'peculiarity' mentioned earlier ... a lack of privacy. In urban and inner-city areas it would not be that difficult to visit a Church on a Sunday morning (or other time) and even to attend a Christian Enquiry Course exploring more about being a Christian and living the life of a disciple.

A 'third agent' is someone or something from outside the community yet known and trusted by the faith community to be able to outline the truths of the Gospel in a simple and sensitive manner with an invitation for people to respond. An example could be a Harvest Supper with a mixture of Christians and not-yet believers and seekers, all coming along as friends. At the supper there will be a 'talk/presentation' that will include a simple and sensitive Gospel presentation. Perhaps someone speaking about a rural farm project in Africa, but woven into this story they would speak of how they became a Christian and how this then led them to getting involved in this particular project.

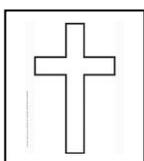
### Putting it all together



It may appear at times as if we are a random group of people gathering together to enact ceremonies that have a deep and ancient meaning yet which can occasionally seem illusory and having little or no real value outside the faith community.

We need to regularly rehearse the great story of God's redemption of the cosmos, to grasp the height and depth and breadth of the love of God for the whole of His creation. And we need to know our part in that story: *"You are a unique and*

*irreplaceable actor in the drama of human history, and Jesus Christ has need of you to make his salvific work known in this particular place and at this particular moment in history"* (Michael Quoist)



This is the great work of evangelism, proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed that people may come to put their trust in God and serve Him in the fellowship of the Church and grow as a disciple of Jesus. Being a disciple of Jesus and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit we are then invited by God to work with Him in the ever unfolding story of the redemption of the cosmos when at the last all things will be caught up in God. (Colossians 1:15-20)

**Going further?**

After attending the simple training course, and using some of the extra material and suggestions in the resource manual, you may want to do something more to equip yourself and others within your local church for evangelism appropriate to your circumstances.

In line with the ethos of this course, we can highly recommend a resource produced by Jim Currin, BRF & Foundations 21 called "Sharing Faith the Jesus Way". (This is itself part of a larger suite of resources at: [www.jesus360.org.uk](http://www.jesus360.org.uk).) The five-week course is designed to run in small groups in a local church or for use by an individual, and can be found at: <http://media.freeola.com/other/17091/sharingfaith-afiveweekcoursebrffeb2012-1.pdf>.