

Re-Imagining Church Discussion Questions

New Year 2019 (30 December - 02 February)

Our theme for the New Year is 'Re-Imagining Church' taking the theme from our [January conference](#). We will be exploring ways of renewing, revitalising, and restarting 'church' beyond boundaries and outwith walls. What is church anyway? Why do we do it?

Over five weeks we will wrestle with questions of what it means to be and do church in 2019. We will consider where we can celebrate tradition and where we can champion new emerging practices.

We will ask:

- What does it mean to *bear with* one another?
- What's it like to have an epiphany?
- Do we have enough of a sense of drama?
- Shall we rediscover the romance?
- How do we cultivate and celebrate diversity, unity and vitality?

The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [Re-Imagining Church Resource Pack](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. They are divided into 5 parts to correspond with the 5 weeks of the Daily Worship theme.

These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose what interests your group.

| Part 1: Bearing with... Bearing witness... Bearing fruit... | | |
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| <p>Conversation starter:</p> <p>This month we are exploring the idea of 'church'. What is 'church' and what does it mean to you?</p> <p>Read Colossians 3: 12-17</p> <p>How do you <i>bear with</i> someone? What is involved?</p> <p>What do you make of the clothing metaphor in verses 12 and 14? Is it different to 'wear' these attributes that are listed here, as opposed to simply 'having' them?</p> | <p>Read Acts 1: 6-11</p> <p>The would-be-apostles are standing around, jaws hanging open, looking intently at where Jesus was, not where he is calling them to go now. It takes a nudge from 'two men dressed in white' to prompt them to get moving.</p> <p>If two men in white turned up in the middle of our local church now - what do you think they would say to us?</p> <p>The apostles are called to be witnesses - what have you witnessed of God so far in your life?</p> | <p>Read Ezekiel 17: 22-24</p> <p>Do we use our imagination enough when we think about church?</p> <p>Do we imagine a local church or a national denomination that is exactly like it is currently (in structure, form, and shape) but with 25% more attendees and a 33% bigger budget? Or are our imaginations more limited even than that? Can we only imagine a church that is treading water - holding steady?</p> <p>What's described in Ezekiel is not a caged bird looking at a mirror... it is expansive boughs wide enough and strong enough that every kind of bird can live there.</p> <p>How can we develop and adapt church so that an ever wider variety of birds can rest there?</p> <p>Let's think big, using the gift of our imaginations...</p> |

| Part 2: Having an epiphany! | | |
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| <p>Read Matthew 2: 1-12</p> <p>This week is <i>Epiphany</i> in the Church calendar, marking the visit of the wisemen to the infant Jesus. We are going to use it as a prompt to think about moments of epiphany, or sudden realisation, when we experience the joy of finding what we have been looking for, or what we didn't realise we were looking for...</p> <p>Like the wisemen, when we re-imagine church we travel with gifts.</p> <p>What gifts do you bring to a re-imagined church?</p> | <p>Read Acts 11: 1-18</p> <p>In verse 17 Peter says "...who was I that I could hinder God?" Peter has an epiphany - he has been putting limitations on God, setting up barriers of who is 'in' and who is 'out'.</p> <p>In what ways do our prejudices and preconceptions hinder God? Where do we draw lines and set up walls? Both as individuals and as church communities.</p> <p>How can we follow Peter's example and let go of these attempts to hinder God?</p> | <p>Read Matthew 3: 1-6</p> <p>Verse 3 says: "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."</p> <p>Is the light of our churches bright enough that people can see it? Or do folk have to squint to see it? Is our light sometimes behind closed, locked doors?</p> <p>If strangers came now to our church - bearing Gold and Frankincense and other gifts, what kind of welcome would they receive?</p> |

| Part 3: Fire, water, voices, drama! | | |
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| <p>Read Isaiah 43:1-7</p> <p>Churches, like any longstanding cultural institution, can sometimes be cautious and risk averse - tending towards stability and predictability, but as we can see in the readings this week - a life in pursuit of God's plans is full of surprise, transformation and the unexpected - in short - <i>drama</i>.</p> <p>How can we get better, in our churches, and across wider society, at responding to and adapting to times of crisis and drama?</p> <p>A life following God is not without its risks, there may be fire and there may be flood, but God will be with us throughout and there on the other side.</p> <p>How should a re-imagined church negotiate difficult and stressful times?</p> | <p>Read Luke 3:15-22</p> <p>Baptism is a dramatic event. The description in the reading is certainly very dramatic... but every baptism is a pivotal moment in the drama of our lives.</p> <p>Like other momentous life events, such as weddings and funerals, baptisms are condensed stories that explain how we got to where we are now. This sense of drama is important as it highlights a key turning point, making it memorable.</p> <p>These stories help us learn about ourselves and the community we belong to. What are the key stories in the history of our church? What were the key moments of drama that shaped the community?</p> | <p>Read Ezekiel 37: 1-14</p> <p>Sometimes we are called to see life in places where others can only see death, disintegration and decay.</p> <p>Looking around your local community - where do you want to see new life? Where do you want to see resurrection?</p> |

| Part 4: Wedding, wine, wings, and worship! | | |
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| <p>Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11</p> <p>Paul describes here individual gifts that are given for the common good. In our churches we each have an individual part to play but in a shared project - we rely on one another.</p> <p>Why are we given different gifts?</p> <p>How do we balance the contributions of individuals and the needs of the whole community?</p> | <p>Read John 2:1-11</p> <p>In contemporary Scottish culture (and in much of the world) church occasions for the last several decades have been often associated with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cold • restraint • prudishness • judging others <p>Whereas in this reading we see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • warmth • excess • generosity • welcome <p>What would a church directly inspired by the Wedding at Cana look like?</p> | <p>Read Psalm 36:5-10</p> <p>The cry of verse 7 is deeply evocative, using romantic and poetic language: "How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings."</p> <p>The choice of the word 'wings' here is striking. Rather than another word such as 'walls', 'fortress', 'shield', or 'arms', why use the word 'wings'?</p> <p>Are our churches spaces where people may take refuge?</p> |

| Part 5: Diversity, unity and vitality | | |
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| <p>Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-30</p> <p>Paul's image of one body - made of many distinct but complimentary parts - offers a compelling way of thinking about church. The human body is a living, thrumming example of diversity and unity with all the components working both independently and together.</p> <p>What makes a healthy, vital church body?</p> <p>Spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically?</p> <p>How can we work on the fitness of our church body?</p> | <p>Read Proverbs 16: 24</p> <p>Words can be powerful healers.</p> <p>How can we use our words like honeycomb to heal division, heartbreak, and animosity in our churches and the other communities we are a part of?</p> | <p>Read Acts 2: 1-13</p> <p>A scene where multiple languages express one central truth in many different ways. This is another compelling example of unity through diversity, where difference does not undermine unity but actually broadens and strengthens it.</p> <p>How can we re-imagine church in diverse, multi-lingual, multi-cultural ways - that doesn't compromise its central purpose but actually affirms and deepens that purpose?</p> <p>And what is that purpose anyway?</p> |