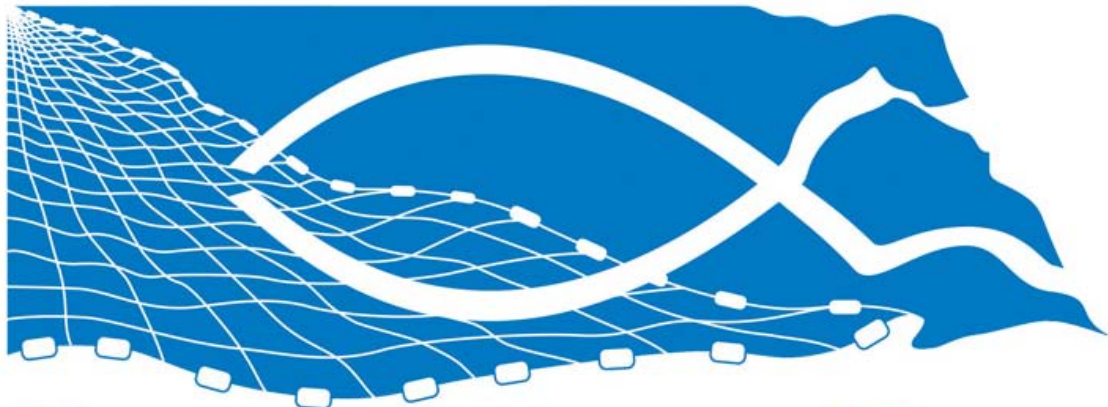




# SHARING OUR FAITH

A short study course



**CASTING THE NET**  
Growing Faith Communities in the Diocese of St. Andrews

## **SHARING OUR FAITH**

(Partly adapted from J. Young, *Explore your Faith*)

One of the Nine Marks of Mission in our Casting the Net programme is:

**Sharing faith by confident and sensitive evangelism,  
*witnessing to God's presence and power***

But why, when and how do we go about it?

'Evangelism' can be a scary or even off-putting word, something that we would rather leave to others. But hear the words of Matthew 28:19 -

*"Go and make disciples of all nations ..."*

In our increasingly secular society, we cannot assume that people know the 'Good news of Christ'. Most people have only the haziest idea of what Christianity is about. We urgently need to share our faith with those around us, to offer them the vision and hope that is our Christian joy.

### **(1) What is 'evangelism'?**

The word comes from the Greek '*eu-angelion*' - 'good-news' / 'Gospel'. In the New Testament, the Good News is God's revelation of peace and blessing, forgiveness and life in Christ, entrusted to us to share and spread with others.

*"The Church is the only organisation which exists for the benefit of those who are not its members."*

(Archbishop Temple)

### **Why should we share this Good News?**

*Consider some passages from the New Testament:*

'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.' (*John 3:16*)

'For Christ's love urges us on, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.' (*2 Corinthians 5:14-15*)

'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 1:8)

'How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?' (Romans 10:14)

Try using these passages to form a mission statement (about 50-60 words) for your congregation.

There are different ideas of what evangelism means today. Which of these statements do you agree with, and which do you disagree with?

Evangelism is about deeds, not just words	Evangelism is not preaching Christianity but offering Christ	Evangelism is talking about the Church's doctrines of God
Evangelism is sharing Jesus Christ	Evangelism is to help people get on with others	Evangelism means missions and campaigns to fill the churches
Evangelism is gossiping about the Gospel to our neighbour	Evangelism is forcing religion down people's throats	Evangelism means explaining that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is good news from God
Evangelism is telling people that they are sinners	Evangelism means witnessing to Christ in word and action	Evangelism is just being there as a Christian in the community
Evangelism is filling our pews in order to boost our church finances	Evangelism is standing on a street corner preaching	Evangelism means leading someone to a commitment to Christ



### (3) Here am I ... send somebody else!

Read through these statements about sharing your faith and note any that best describe your own position.

- (a) I am afraid I will offend others.
- (b) I really don't know what to say.
- (c) I feel that it isn't my job to talk to others about Christ.
- (d) I don't have much contact with people who are not Christians.
- (e) I don't think I have answers to the questions people might ask.
- (f) I don't think my relationship with God is strong enough.
- (g) I am afraid of being rejected or laughed at.
- (h) People will think I am a hypocrite.
- (i) I wouldn't know how to begin a conversation about Jesus.
- (j) I would feel embarrassed.
- (k) I am just not motivated enough to share my faith.
- (l) I don't like setting myself up as an expert.
- (m) I believe Christianity is a private matter and not something to be talked about.
- (n) My non-Christian friends seem happy enough without Jesus.
- (o) .... (*add your own statements ...*)

Most of these comments relate either:

*to ourselves:* e.g. 'I would be embarrassed'

*to others:* e.g. 'I might cause offence'

*to the message:* e.g. 'I don't know the answers'

Which is the most important issue for you?

Some of the Bible's language might suggest we have different responsibilities in the church anyway:

*The gifts He gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.*

*(Ephesians 4:11-12)*

Are we all called to be evangelists?

Some make a distinction between an *evangelist* and a *witness*.  
How might we distinguish them?

*Here are some ideas:*

- An evangelist creates opportunities to speak about the faith;  
a witness responds to questions
- An evangelist can tell God's story with confidence;  
a witness can tell their own story.

Is this distinction helpful - or does it just give most of us an easy escape?  
When might 'witness' become 'evangelism'?  
What gifts do you need to be an evangelist? or a witness?

*And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it.*

*(1 Peter 3:15)*

**Ponder this parable by Bill Thrasher:**

Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen. And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. Week after week, these who called themselves fishermen met in meetings. They talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. One thing they did not do: they did not fish.

After tedious training many graduated and were given fishing licences. They were sent to do some full-time fishing, some to distant waters which were filled with fish. But, like the fishermen back home, they never fished.

After one stirring meeting on 'The Necessity of Fishing', one young fellow left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported that he had caught two outstanding fish. He was honoured for his excellent work and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it. So he stopped his fishing in order to have time to talk about his experience to the other fishermen.

Now it is true that many of the fishermen sacrificed much and put up with all kinds of difficulties. Some lived near the water and put up with the smell of dead fish every day. They received the ridicule of some who made fun of their fishermen's club.

Imagine how hurt they were when one day a person suggested that those who did not catch fish were not really fishermen, however much they claimed to be. Can you be a fisherman if you never catch fish?

#### (4) The journey of faith

Our own journeys of faith are an important resource for evangelism: they provide a story to tell to those we encounter, and they can point to ways in which our encounters can be more effective.

##### **My story:**

Look back over your own experience and note:

- when did I first become aware of God's reality?
- when has my faith been most alive and full of meaning?
- what life events helped me on my spiritual journey?
- who has been significant in leading me closer to God?
- what is moving me forward now in my relationship with God?

*When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, 'Woman, you are set free from your ailment.' When he laid his hands upon her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. (Luke 13:13)*

Practise sharing your story with a fellow-Christian.

##### **My story as an example of coming to faith:**

Think about your own journey of faith, and write down:

- ✓ the main one or two factors that led you to faith in Christ
- ✓ any supporting factors
- ✓ any factors that you know have been important for other people

*e.g.* Family members (which?)      Bible      A dream or vision  
Godparents      Minister/Priest      School  
Illness      Church activities (what kind?)      Drama, music, books

*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. (2 Timothy 1:5)*

Are there some times and stages of life when we are more open to faith?

List (i) **key life events** that might cause people to think about God

(ii) **the faith questions** that we might have at different ages

*Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah ... Philip began to speak and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed the good news about Jesus ... (Acts 8:27-35)*

Consider too:

(iii) **what spiritual needs** people have today - what is lacking?

*A man was there called Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but because of the crowd he could not, because he was short of stature ... (Luke 19: 2 ff)*

What does all this suggest about **likely opportunities** for us to share our faith as a congregation and as individuals?

Consider the following scenarios, and think about:

the life event they are experiencing; the questions they might be asking; their spiritual needs; how your own story might help you engage with them

- (a) A young couple have just had their first baby. They have no Christian background but are amazed at the wonder of their new arrival and feel nervous about coping with the responsibilities of parenthood.
- (b) A man with a teenage family has just become unemployed. He has no hope of another job and is beginning to feel useless, frustrated and rejected.
- (c) A parent whose teenage child has just died in tragic circumstances.
- (d) A couple who are happily married with good jobs and a nice home. They have no apparent problems.
- (e) An old person who lives alone, and who equates Christianity with being British, with doing good to others and who has 'always tried her best'.

*"Evangelism means carrying Jesus in your heart and giving the presence of Jesus to someone else"*  
**(attributed to Mother Teresa)**

## (5) The faith we share

It is one thing to share a journey of faith, but another to answer the questions that may follow. Our faith is nourished by **worship** and hearing **the Bible**, by **exploring faith** when there is opportunity, by **reading** and **reflecting** and **talking** with other Christians. We may still feel unprepared for questions from enquirers!

*Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.*  
(Mark 13:11)

But it is a good idea to think about how we might answer possible questions.

e.g.: **“What is this ‘Good News’ you talk about?”**

Try to put together the key elements of the Gospel; these words may help:

peace	sacrifice	church	goodness
Jesus	anxiety	forgiveness	love
sacrifice	blessing	sin	evil
life and death	suffering	obedience	Spirit
disciple	healing	welcome	family
reconcile	world	salvation	renew

### **‘What is a Christian?’**

- a friend of Jesus?
- a moral person?
- a follower of Christ?
- someone who is saved?
- a baptised believer?
- a servant of Jesus?
- a churchgoer?

*A Christian is not only a good and well-intentioned person but a man or a woman for whom Jesus Christ is ultimately decisive; for whom Jesus – not Caesar, not another god, not money, sex, power or pleasure – is Lord.*

(Hans Küng)

## ***‘Why should I become a Christian?’***

Think about what difference being a Christian makes to your life.

You could look at:

vision / perspective / relationships / meaning / mystery / compassion  
trust / spirituality / courage / serenity / creation / having and giving / love

You might want to group your ideas under these headings:

*the purpose of my life*  
*my view of the world*  
*how I relate to other people*  
*my sense of who I am*  
*the balance of my life*

How do the words 'God', 'Jesus', 'Spirit' come into the sentences you would use?

The impact of Christianity on a person's life can be puzzling and disturbing to others. They may have to explain why the difference that Christianity makes is important and valuable. How would you support a new Christian who is experiencing negative comments?

for example:

*“You’re going through a mid-life crisis. You’ll get over it soon.”*

*“You go to church all the time now – it’s all church, church, church.”*

*“You’d have more time and money if you gave up Christianity”*

*“You don’t have to be a Christian to be a good person.”*

*“Christianity is just therapy for losers.”*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*(Matthew 5:10)*

## **(6) Casting the Net**

The 'fishermen' in the parable above (3) never actually got around to fishing. So it is important now to turn from broad reflection to specific planning, and then to go out and 'Cast the Net'.

### **Yourself**

Think back to section (3). You have been called by God to 'cast the net', and you have been given the gifts that you need.

Looking honestly at yourself, note:

- ✓ the gifts that you have that equip you to be a witness
- ✓ the gifts that you have to be an evangelist
  
- Now try to discern the gifts that you have not yet developed
  
- ❖ Finally, note one aspect of knowledge or practice that you still need, and resolve to acquire it in the next six months

Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be;  
set your seal upon my heart and live in me.

*(John Bell)*

### **Your 'fish'**

There are lots of 'fish' out there that God is calling you to seek. Around you, there are family members, friends, work colleagues, neighbours, people you meet in the street, in shops, in the park, in hospital, at school. Think back to section (4) and the journey of faith they might be on.

Reflecting hopefully on the people you know, identify:

- ✓ who God has placed near to you, or who seems to come to mind
- ✓ where in the journey of faith they might be
  
- Now try to discern how God is calling you to engage with them
  
- ❖ Finally, note how you need to prepare for this - especially in prayer

## Your church

Think back to section (4). The church and church events can be a significant factor in drawing people to faith in Christ. An imaginative church can provide interesting and non-threatening ways to welcome people.

Think about your own church and identify:

- ✓ events that you could invite non-churchgoers to
- ✓ welcoming aspects of your church
  
- Now think about some new ways that you can come into contact with enquirers and invite people in

e.g.:

Question Time panel on life/current issues

looking out for newcomers to the area

lunch club

toddlers' group

flower/wedding/music/ etc festival

exhibition

Back to Church Sunday

Harvest Festival / Creation service

shared meal / Fairtrade wine tasting or fashion show

- ❖ Lastly, list one new thing that you are going to do as a congregation, and fix the details, e.g.: date; place; who will be involved; what equipment is needed; what hospitality is needed; who will invite; who will be invited; what publicity is needed; who will pray for it

## **(7) And finally ...**

Stephen Cottrell wrote a book on leadership called *'Hit the ground kneeling'*. The title reminds us that all our thoughts and plans and energy are pointless without God's direction and blessing. God is already in the world, reconciling it and calling us to join in (2 Corinthians 5:19). Through prayer, we are filled with the Spirit and guided to 'cast the net' for God and with God.

So: may all our study and sharing and service begin and continue in prayer. Pray for those who are searching for God; pray for the Church as a place of encounter with Christ; pray for yourself that the Spirit may live in you.