



Mission Creed notes

United Reformed Church

Mission Team

Mission Creed

We believe in God's mission:

Beginning at creation
with a word of possibility
and a promise of abundance.

Breathing us into existence
to delight in creation
and to tread carefully.

We are creatures of the earth,
reflecting God's diversity,
interconnected and interdependent.

We believe in God's mission:

Bringing good news in person,
starting where others need to begin
and finding holiness in every encounter.

Bursting through the walls of our churches,
to reach out to the marginalised
with unconditional love.

We are called to be a people of resurrection,
sojourners in this generation,
dependent on the generosity of God.

We believe in God's mission:

Challenging complacency,
and calling for action,
through contemplative love.

So that we might be at one
with each other
and at peace with the world.

We are commissioned by God,
Creator, Saviour, Holy Spirit,
Source of the mission we seek to fulfil.

In the beginning God Created

Rural Mission notes

Aims of the session:

1. To interpret this part of the Mission Creed in the light of creation
2. To explore what perspectives on mission in rural and urban contexts result from the selected texts.
3. To examine how the congregation/group can respond to this in practical action.

Before the group meeting:

Distribute copies of the Mission Creed study guide or download and photocopy the relevant pages. Ask members to read the Bible passages



**We believe in God's mission:
Beginning at creation
with a word of possibility
and a promise of abundance.**

Something to read

Genesis 1: 1-5; Psalm 65: 9-13; Romans 8: 18-25

Something to think about

Beginning at Creation

There are several accounts of creation in the Bible and a number of different ways of understanding and interpreting it. None is complete in itself and each has some insight to give into the wonder and mystery that is creation. What is consistent, however, is the belief that God is the creator – the author of the story and the 'end' of the story – alpha and omega, beginning and end.

The Bible begins 'in the beginning' with the weaving together of two different creation stories, setting the human experience within the context of God's creation and purpose. And while on the seventh day God does indeed rest 'from all the work that God

had done in creation' (Genesis 2:3) this is not to imply that all is completed. The biblical notion of creation involves the ongoing care and nurturing and sustaining of everything that had been made.

The first story of creation, which we find here in Genesis 1, emphasises that it is God's word which brings all things into being: 'Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.' (Genesis 1:3) God's word brings forth a world of possibilities – an environment overflowing with opportunity – for wholeness and harmony and wonder on the one hand – or alienation, toil and strife on the other. Humans are made 'in the image of God' and as such are elevated to a place of great dignity and worth, but also one of huge responsibility as co-creators with God, called to subdue the earth and having dominion over every living thing (Genesis 1:28). Such a text sets alarm bells ringing for us as we reflect on how humanity has abused this high calling but it can also affirm and encourage us.

With a word of possibility

These early chapters of Genesis remind us in one sense of what has been lost, yet point also to the future consummation of all things. They come to us as a word of possibility – a word of hope which highlights the enormous potential for good within the human condition and the prospect of redemption, not just for human beings, but for the whole creation, which we know, ‘has been groaning in labour pains until now’. (Romans 8:22) A word of possibility and hope ‘that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God’. (Romans 8:21)

A promise of abundance

Implicit in the stories of creation – and evident in our experiencing of it – is the degree of abundance in all that God has made; we might say superabundance. The richness, diversity, beauty, awesome wonder and bountiful provision of creation take our breath away, if we take time to notice. And this superabundance is promised to be a hallmark of the new heavens and the new earth (Isaiah 66:22) – the new creation spoken of also in the New Testament for which Christ holds the key. And it will be in and through Christ that creation will ultimately find its fulfilment (Colossians 1:17). This is the future hope and the promise that helps to form our present.

Something to do

1. **Share a story** from your own experience of the wonder of creation.
2. **Reflect on** what it means for us to be ‘co-creators with God.’ In what practical ways are we caring for, nurturing and sustaining all that God has made?
3. Consider who are responsible for bringing food to our tables. How thankful are we for all who are involved?
4. **Hold a service** – or series of services – which focuses on food production, retail and consumption. Is there someone in your community directly involved in the food chain? Invite them to share in a service to learn about what they do – and include their work in your prayers. What are the ethical issues about food and how are you addressing them?
5. What **creative and imaginative opportunities** might there be to celebrate creation in the life of your church and community?
6. Visit the Arthur Rank Centre website and learn about aspects of God’s mission in our rural communities. www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk

**For food, glorious food
And those who provide it**

Let us praise God

**For potatoes and pasta
crumbly cheese and juicy tomatoes**

Let us praise God

**For the smell of freshly baked bread
For butter and honey, jam and cream**

Let us praise God

**For colourful carrots and bendy bananas
For peppers and peanuts and perfect pears**

Let us praise God

**For sizzling sausages and bacon butties
For crunchy apples and seedless grapes**

Let us praise God

For milk and for juice

For fish and for chips

Let us praise God

For chocolate and for biscuits

For corn flakes and toast

Let us praise God

For food, glorious food

And those who provide it

Let us praise God.

Amen.

Something to pray for

Gracious God

*Creator, Redeemer and Life-giver,
the whole earth is alive with your glory,
overflowing with wonder and beauty and grace.*

We offer you our worship and praise.

Gracious God,

*Creator, redeemer and Life-giver,
in Jesus Christ you touched the earth lovingly,
setting creation free; bringing wholeness and hope.*

We offer you our worship and praise.

Gracious God,

*Creator, redeemer and Life-giver,
you breathe life into the dust of the earth,
making us human, co-creators and alive.*

We offer you our worship and praise.

Gracious God,

*Creator, Redeemer and Life-giver,
we rejoice in your goodness, faithfulness and love.
We accept with gratitude your many and wonderful gifts.
We seek to share in the very life of heaven, here on earth.*

We offer you our worship and praise.

Pray for

- the work of the Arthur Rank Centre & the work of Synod Rural Officers;
- Rural Stress Helpline, Farm Crisis Network, ARC-Addington Fund and others that offer support to those living in rural and agricultural communities who are experiencing difficulties;
- the work of Eco-congregation: Small, rural churches sharing in God's mission;
- farmers, growers, food producers and suppliers, migrant workers, policy makers;
- stronger links between urban and rural communities.

For all who work to bring food to our tables,

Thanks be to God

For farmers, growers, packers and processors,

Thanks be to God

For those who breed animals and look after them,

Thanks be to God

For distributors, drivers, sellers and stall-holders,

Thanks be to God

For chefs, cooks, and fair and thriving businesses,

Thanks be to God

Amen.

Delighting in Creation

Climate Change notes

Aims of the session:

1. To interpret this part of the Mission Creed in the light of our responsibility as stewards of God's creation
2. To explore perspectives on the environment and climate change in the context of mission.
3. To examine how the congregation/group can respond to this in practical action.

Before the group meeting:

Distribute copies of the Mission Creed study guide or download and photocopy the relevant pages. Ask members to read the Bible passages.



**We believe in God's mission:
Breathing us into existence
to delight in creation
and to tread carefully.**

Something to read

Genesis 2.7; Genesis 1.26; Job 33.4; Psalm 8.3-6
[Additional readings: *Isaiah 24.4-6; Deuteronomy 8.7-20; Acts 4.32-37; Matthew 16.1-3*]

Something to think about

Breathing us into existence

The breath of God flows through every human being. We have life because God wills it, life as individuals reflecting the characteristics of the God in whose image we are created. Breath is life and life is movement, constantly changing and never static. The writer of Psalm 8, in awe, proclaims of human beings, 'Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honour'. A daunting and amazing truth, inspiring our response in worship to the love and generosity of the Creator!

The biblical message is clear; all humanity resembles God but with that resemblance comes responsibility. We are all connected. The foundation for all our

relationships is the value and worth of every human being in the sight of God. We cannot live our lives in isolation, as evidenced sharply by the focus of this study, the global phenomenon of climate change.

Reflect on these words of George Fox to the early Quakers. 'And this is the word of the Lord God to you all, and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God; be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come from, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.'

To delight in creation

'Fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth' (Genesis 1.28). Have these

words been interpreted as a green light for humanity to exploit the created world or as God's call to responsibility and care?

Rather than delighting in creation, all the signs are that humanity, particularly in our time, has given it little regard. We have too easily assumed that the resources of the earth are limitless and have failed to consider the impact of our consumer lifestyle on others and on our fragile planet. It seems that we are now reaping the consequences. Have we taken seriously the words of Jesus, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?' (Matthew 6.25) – or is it taking the global economic crisis to force us to rethink our perception of 'enough'?

Read Deuteronomy 8.7-20 headed in the NRSV, 'a warning not to forget God in prosperity'. The earth's abundant resources and the ability to create wealth are God-given but exalting self and forgetting God will ultimately lead to devastation. Then contrast Acts 4.32-37, the account of the early church experimenting with an alternative economic model, living in community and sharing resources in common.

And to tread carefully

This phrase evokes images of gentle, light footsteps; a slower pace with time for reflection and encounters. It's why 'carbon footprint' is becoming such a graphic concept as we face up to the impact our lives, choices and actions are having on our planet and its most vulnerable people. The call to tread more carefully demands that we change our way of thinking and being.

The churches worldwide are in a unique and privileged position when it comes to sharing stories. We cannot say we did not know. The facts and figures in reports, background papers and articles come to life when grounded in the experience of others.

The Revd Bureieta Karaiti of the Kiribati Protestant Church spoke at a fringe meeting at URC Assembly in July 2008 about the impact of climate change on the group of islands that make up his country, many no more than four metres above sea level. Farmers and fishermen were amongst the first to recognise the evidence, working as they do in the increasingly extreme heat. Older people speak of the sun coming closer to the earth. The weather is no longer predictable. Research undertaken by the University of the South Pacific in Fiji

indicates that the islands will be under water by 2050 unless the global community takes urgent action now to limit carbon emissions. The churches in Kiribati are becoming more active, developing projects to plant mangroves and utilise solar power but they realise there is little they can do alone to limit the advance of global warming. Some people, probably amongst the better off and better educated, are already leaving to make new lives for themselves in New Zealand. But as the situation worsens, the numbers leaving will increase. Karaiti speaks of the people of Kiribati being on a pilgrimage, 'leading to lands we don't know'.

There is only one world, God's world. Mark Dowd of Operation Noah comments: 'More than anything, we remind ourselves that God is always with us and that we only need ask and we will receive. The question is: dare we ask lest we become frightened of the answers we might be given?'

Something to do

1. The UN Climate Summit taking place in Copenhagen in December 2009 is being described as the last chance for the planet. **Find out how you can be involved:** Countdown to Copenhagen (Christian Aid) – www.christianaid.org.uk **Sign the pledge** for a climate deal that is effective and fair; Ark Campaign (Operation Noah) – www.operationnoah.org **Sign the petition** calling for urgent cuts in power station emissions, and make an ark!
2. The URC's Commitment for Life programme has partner projects in countries where the impact of climate change is already evident. Follow the Commitment for Life link on the URC home page (www.urc.org.uk) for updates and resources, and to find out **how your church can participate** if you are not already involved.
3. **Sign up to receive** the regular email newsletter from Creation Challenge, the Baptist/Methodist/URC Environmental Network – www.creationchallenge.org.uk
4. **Encourage your church** to consider working through the Eco-congregation programme, leading to an Eco-congregation Award. Read the reports from recent winners published in the 'green pages' of Reform. Find out more – www.ecocongregation.org
5. For a detailed listing of events, news and resources, go to the website of Christian Ecology Link (ecumenical organisation on environment issues) – www.christian-ecology.org.uk
6. **Have a regular focus** on climate change in worship.

Something to pray for

Affirmation

We are not alone; we live in God's world

We believe in God

*who has created and is creating
who has come in Jesus, to reconcile
and make new.*

We trust God

*who calls us to be the church;
to love and serve others;
to seek justice and resist evil;
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.*

In life, in death, in life beyond death,

God is with us.

We are not alone.

Thanks be to God.

United Church of Canada
(published in the Worship Book
for the 6th Assembly of the World Council
of Churches, Vancouver, 1983)

Pray for

- those countries where climate change is already impacting on people, their homes and their livelihoods;
- campaigning agencies and faith groups, urging action and raising concerns with government and policy makers;
- those charged with making decisions at national and international level;
- those with responsibility for encouraging others to believe that they can make a difference.

A generous God affirming Diversity

Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry notes

Aims of the session:

1. To interpret this part of the Mission Creed in the light of the selected texts.
2. To explore racial justice and multicultural perspectives of the missional vocation of the Church
3. To examine how the congregation/group can respond to this in practical action.

Before the group meeting:

Distribute copies of the Mission Creed study guide or download and photocopy the relevant pages. Ask members to read the Bible passages and excerpts from General Assemblies and from Kenneth Leech.

**We believe in God's mission:
We are creatures of the earth,
reflecting God's diversity,
interconnected and interdependent.**

Something to read

Isaiah 56:6-8; Luke 10:25-37; Galatians 3:28-34
[More Scripture readings: Matthew 25:31-45; Acts 2:1-13; Acts 10; Acts 13:1-3; Revelation 7:9-11]

“ The United Reformed Church declares itself to be a Multicultural Church welcoming all cultures and ethnicities in worship witness and service, and celebrating the diverse gifts of the whole people of God for the mission and ministry God calls us to. ”

[General Assembly, 2005]

“ The United Reformed Church believes that all people are created in God's image, free and equal in [God's] sight. Racism results where prejudiced attitudes of superiority over others are combined with the power to shape society.....The United Reformed Church commits itself to challenge and equip all its people to resist racism within themselves, within the church and within society as a whole and to train people and devote resources to this task. The United Reformed Church pledges itself, as it shares in action against racism, to monitor and review at regular intervals what progress is being made in church and society. ”

[General Assembly 1987]



If the local church is truly living out the character of the gospel, it will be a focal point of welcome for the stranger and the alien, a home for the homeless and unloved, a place of sanctuary for the refugee. It will be a place which opens its doors to the community. Yet very often, even in areas of conflict, the church is remote from what is happening, and is often reduced to being no more than a 'haven of rest for the elderly', a place of refuge rather than of transformation. Churches which see themselves merely as refuges cannot hope to combat the evils of racism. And the way in which they see themselves will be visibly manifested and easily recognizable: a closed church, closed against the community, speaks more powerfully than any number of words. A church which is open and welcoming, warm and inviting, speaks powerfully of Christ who welcomes all.



[Kenneth Leech, *Struggle in Babylon*]

Something to think about

We are creatures of the earth, reflecting God's Diversity, interconnected and interdependent

From the beginning, diversity (not homogeneity) has been the intention of God. According to the Biblical writers God created a diverse world and affirmed that "it was good". That diversity was created of every kind (Genesis 1) and though different there was a sense of unity, equality (Acts 17:26) and interdependency. The whole of creation is connected.

The Scriptures further underscore a God who shows no partiality and whose nature is that of including and being generous. The ministry of Jesus is replete with examples of expansive generosity that transgressed narrow boundaries. It was a ministry of including, giving value to diverse people – building inclusive community and breaking geographic and cultural boundaries.

In the Pentecost story, the Holy Spirit enabled friends and followers of Jesus to speak in a variety of languages. What the drama conveys is a theological affirmation: through Christ God heals prejudices and divisions while affirming cultural and ethnic differences.

1. **Reflect on the ways in which we label other people based on prejudices.**
2. **What influences people to hold particular views on colours, habits, shapes, cultures, abilities etc?**
3. **How would you view mission in a diverse and multiethnic/cultural society?**
4. **How is your congregation already practicing inclusion in its life? Reflect further on concrete ways to build on these to practice a "culture of inclusion" in all aspects of your congregation's mission and ministry.**

Something to do

1. **Formulate a code of practice** which as a group you would feel happy with in a workplace where people from diverse, religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds work.
2. **Discuss together** about your church communities, **thinking critically** how things can be improved? What changes will Jesus expect us to make?
3. **Make a realistic commitment** to celebrate and delight in the diversity and differences around you.
4. **Check out your local library** for DVD's and videos related to ethnicity, diversity, cultures, immigration etc for use in a discussion group.
5. **Intentionally create** a shared vocabulary (written and spoken) and multicultural images to be used in: mission statements; corporate prayers; hymns and songs; visual messages (posters and banners); sermons; the printed order of service; the church newsletter and webpage.
6. **Extend hospitality** to new immigrant groups and plan shared activities during which both the host and guest congregations participate as equal partners.
7. In your worship group, **reflect on ways** to encourage greater cultural diversity in corporate worship as a community.
8. **Find someone** to say the Lord's Prayer in his or her mother tongue (in a language other than English).
9. **Share the good practices and insights** of your community with others including the RJMM Office at rj.mm@urc.org.uk
10. **Support the work** of your local Racial Justice and Multicultural Advocate. Visit the RJMM webpage and tell others about the available resources.

http://www.urc.org.uk/what_we_do/rjmm/racial_justice_and_multicultural_ministry

Something to pray for

Pray for

- more awareness of our neighbours' cultures and experiences;
- a deeper understanding of ourselves, our roots and identity;
- understanding of the feelings of people from different cultural backgrounds;
- ways to become more inclusive, welcoming and outward looking;
- deeper understanding of being one in Christ;
- the courage to tackle injustice, not to ignore it and to live out our faith in practice.

Something to pray for

A four directions prayer of the people

Leader There are gifts from each of the peoples in the four directions of the world. The winds of the different directions remind us of these gifts. We invite participants to stand and face the four directions, honouring the wholeness of humanity and God's creation.

Leader Let us turn now to the **East**. We give thanks for the peoples of the East. This direction symbolizes new life on the earth and reminds us of our connectedness to each other and to creation. The sun rises in the east and each day is a gift. Life itself is a gift.

All **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

Leader And we offer our prayers for God's church: May God open our eyes each morning to the gift of God's reconciliation with us through Jesus, and the call to be ministers of reconciliation. We pray for our leaders and for renewal for all who nurture the church in Christ's ministry of healing and transforming the world.

Leader We turn to face **South**. We give thanks for the peoples of the South. The South represents warmth and growth. Give us your strength and courage to be open to new learning and to grow in our witness and care for the world, we pray.

All **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

Leader And we offer our prayers for God's world, praying especially for those who suffer from the violence of racism, poverty and war; and from the legacies of colonialism and slavery. May God's strength be with all who suffer and with all who work for justice, peace and the healing of relationships amongst peoples.

Leader We turn to face **West**. We give thanks for the peoples of the West. The West represents the gift of rest, the passing of time and of those who have gone before. Give us the wisdom and grace to use your gifts of time and leisure well; give comfort to those who mourn, and rest to those who have passed into your care, we pray.

All **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

Leader And we offer our prayers for all in need: May God's peace and healing presence be with all who suffer and those who are weary and in need of rest.

Leader We turn to face **North**. We give thanks for the peoples of the North. A gift of this direction is clarity of vision and a sense of the strength we need to live each day. Help us to see more clearly your role for us, especially in the healing and care of Mother Earth, we pray.

All **Come Holy Spirit, come.**

Leader And we offer our prayers for the wisdom of discernment: May God open our hearts to the grace of God's holy presence with us and around us, that we might truly behold the earth and each other as beloved by God.

Leader We turn to complete the circle and to look: to God who cleanses our Earth with snow, wind, fire and rain; to Jesus Christ who fills us with the wideness of mercy and lovingly embraces us all, And to the Holy Spirit who inspires us.

All **Amen.**

[Adapted by CEARN from For the Healing of the Land, Rupert's Land Indigenous Council, 2003]

Mission Creed study guide

Mission notes

Aims of the session:

1. To interpret this part of the Mission Creed in the light of the Emmaus story.
2. To explore what perspectives on mission/evangelism result from this story.
3. To examine how the congregation/group can respond to this in practical action.

Before the group meeting:

Distribute copies of the Mission Creed study guide or download and photocopy the relevant pages. Ask members to read the Bible passage, Luke 24, 13-35.



We believe in God's mission:
Bringing good news in person,
starting where others need to begin
and finding holiness in every encounter.

Something to read

Luke 24: 13-35

Something to think about

Bringing good news in person

This passage is set on Easter Day, after the women have found the tomb empty and are told by two men in dazzling clothes that Jesus has risen. They return from the tomb and tell the apostles what has happened, but their story seems “pure nonsense” to them. Later in the day two of Jesus’ followers are walking to Emmaus and are talking about the events of the past few days. And then Jesus himself comes near and walks with them. Christ meets them in the moment of their bewilderment and sadness; comes close to them and, taking the stories they are familiar with, explains something of his true nature - sharing

the good news that God loves us and in Christ has become like us. In Christ we see a God who has made the difficult and precarious journey towards us in order that we might journey with him.

Because God has come to us, it is helpful in Christian mission to begin with thinking about our own experience. Think of times and situations in which we have recognised God’s coming to meet us and then find ways of opening these experiences up to others. However, we must not stop there; we need to go further. Robert Warren (2004:57) states that individually and as a faith community we are called to express the life of Christ. So, in the same way that Christ has become good news to us, our calling is to be good news in person to others and to our communities. In his book ‘God has a dream’ Desmond Tutu expresses this as being partners or fellow workers with God (2004:59-60):

“Dear Child of God, do you realise that God needs you? Do you realise that you are God’s partner? When there is someone hungry, God wants to perform the miracle of feeding that person. But it won’t any longer be through manna falling from heaven. Normally, more usually, God can do nothing until we provide God with the means, the bread and the fish, to feed the hungry. When a person is naked, God wants to perform the miracle of clothing that person, but it won’t be with a Calvin Klein outfit floating from heaven. No, it will be because you and I, all of us, have agreed to be God’s fellow workers, providing God with the raw material for performing miracles.

Reflect together:

1. Who in your life has brought the love of God close to you? What effect had this had on you?
 2. How has this enabled you to bring good news in person to others?
-

Where others need to begin

In the story from Luke, Jesus asks the two what they are discussing and by doing so allows them to tell their story. He listens to them and genuinely wants to know how they are seeing things. This is crucial to our approach in mission. Many attempts at mission begin with the sinfulness of humanity and seeking to convince people of that. Sri Lankan theologian DT Niles once said that one of the crises facing mission is that we Christians are more convinced of “our need to be in mission” than of the “need of our neighbours to hear the gospel”. If we truly believe that the gospel is for and about our neighbour, we must be more prepared to listen and we need to start where our neighbour wants to begin. This offers a new perspective on mission. Mission is then about joining people on the journeys of their lives; making space for their stories and deepest questions in the manner of Christ on the way to Emmaus. It becomes a continued pilgrimage with others into the living heart of God and is to help others to trust the God who identifies with them in Christ.

In the Emmaus story Christ’s coming close is for a purpose. He wants not just to accompany the two disciples, but to transform their lives. His companionship is in order to lead them to new life. From the other side of the grave of despair and hopelessness, the resurrected Christ offers the way to life and renewed hope. Sandra Duguid’s powerful poem ‘Road to Emmaus’ expresses poignantly the need for people to walk with those who are suffering, blinded by disappointment or grief, and to hold up to them an image of a different reality.

Click to read
Road to Emmaus

Sandra R Duguid, In America 188:15
(April 27, 2003)
http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2942

Reflect together:

1. Listening to the people in your community, what are the stories they want to tell?
 2. What would constitute new life and new hope for your community?
-

Holiness in every encounter

The Emmaus story ends with the three sharing a meal together and it is in the simple act of taking, blessing and breaking the bread that the two recognise Jesus. In the simple encounter there is a glimpse of holiness. Christian mission has often worked on the premise that the missionary is the one bringing the holiness to the encounter, as if God is not there until the missionary arrives. But why do we engage in mission? Is it because God is present with our neighbour or because God is absent? In 'God has a dream' Desmond Tutu states, in the spirit of St Paul, that each person is a 'God carrier', concluding from this that human beings must not just be respected, but be held in awe and reverence. "If we took this seriously", he says, "we should not just greet each other. We should really genuflect before one another. Buddhists are more correct, since they bow profoundly as they greet one another, saying the God in me acknowledges the God in you." (p63)

For those of us brought up within the church it is not easy to learn to see others in this way. Yet in our post-Christendom, increasingly diverse, multi-cultural and multi-faith world, this is an essential lesson to learn. Jane Leach, reflecting on her pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, suggests that the concept of being a guest can help churches to focus beyond themselves, acknowledging at the same time that this is difficult for churches that have been used to power and influence. "We are not used", she says, "to articulating and explaining our beliefs, we are not used to starting where others want to begin, and we are not used to naming God in unfamiliar places. Perhaps it is the art of being the guest that Christians in the West most need to recapture in the post-Christendom world if we are to experience holiness in encounter with those who are different from us and participate in the kind of community to which God is calling the whole of humanity." (p93)

Reflect together:

1. Think of someone whose culture, religion or way of life is different from yours. How can you open yourself to what they may have to teach you?
 2. What does it mean for the church to be a guest in our society?
-

Something to do

1. *Your role in the community:*

Many churches are actively involved in the life of their local neighbourhood or community, either through the voluntary service of individual members or through a project run by the church. If this is the case for your church, please share your story with others through the URC website. Go to [www.urc.org.uk/what we do/](http://www.urc.org.uk/what-we-do/) and click on mission team to find out more.

You may also wish to become more involved in your community. If this is the case, your Synod Training and Development Officer or Mission Enabler may be able to help you. Contact your Synod office for more information.

If you are interested in doing a mission audit in your church, you may find *The Healthy Churches' Handbook* a useful resource. It was written by Robert Warren and offers a process for revitalizing your church.

2. *Engaging in evangelism:*

Is your church involved in faith sharing through evangelism in your community? If not, and you are interested you may wish to become involved in Vision4Life. V4L is a process for local churches to re-engage with the Bible, with prayer and evangelism and is running from 2008 to 2011. V4L materials can be obtained from Church House or from the V4L website: www.vision4life.org. For those who would like to go into evangelism more in-depth there is Training for Learning and Serving and TLS Lite. Go to www.urc.org.uk to find out more.

3. *New ways of being church:*

From June 2009 the URC will become a partner in Fresh Expressions. This is an initiative of the Church of England and the Methodist Church to help churches to reach out to people in new ways and to develop new ways of being church. Two DVDs, offering examples of how this can be done, have been produced. You can order these DVDs from the URC bookshop.

The Fresh Expressions team also offers courses for lay people and ministers, who are interested in developing initiatives to connect with people outside the church. Go to www.freshexpressions.org.uk for more information.

4. *Encountering your neighbour:*

The world around us (immediate and wider) is one of many cultures, peoples and faiths. With our neighbours of faith we share a vision for the common good of society/world but this demands building relationships of integrity with commitment and openness. Here are some practical suggestions:

- Build a relationship with a neighbour or colleague from a faith tradition other than yours.
- Locate and join a local group that does interfaith walks visiting places of worship (Mosque, Gurudwara, Hindu Temple, Viahara, Churches etc).
- Try making links with a culturally diverse congregation, first locally and then beyond.
- Join or start an inter-faith group.
- Invite and host international students from other cultures and faith traditions.

Something to pray for

Pray for

- the work of the Mission Team;
- the members of the Vision4Life Steering Group and writing groups;
- the Synod Mission Enablers and/or Development Officers;
- the Church Related Community Workers;
- the work of all those in the URC who engage in evangelism;
- the Fresh Expressions team;
- all who are involved in interfaith work.

Love extravagant a Commitment for Life

Aims of the session:

1. To interpret this part of the Mission Creed in the light of the story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman
2. To explore what perspectives on mission through the lens of Commitment for Life.
3. To examine how the congregation/group can respond to this in practical action.

Before the group meeting:

Distribute copies of the Mission Creed study guide or download and photocopy the relevant pages. Ask members to read the Bible passage, John 4:5-26.

We believe in God's mission:
Bursting through the walls of
our churches,
to reach out to the marginalised
with unconditional love.

Something to read

John 4: 5-26

Something to think about

Breaking through the walls of our Church

Do we really appreciate the fact that Jesus stopped and talked not only to a woman with a reputation but also a Samaritan? There was no way a male Jew would associate with a Samaritan and a woman at that. This woman was marginalized by society at that time. She obviously knew her place by coming to the well in the hottest part of the day when the rest of the women would not be there. Jesus' immediate need was physical: he needed water. She had the means to get the water from the well and we presume she does lower her basket down into the well to get water. The conversation between them is direct and sometimes brisk. The woman argues her case and the conversation moves quickly into something much deeper and

towards the woman's need (v10.) She hears his words and later takes action. So by the end of the chapter we learn many have come to know Jesus because she told others about her encounter with him (v 42.) The water Jesus offers her is living and constant, it is an outpouring of the spirit breaking out of the box. So often aid agencies have to help the urgent physical need first and then look at the deeper problems, and that can lead to real long term development work.

Verses 19 and 20 upholds the work of those working "outside the church walls" that worship is not confined to a building but can be anywhere, even helping people understand their human rights or working with those living with HIV, so long as it is with "truth and spirit." This is another example of faith creating actions that will often lead to an understanding of faith.

To reach out to the marginalised with unconditional Love

This meeting with this woman starts the breaking down of barriers which leads directly to Jesus' message for all people and culminates in the message of Pentecost. Here the disciples invited all people whatever their colour, caste or creed to follow Christ. We may not be able to show this love personally to those in need but through the money Commitment for Life raises each year you give Christian Aid the opportunity to carry on work with the poor and marginalized. They are giving your unconditional love. Vivene is someone marginalised by the society in which she lives in Kingston, Jamaica. Listen to her story.

Vivene's story

Imagine having a big secret, so big you can tell no one. It means you're constantly avoiding questions and making sure you are not discovered as you put life-saving pills into vitamin bottles. The stress must be unbelievable. That is what it is like for Vivene. She told us her story whilst sitting in a very hot bus, parked streets away from home. None of her family is aware she is HIV positive. She cannot tell them. With a wonderful smile, she introduced herself. "Glad to meet you all and share the smiles and happiness. I am feeling happy with you all. I am a mother of seven all grown up. I am working in the Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) candle scheme. Right now I am pushing forward for myself and for my little girl aged 17."

Vivene explained that she did not come from a supportive family. She has not told anyone she is HIV positive. She was tested 4 years ago, but thinks she has been HIV positive for the past 9 years. Movingly, Vivene spoke of her acceptance of her condition. "I have accepted it, sometime I even forget I am ill, like when we were on the beach." Recently Christian Aid partner JASL organised a day out at the beach for those they cared for.

"I had a cold and it didn't get better. I went back feeling more ill and the doctor ran the test and gave me a letter for a health centre. At first I could not believe it but I started talking to the doctor and he told me about JASL."

"When I came to talk, the nurse was the first person I saw. She cheered me up by saying she would be there for me. They have been like a family to me. They have shown me how to eat right. Eating well means being fit and strong." Daunette Wellington from JASL explained how they lobbied to get signage removed from pharmacy windows, which showed a patient's condition. Many, including Vivene, could not take their prescription there, as all would see their status. Now there is just one window for all kinds of ailments, so people cannot be stigmatised by their condition being widely known.

At present, she still helps at JASL four days a week but is looking for a business project. "I am thinking about selling fish," she told us. "My sister is looking to get a car and then we will have transport. She will transport me and I will pay her. I want to tell my youngest daughter but she has a lot of stress right now at school. I will tell all the children at the same time. That time is not too far away. I go to Church. I try to serve the Lord. If you have faith you can hold on in there."

Something to do

1. **Become a Commitment for Life Church.**
By making a regular financial commitment you enable agencies with the expertise to reach out to the marginalised such as Vivene.
2. Choose to **learn more** about one of our four partner countries: Bangladesh, Jamaica, Zimbabwe and Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
3. **Campaign against injustice**, both social and environmental. Write to your MP or MEP about issues we tell you about on our website. www.cforl.co.uk
4. Make sure the **worlds concerns** are part of your private and corporate prayer life.

Something to pray for

Called to bear witness

We are called to bear witness to the Good News that no one is a stranger or an outsider, and that in Jesus Christ all division and separation have been broken down.

In the face of the worldwide crisis of AIDS, we are called to be one people, a whole people, none of whom is worthless.

Yet hardness of heart, discrimination and oppression prevent us from being who God called us to be.

As we prepare to confess our sins, we come to God in prayer.

Lord of Compassion, we often represent you as a God of wrath.

Yet, you are a God of love, raising us to life;
and so we ask;

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord Jesus, you banish the fear that has often paralysed us.

In responding to the needs of all of us who are affected by HIV and AIDS,
when we falter, encourage us and strengthen us;

and so we ask:

Christ have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Spirit of unity, you build us up when we break down;
you unite when we divide; you comfort when we condemn;
and so we ask

Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Author unknown

Sojourners on the Way

Ecumenical notes

Aims of the session:

1. To interpret this part of the Mission Creed in the light of the journey of an ecclesial tradition – the United Reformed Church – with its diverse history.
2. To explore the integral link between mission and ecumenism.
3. To examine how the congregation/group can respond to this in practical action.

Before the group meeting:

Distribute copies of the Mission Creed study guide or download and photocopy the relevant pages. Ask members to read the Bible passage, 1 John 4:7-21.

We believe in God's mission:
We are called to be a people of resurrection,
sojourners in this generation,
dependent on the generosity of God.

Something to read

1 John 4: 7-21

Something to think about

A people of resurrection

We are called in the midst of our everyday lives, with their stresses and strains, to a bigger hope which reaches beyond us and our localised concerns. This is a real and tangible hope for the world and for the future, because it holds fast to a belief that God has the power to bring new life, new hope, new possibilities, from seeming dead ends. And we are called to share and participate in that new life, through the hope that we have, the lives that we lead and the faith that we share. It is a hope that things can be better, that the world can be transformed by the love of God. It is a faith that causes us to work – together – for that better future.

Sojourners in this generation

We are sojourners, people of temporary residence on the way towards something which is not yet here, but which we believe can be a reality. We are also called to be a people who are in the world, not of the world. Certainly there are many times in this day and age when we find ourselves at odds with the world or out of touch with the world. Sometimes, we find that the values of the world conflict with our own. At other times, we find ourselves in a world which makes no sense to us, because we have so separated ourselves from the real world that we struggle to live in the world. To many outside our churches, we worship in an environment which is very alien to them. Perhaps it is sobering to think of ourselves as the strangers in an alien world, as minorities in a decreasingly church-going society. Yet we are the ones called to welcome in and tend the stranger.

Dependent on the generosity of God

In our own strength and working independently, we can achieve very little on the way to resurrection. In God's strength and working together as a united body of Christ, it is God's generous nature which will prevail. That generosity reaches beyond our customs and traditions and mindsets, with an extravagance which will always surprise us and challenge us. That generosity calls us to love with an overflowing heart, beyond our own limitations of generosity and tolerance. That generosity also extends to us.

Let us love one another

God loves us enough to send Jesus into the world that we might live through him. We rely upon God. But in God's eyes all the others for whom Christ also died are equally valued. God is making new things possible. So, from verses 10 and 11, if our ecumenical partners are so loved and valued by God, then on the basis of that common loving and valuing alone they are those with whom so much should already be possible. Arguing that things cannot be shared until we arrive at a distant goal misses the point of what is already ours through this divine loving and valuing.

Perfect love casts out fear

The United Reformed Church came into existence because our forebears believed they heard God's call to be one and to take the step of organic unity. We are sojourners on the way to something else. In our day we believe that God is Still Speaking. At a time when all sorts of voices mouth all sorts of definitions and goals for ecumenism, we shall continue unapologetically to stand for what some find unpopular or outmoded. One does not give up on the truth one has been given because the world wants to hear something else, even if that proclamation has to sit alongside other strategies fully to meet the needs of the time.

Get surfing, exploring some ecumenical websites, e.g.

CTBI, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland www.ctbi.org.uk

CTE, Churches Together in England www.cte.org.uk

ACTS, Action of Churches Together in Scotland www.acts-scotland.org

CYTUN, Churches Together in Wales www.cytun.org.uk

For further information, have a look at the website or talk to the Ecumenical Relations office.

Tel: 020 7916 8654

Something to do

1. **Take stock of your own church.** What is it you really like and appreciate about the place, the people, the worship and the fellowship of your church? Ask your friends from other Churches about what they like and appreciate in their own Church. Ask the local people you know who don't go to church what impressions they have about your church. Compare and contrast! Did anything surprise you? Is there something your church could do better? Is there something your church does well and could share with other churches?
2. **Find your nearest local ecumenical partnership (LEP)** church, where two or more denominations have entered into a formal sharing agreement. Listen to their story. How and why did they decide to come together? What do they do and what makes them unique? What are the advantages to being an LEP? What are some of the difficulties? What could your church learn from their experience? Does your church share with churches from another denomination?
3. **Find a church with a very different tradition to your own** and take yourself along to a service. Introduce yourself and say where you come from. Ask them to explain something about their church, its history, theology and practises. What did you enjoy? What made you uncomfortable? What was different and what seemed familiar? Were you made to feel welcome? If someone from there came to your church, how might they feel about your worship and welcome?
4. **Get together with others** in your area, identify things you might do together and see where it goes. Are there times when you could come together for joint worship or fellowship? Could you work together on a local community project or issue? Could you join a campaign for something on a wider scale, such as fair-trade, human rights, climate change, world poverty?

Something to pray for

Pray for

- all those for whom Christ also died;
- the work of the Ecumenical Relations Office and its staff;
- our ecumenical partners in these islands;
- all those who live out their witness in LEPs, United Churches, Circuits and Areas;
- those working for growth in ecumenical understanding in Northern Ireland and in all other areas where there is a sad and difficult history.

Transforming love challenges

Church and Society notes

Aims of the session:

1. To interpret this part of the Mission Creed in the light of Jesus sending out the disciples.
2. To explore perspectives on mission via the Church's engagement in society.
3. To examine how the congregation/group can respond to this in practical action.

Before the group meeting:

Distribute copies of the Mission Creed study guide or download and photocopy the relevant pages. Ask members to read the Bible passage, Matthew 9:35-10:8

We believe in God's mission:
Challenging complacency,
and calling for action,
through contemplative love.

Something to read

Matthew 9:35 – 10:8

Something to think about

Challenging complacency

This passage describes the first mission commissioned by Jesus. It happens relatively early in his public ministry in the context of his teaching and healing ministry in the towns and villages of Judea. Jesus challenges complacency by embodying the good news of the kingdom he proclaims and refusing the secular-sacred dichotomy of the religious and political leadership of Israel. The Spirit of the Lord was indeed upon him and he demonstrated this by announcing good news to the poor, and proclaiming release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind in keeping with the Isaiah prophecy of the Messiah (Isaiah 61).

This is the essence of holistic or **integral mission** which has been defined in the Micah Declaration as 'the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel. It is not simply that evangelism and social involvement are to be done alongside each other. Rather, in integral mission our proclamation has social consequences as we call people to love and repentance in all areas of life. And our social involvement has evangelistic consequences as we bear witness to the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. If we ignore the world we betray the word of God which sends us out to serve the world. If we ignore the word of God we have nothing to bring to the world. Justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together. As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task.'

Calling for action

This passage also reveals the motivation for Jesus' ministry. 'When he saw the crowds he was moved by compassion because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.' Compassion is a recurring theme in the ministry of Jesus and means 'to be moved to one's inwards or to empathise with the suffering of others.' In each instance it moves him to take action to remedy the situation and in this instance it leads him to appeal to his disciples to pray to the lord of the harvest for labourers to be sent out into his harvest 'as the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.'

But prayer must always be followed by action, and Jesus summons his twelve disciples and gives them authority to proclaim and demonstrate the presence of the kingdom of heaven to the lost sheep of Israel in the same way that he had done. Hereafter they are called the twelve apostles – those who are sent forth to minister – despite the fact that they still had much to learn as disciples of Christ. This represents an important transition for the twelve. Up until this occasion they could be described as **companions** of Jesus who were observing and learning about the kingdom of heaven as lived and taught by their teacher (Rabbi). Through this companionship they entered into **communion** with Jesus which readied them to become the answer to their own prayers for the lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest fields to engage in acts of **compassion** through contemplative love.

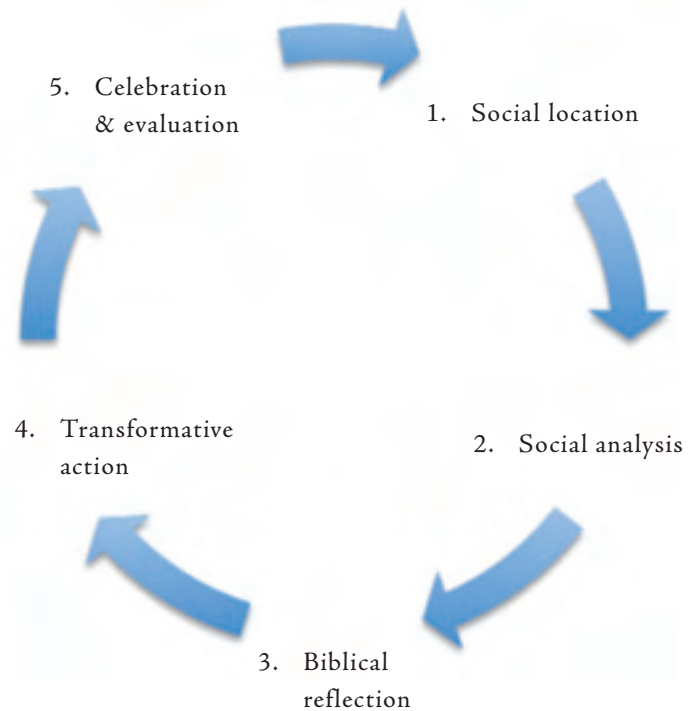
After receiving further practical instructions from Jesus, the twelve apostles embark on their mission and the Gospel of Luke picks up the story in the ninth chapter. He reports that 'they departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere' (v.6). In other words, they too engage in integral mission as they respond to the needs of the whole person and Luke tells us that 'on their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida' (v.10). This suggests a time of celebration and reflection prior to further action, but is interrupted by the crowds finding out about this and following them, and Jesus welcoming them and speaking to them about the kingdom of God, and healing those who needed to be cured (v.11).

Contemplative Love and the Pastoral Cycle

This passage provides a wonderful example of what has become known as the pastoral cycle or action-reflection method of ministry. This is a tool, a method of analysis and questioning, not only of problems or concerns that are faced, but also what causes them, and what obstacles need

to be overcome. It is a continuous process of engagement with, and reflection upon, the God's World and God's Word so that appropriate courses of action may be discerned and taken to make things different. It provides for the outcomes of this action to be celebrated and evaluated and, if necessary, subjected to further analysis and questioning etc., in a continuing cycle, or spiral, as further changes are identified.

This cycle can be represented as follows:



Applying this method to this passage can be summarised as follows:

1. **Social location** – this is located in the villages and cities of Judea where Jesus is engaged in his ministry.
2. **Social analysis** – Jesus perceives the crowds as 'harassed and helpless, as sheep without a shepherd' based on a keen eye for justice and righteousness and equity for the meek of the earth.
3. **Biblical reflection** – Jesus reflects on the spiritual poverty and social deprivation of the people he encounters based on the covenantal promises of Yahweh to care for his sheep and search for the scattered sheep of Israel and rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered (Ezekiel 34:11-12).

4. **Transformative action** – this begins with an appeal for prayer – ‘Ask the lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.’ This is prayer as transformational dialogue as it is the disciples themselves who are to be sent out by Jesus as they become the answer to their own prayer. Prayer leads to action and the twelve are summoned, given authority and instructions, and then sent out into the villages surrounding them.
5. **Celebration and evaluation** – when the twelve return, they report to Jesus what they have done and he leads them to a place of quiet for reflection and evaluation of their mission and ministry. When this is interrupted by the crowds he is again moved through contemplative love to minister to their spiritual, physical and material needs (feeding of the five thousand) with the assistance of his disciples (Luke 9:12-17).

Something to do

1. Much of our mission in the URC has reflected the social-spiritual divide which was foreign to the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. **Reflect on** the definition of *integral mission* proposed by the Micah Declaration to determine whether your mission and ministry as a local congregation is holistic?
2. **Use the pastoral cycle outlined above to analyse** a particular social/spiritual concern in your community and how to respond to this through prayer, Biblical reflection and transformative action.
3. **Think of creative ways to celebrate** your successes collectively (regardless of how small this may be) in order to develop a culture of celebration within your church and local community.
4. Also consider creative ways to **engage in contemplation and reflection** as groups and individuals as a critical prerequisite for transformative action.
5. **Reflect on the process** of *companionship, communion and compassion* as a strategy for mission in your own community and for establishing links with mission partners overseas.

Something to pray for

Lord,
 like your disciples
 we have received freely from your fullness,
 grace upon grace;
 Grant us now the courage to freely give.
 Open our eyes
 to see the people around us
 through the compassionate gaze of the Good Shepherd,
 that like him we might be moved
 to holistic action
 that will transform us in the process,
 and bring healing, reconciliation, and renewal
 to our congregations and communities!
 This we ask
 in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 Amen.

God loves the world

a larger view & International notes

Aims of the session:

1. To interpret this part of the Mission Creed in the light of selected scripture passage
2. To explore what perspectives on mission we can glean from the larger perspective of our global lives.
3. To examine how the congregation/group can respond to this in practical action.

Before the group meeting:

Distribute copies of the Mission Creed study guide or download and photocopy the relevant pages. Ask members to read the Bible passage, John 17:11-23



We believe in God's mission:
So that we might be at one
with each other
and at peace with the world.

Something to read

John 17:11-23

Something to think about

In the world, not of the world

This passage is set on the eve of the crucifixion, just before Jesus and his disciples enter the Garden of Gethsemane. At this moment he has a choice. He can escape by walking up past Gethsemane, up the Mount of Olives and over into the Judean desert. Yet he chooses to fulfil God's mission by taking the path preordained for him. In this moment he submits himself to God's will for the whole of creation and turns away from the way of the world for himself alone. As he prays, he tells us that his thoughts are on how the disciples will remain faithful to the work he has started, so that they and future generations keep focussed on God's mission for the world.

God's purposes are global. They encompass the world, seeking to bring healing to the nations and to bring reconciliation and peace with justice. They speak to our sin and failure, offering love and forgiveness; and liberation from the past and new opportunities for tomorrow. They speak of engagement with the world, but not enslavement to worldly values. They offer a vision of wholeness, of shalom – people at one with God, with each other and with the whole of creation.

So that they might be as one

Jesus calls the disciples into partnership with one another, to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. Each generation has to make these purposes their own: to see in the signs of the times where God's mission lies for them; to interpret afresh Jesus' understanding of the kingdom and in their own words and actions to witness to these things so that others might believe and share in the new life they offer.

The United Reformed Church's international relations work is organised around our belonging to the world church. With other churches and church agencies around the world we are partners together in God's global mission. In this partnership we are called to learn from one another, support one another and together proclaim and live out God's healing and reconciling love for the world. In this partnership we are involved in many of today's global concerns and in the sending and receiving of people as mission partners, as volunteers and in short-term exchanges helping us to learn from and be enriched by one another. The Belonging to the World Church (BWC) programme is designed to stretch the imagination and vision of people in the URC by exposing them to churches whose life, witness and circumstances whilst markedly different from ours, offer much to be learned about being the church engaged in God's mission today.

At peace with the world

While we are not of the world, we live in a global culture. Our cities are international centres with communities drawn from many ethnic groups, cultures and faiths. Our rural communities now compete with rural communities across the world for markets which not so long ago could have been taken as granted as theirs. Around the world we are partners in God's mission with churches whose own life reflects the individual strands of the multifaceted society in which we minister. Together, we face the common challenge of a global economy and a global news and entertainment media. Working together and learning from one another, we can gain the perspective and form the networks that help us understand God's purposes in this age and enable us to proclaim and live a gospel that speaks to our time.

The church being both global and local is uniquely placed to speak to this phenomenon of globalisation. The increased control of wealth and power across the world by a few individuals and large corporations needs challenging, most especially where the needs of people are ignored and the environment is mercilessly exploited. Working with our church partners, sharing stories and experiences, we can make connections and begin to try and understand the forces that are at work behind the term "globalisation". As the Christian community, we too can be global players, but we need to learn from one another and to work much more closely together. Our world church partnerships make it possible to take seriously the global challenges facing us and find ways of responding together as Christians called to care for God's world.

Something to do

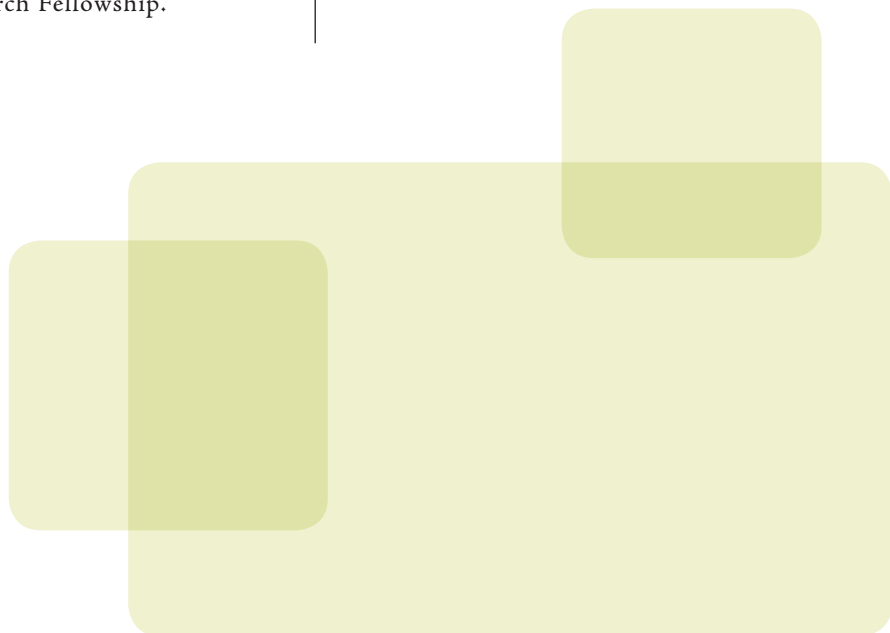
1. Does your synod have a link with one of our international partner churches? If so, where? How does that link work? Do you know your link person? How much do you know about that country and church? Is your synod planning a trip to visit that church and have you considered going? If there is no link, would you be prepared to become a link person for your synod? Or has your church thought about developing a relationship with a partner church overseas.
2. Have you already been on a BWC trip? How has that experience changed you? What things did you learn and what have you been able to share back home? Do you give talks about your time overseas? Do you maintain that link? Have you been involved with organising a reciprocal visit? What have you learnt from that experience? What have you been able to share in return?
3. Do you speak another language and, if so, how can you use this to make a connection with Christians in other parts of the world?
4. Are you entitled to some funding from the BWC programme for an international visit? Grants are awarded for:
 - Ordinands and those training to be Church-Related Community Workers.
 - Ministerial Education programmes.
 - Global Partners exchange programmes for synods (linked to World Exchange volunteer and work/study camp programme opportunities.
 - International Ministry Exchanges – an ecumenical exchange programme for church professionals (ordained & lay.)
 - Lay training opportunities.
 - Opportunities for young people and children.

For further information, have a look at the website or talk to the World Church Relations office.
Tel: 020 7916 8654

Something to pray for

Pray for

- the work of the World Church Relations Office and its staff;
- everyone engaging with the BWC programme;
- Synod World Church Advocates;
- Synod European Partnership Coordinators;
- and the many people throughout the United Reformed Church who serve as District World Church Advocates;
- our International Partners:
 - WARC, CWM;
 - The World Council of Churches;
 - The World Alliance of Reformed Churches;
 - The Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council and participates in the World Convention of the Churches of Christ.
 - The Conference of European Churches;
 - The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe – Leuenberg Church Fellowship.



Mission Creed Study Guide

Mission Spirituality notes

Aims of the session:

1. To reflect this part of the Mission Creed in the light of these texts.
2. To explore shapes to a mission spirituality.
3. To examine how the congregation/group can respond to this in practical action.

Before the group meeting:

Distribute copies of the Mission Creed study guide or download and photocopy the relevant pages. Ask members to read the Bible passages below.

We believe in God's mission;
We are commissioned by God,
Creator, Saviour, Holy Spirit,
Source of the mission we seek
to fulfil.

Something to read

*Luke 4: 18-19; Matthew 5:13-16; Matthew 13:33;
2 Corinthians 2:14-16; John 10: 10*

Something to think about

Spirituality is life in the Spirit, that is, living by the Breath of God. A spirituality of and for mission will be grounded on the understanding that mission belongs to God and that we are called to participate in God's mission, enabled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The selected texts point us to aspects of mission spirituality that you will wish to further reflect upon. There is the well-known manifesto or mission statement of Jesus (Luke 4:18-19) with God's Spirit leading Jesus to preach good news, release captives and oppressed, restore sight and release people from debts. Within this framework we can then locate the metaphors of 'salt', 'light' (Matthew 5:13-16) and 'yeast' (Matthew 13:33) to describe dimensions to the Christian walk of mission spirituality. As walkers of

the 'Jesus Way', it is the aroma of the risen one, affirming the fragrance of life (2 Corinthians 2:14-16) that propels Christian communities to the way of abundant life for all (John 10:10).

Therein are signs of the shapes of spirituality for mission for us to contemplate on.

- Mission spirituality locates us in uncomfortable places – on the side of justice, demanding that we place all our resources in countering evil and agents of death. A spirituality of mission is essentially one of overflowing and expansive grace that counters restrictive agendas.
- Mission spirituality is about presence and engagement. It includes genuine friendship with those living on the other side of the border (poor, marginalised, excluded) and includes a dialogue-of-life with them as they struggle for dignity, freedom and community.

- A spirituality of mission calls for openness and responsiveness to the message of Jesus and to the reality of complex and interrelated contexts.
- Mission spirituality will be more concerned with presenting good news embodied in walking or living the talk rather than in talking the talk.
- Mission spirituality resembles the intense awareness and concern about any shortage of wine, bread, water, rice, joy, life and honour in the whole of life. Full life begins here!
- Mission spirituality is the ability to imagine a counter script of our creating and saving God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Susan Hope identifies some indicators of people living a mission spirituality. Among them are:

- **Knowing what they are for and about**
- **Living with trust**
- **Contemplative activists**
- **Travelling light**
- **Two by Two (Community)**
- **Dependence: Prayer and the Holy Spirit**
- **Branded with a message**
- **Robust faith**
- **Joyfully serious and seriously joyful**
- **Embracing adventure and risk – the apostolic way.**

Susan Hope, Mission-Shaped Spirituality: the transforming power of mission (Church House Publishing, 2007)

**Read and reflect on chapter 4 of
Mission-Shaped Spirituality [pp.22-24]**

Something to do

1. **Inhabited by the Word:** following Jesus is an invitation to welcome, listen to, meditate upon and be transformed by the Word who is Life. *Select a portion of Scripture, inhabit and let yourself be inhabited by the words.*
2. **Marked by faith:** following Jesus is an invitation to keep his story in our faithfulness alive. *Reflect on the times when you have kept his story alive*
3. **Challenged by mutual love:** following Jesus is an invitation to demonstrate love to all around us – starting with those closest to us. *Consider ways in which you can widen your circle of love*
4. **Ready to face challenges:** following Jesus is an invitation dare to risk and experience costly grace. Name the moments when it was easier to take the easier options. *Commit yourself to one act of costly discipleship.*
5. **Filled with the Spirit:** following Jesus is an invitation to become vulnerable – to be open to and be filled with the Spirit. *Reflect on the times when you preferred your way rather than the uncomfortable pull of the Spirit's way.*

Something to pray for

Pray for

- for mission that will gather into the chalice of our hearts the tears of all that excludes, lifted up for God to see, bless and transform into a cup of abundant life and living;
- for examples of salt-quality and leaven capable missional lives to take shape and flow outwards transforming hearts and structures enabling the earth become fine bread for the feast of God, the feast of people;
- for lives that invest in interiority that will respond with joy to the invitation of Jesus to “come and see” where he dwells and is leading us towards.

Resources

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Permissions have been sought for:

a) *A Four Directions Prayer of the People*

[Adapted by CEARN from *For the Healing of the Land*, Rupert's Land Indigenous Council, 2003.]

Taken from the Canadian Council of Churches website:
<http://www.ccc-cce.ca/english/justice/racism.htm>

b) *Poem Road to Emmaus*

Sandra R Duguid, *In America* 188:15 (April 27, 2003).
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http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2942

