



Local Church Review Worship

Devotions for Sunday worship or LCR Team training sessions:

As we come to understand the Local Church Review process and indeed come together to form review teams, Ecclesiastes helps to set the spiritual background with the expressions of 'time' – everything has a time.

Scripture reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Making use of some of the words from 2012's Pray Now, let us ground our training in prayer. Let us pray:

Prayer:

Dear Lord,

As we gather here in this place,

We all come with differing expectations, thoughts and feelings.

May we be reminded that what we do

We do for the glory of your kingdom,

And as we work in service and explore mission with our congregations,

Like seeds we need to give support and care,

We need to nurture those ideas.

We also need to know when to leave well alone, too.

Enable us to have the patience and understanding

that sometimes the work we do doesn't come to fruition until later

As only you Lord see all things to their conclusion;

Ideas shoot up like crocuses in our minds,

Hope like an acorn in our hearts

And our souls are sewn in love.

Bless the new things we begin

And the new things that we feel.

Bless our work with local church reviews

That your will may be known

And that all parties involved are inspired towards the mission and advancement of your church within our communities.

May every seed of your spirit come to flower and flourish within us.

Amen



Some scriptural words to think about as you move into your visioning and planning for your congregation and wider community:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-5

1 Peter 2: 4-6

Prayer for the beginning of the planning session:

Gracious God

We come here, gathered together with one purpose:

To advance your kingdom here in our communities.

We acknowledge and give thanks for all that has gone before –

Our church stories, our history, our fellowship,

Connections made through your will,

People brought to faith and supported in their journey –

And we pray for the lives still to know you and recognise your love for them.

To build your church with people

Takes skill, craft, commitment and patience.

For we know that no two people are the same –

We learn differently, we think differently,

We engage and respond differently.

Despite the unusual building material,

The house of God has firm foundations in Christ,

And the walls that accommodate those of every size and shape,

Varying talents and hopes,

Diverse opinions and none,

The introvert and the extrovert,

With age and gender no barrier to being included.

So enable us, inspire and guide us

As we come together a community in Christ

To set down our plans, our visions for our church and community.

May this be a place where all talents and ideas

Are recognised and welcomed,

Secured in the foundation of your love and care for us.

Amen



Devotions for the ministers' LCR group meeting:

Recognising the work carried out in God's name and acknowledging holistically the person answering the call and giving service.

Scripture reading from Philippians 1:1-11

Prayer for the ministerial teams in the congregation:

Lord God,

We give thanks for all those who serve you:

For our ministers here today,

For the work they do and the communities they serve.

How blessed we are in this presbytery for those in your service

Who teach, who support and who give comfort,

Enabling the people in their parish and beyond,

Helping to shape the people we are today and will be tomorrow,

Shaping souls for Christ.

As Christ lived and taught, people realised and recognised God among them.

So today, Lord, we give thanks

For all who patiently and tirelessly strive to build your kingdom.

No man or woman is an island and bringing people to faith

Requires energy, insight, vision and hard work.

And in those moments when we are weary,

Enable us Lord to know that we are assured of your support,

That you equip those around us,

Often the most unlikely to serve.

Words of reassurance can come from the strangest of places, but nonetheless they reassure.

You supply us with family, friends and colleagues,

Showing us we are not alone

As nothing can separate us from the love of God.

We are a community in Christ.

Amen



Sermon Starters

Sermon 1:

Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 13:1-9

Dream dreams. Dare to dream. When the bible talks of God's Dream, that is the Kingdom of God, it often uses small images to begin with such as yeast and seeds. How many images in the bible are about seeds and beginnings and starters for things? Tell their stories: fishermen, yeast, mustard seed, sower etc.

You can get stuck sowing seeds, however. It is not a healthy place not to see beyond what we do with seeds. Once the seed have been sown, then we need to choose to nurture them. How do you let an idea grow? How did Jesus imagine and grow the kingdom? What is our place in that in our local area?

Sermon 2:

Matthew 22:36-40

Love your neighbour is a founding principle of Christianity and for most other mainline religions. It can be quite theoretical and abstract however, talking about it a lot but doing little about turning the idea into a way of living. What if 'loving your neighbour' was written as a number of steps? Perhaps the first step would be: 'get to know your neighbour'?

In being church, how much is believing that principle of loving neighbour, and how much is the practical action of getting to know your neighbour? When does the theory of faith turn into an act of faith? In what way is your own congregation being shaped in order to enable that to happen? What resources are there? What do you do with new ideas? Who has God gifted you to have the ideas and who has God gifted you with to make practical those ideas?

Sermon 3:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-12; Mark 1:16-20

Starting where we are. Jesus started the kingdom building with a few disciples on the beach, with Zacchaeus in his tree, with Paul at the stoning of Stephen. There is no perfect place to start building the kingdom except in the very place we find ourselves. Look around your faith community and neighbourhood and find the starters of God's Kingdom. Here is where God has placed you to discern the work of the spirit. What shall your faith community give the spirit to use? What openness will be offered? What do we need to hold on to and what must we lay down in order for that start to begin?

The following are some ideas to use in worship as the Local Church Review process gets underway.

Creative Activity 1:

Creative activity of laying down and picking up.

Local Church Review can be quite a cathartic experience, with the opportunity to renew who we are. Provide a table on which there is a white sheet and a lit candle. In a different part of the worship space provide a table covered in a whole lot of different objects or images of these objects such as keys, stones, books, hymn book, candle, shoe, hat, map, compass, computer, cup, paper, coloured crayons, money etc.



The idea is simply to enable a congregation to lay down those things they wish to give up to God: those things in the congregation that have passed their sell-by date for that particular person and lay it down on the table with the cloth and candle. That could be done by drawing or writing those things on slips of paper and laying them down.

Following that by inviting people to go to the other table and pick up an object (or image of that object) that speaks to them about the future, something they think the church should 'pick up' and explore and journey with. It doesn't necessarily mean something that will be done, but something to explore, learn from the experience. These objects can represent a whole host of things and in small groups people can explain what that object means to them in the context of the congregation. Take a note of these ideas in each group and the local church review group can use them to explore the future with the congregation.

Creative Activity 2:

Celebrating the life of a congregation

A simple activity of celebrating those things that give life to the congregation. Create a large tub of peat or growing material. Give everyone a lollypop stick and a pen and some seed. Invite people to reflect on those things that they celebrate because they give the congregation life. Invite them to write those things on the lollypop stick and then sow their seeds in the growing material and plant the stick beside them.

Ask someone to take a note of all the celebrations and someone to care for the tub of seeds and watch them grow over the season.

Creative Activity 3:

This idea is to create a tree with fruit of the future hanging on it. It is a way of gathering ideas.

Place a number of tree branches into a bucket or stones (so they stand up) to represent a tree or bush. Give everyone in the congregation a slip of paper with the image of a piece of fruit. Invite people to draw or write something they have always longed about the church, or a dream they have had for the church. It can be as traditional or random as they wish. The idea is to create some imagination. During some music, or during the singing of a song such as 'Here I am Lord' invite people to hang those pieces of fruit on the tree.

Following the service, during a session meeting or preferably a Local Church Review meeting with the whole congregation, lay all these ideas on a table and people are invited to choose two of them, write each idea on a post-it note and place them on a wall. From these the group can then see the two most popular ideas or challenges. Perhaps these two could be used to shape a journey for the congregation over the course of local church review.