



**Handbook for  
Home Group Members**

# Introduction

Home Groups have been a key part of the life of St Mary's for many years. Many of us have found meeting with a small group of Christians midweek essential in our life of faith, an experience reflected in churches all around the world. Research has found that small groups work most effectively when underpinned by the following values:

## Small Group Values

- A** All Involved: every member in ministry
- B** Becoming Disciples: discerning God's will for us and following Christ
- C** Creating Community: sharing lives and building relationships
- D** Doing Evangelism: sharing God's love with others
- E** Encountering Jesus: realising the reality of his presence with us

This booklet will help you to understand the structure of a normal home group meeting, using the values above, and giving you a with a variety of resources to help take your part in an "all involved" group. You'll never be asked to lead a whole meeting, but we hope that everyone will be able to find a 'W' they can do from time to time. Small groups generally provide lots of support for learning new things so why not 'give it a go' and try something new – you might very well surprise yourself!

Home group meetings are usually divided into four different sections, sometimes called "The Four W's". This booklet has a short introduction to the essence of each, followed by a list of potential ideas, with the exception of 'Word' for which you'll be given a bible passage from your home group leader.

## The Four 'W's':

Welcome  
Worship  
Word  
Witness

# Witness *(looking outwards)*

Home Groups should never just be about those who come—there needs to be space for looking outwards too. A small group can encourage us to be faithful and enthusiastic about sharing our faith with others. How about:

Writing down three people individuals will commit to pray for regularly – perhaps those close to us, or those in particular need or who have questions about the Christian faith or church. In future the lists can be brought out again to catch up on how God might have answered prayer.

Sharing situations when we've been asked about church or our faith, how we responded and praying for the people involved.

If there is a social coming up, thinking of one or two people we might invite to it, and praying that they'll come!

Planning that social event – if there are people you'd like to invite what would they come to?

We can see witness in a wider context than this, though. Here are some general ideas for how your group might relate more positively to our church, our community and the wider world around us:

Someone in the group shares how they are involved in helping the local community in some way, in their work, or in a voluntary capacity. The group can then pray for them.

Invite someone from a ministry at St Mary's the group doesn't know a lot about (or even a representative from a wider organisation) to come and talk about what they do, how they need help and what they might need prayer for.

As a group, consider getting involved in an activity within the life of St Mary's, either as a one-off or a more regular commitment.

How might the group best respond to a humanitarian disaster, seasonal need (e.g. Christmas shoe box appeal), or charity event (e.g. Comic Relief).

Become a 'link' to one of St Mary's mission partners.

Get involved with some kind of community action as a group, considering meeting at a different time to do something practical.

rephrase it in a different way before you move on to the next question.

### ***When Interpretation is Controversial or Difficult***

Try to affirm people's answers, even if they are a little unusual. Never reject someone's contribution outright. If people are going off on an unhelpful tangent don't be afraid of gently bringing them back to the subject.

Encourage different responses to questions – some issues are controversial and people are bound to disagree, whilst varied contributions will almost always be more fulfilling than one person's clear-cut answer.

Sometimes the passage will say things which it's hard to accept at face value. Consider asking questions like these:

Does the application depend on the situation?

Was this an instruction for a specific situation which no longer applies?

Is there another bible passage which is clearer or more helpful on this issue?

### ***At the End***

Sometimes the discussion will come naturally to an end early or on time, but more often you will need to stop before you have completely finished. This is no bad thing and *Word* should never dominate the evening, but if the discussion is particularly fruitful your Home Group leader may consider letting it 'run on' a bit.

Consider ending the discussion in prayer, perhaps with a period of silence for people to consider God's challenge for them, or a brief prepared prayer based on a verse of the passage. Occasionally a longer period of reflection and prayer might be appropriate, perhaps breaking into twos and threes, but your Home Group leader will usually make the decision on this.

There are plenty more ideas where these came from, especially at this very good website:

<http://www.cell-ideas.co.uk/meetings.html>

but you may find that you want to adapt or invent your own.

Generally each meeting will have each of the four 'W's in order, but your group could try mixing them up or even missing one out at times, especially if that 'W' took a long time at a previous meeting. Occasionally you might want to dedicate a whole meeting to one 'W', e.g. an evening of prayer and worship, in fact you might see a home group social as being particularly about *Welcome*.

### ***A note on prayer***

Prayer for each other, for our own needs and those of others around us, is essential for the makeup of any church small group, but does not always relate to one specific 'W'. Often groups count prayer for each other as the *Worship* slot, but done exclusively this can narrow what can be the most creative and moving part of the evening. Perhaps this 'sharing time' can sometimes be seen in a context of welcome, but it can also naturally follow a bible study where people are asked to share the impact of the bible passage on their lives, and praying about sharing our faith with our friends is a natural *Witness* activity. It won't be possible (or wise) to have all of these things each time, but leaders will want to encourage some element of praying for each other as part of every Home Group meeting.

*Rich Burley, April 2013*

## Welcome (*"getting to know you..."*)

Welcome is a hugely important part of small group life, especially in a group's early stages, but whilst well established groups might not always need a special activity (other than tea and chat!) 'ice breakers' can help a group to continue to bond by revealing things that normal conversation might not. Equally 'Welcome' provides a non-threatening way for less confident or quieter members of the group to be fully involved, and is particularly helpful for allowing new members to feel part of proceedings.

There are hundreds of potential 'Welcome' ideas, either in the form of an activity, a question or a 'show and tell' of which the following are only a sample – why not think up your own that would work really well with your group?

Jenga – simple but effective!

What is your favourite song and why?

How did you get your worst scar?

The worst and best things to happen in the week

A Memories Evening (e.g. guess group members from baby pictures)

Discuss DIY disasters

Get people to bring in an item from home which represents how they feel about their faith or how their day/week has been

Get everyone to stand up then sit down in a different order e.g. by height, how far their place of birth was from Wythall

Which is the most beautiful location you have ever visited?

Which famous person would you like to spend an evening with?

When you were a child what did you tell people that you wanted to do when you grew up?

As a child what earned you the biggest telling off?

If you could save one thing you own from a fire, what would it be?

How might Jesus have phrased that in Wythall in 2013?

## **During the Study**

Start with a prayer, asking God to help us hear, understand and apply His word.

Have the passage read aloud in full, either by one volunteer or taking a verse or paragraph each. People should be encouraged to bring their own bibles, but they needn't all have the same translation, in fact sometimes discussion is more interesting if they don't.

Use the questions you've prepared to guide the discussion but don't be bound by them. Some questions will be more fruitful than others, and other questions and issues you hadn't thought of will almost always arise. Sometimes you won't reach the end of your notes, but that's okay too. Remember God often works in mysterious ways!

Try to understand the dynamics of your group. Some people will naturally talk more than others and tend to learn by thinking 'out loud', whilst others prefer to consider in silence and are unlikely to say anything unless they're sure it's relevant. Don't force everyone to make contributions or put people 'on the spot'. What's important is that everyone is comfortable and has a chance to contribute if they want to. Sometimes this might mean gently interrupting one person in order to give space for another who you can tell by their body language wants to speak.

The larger the group, the more difficult some people find it to speak. If your group numbers 10-12 or more you might consider splitting up into smaller groups for discussion, in which case you might need printouts of the questions you've prepared. As an alternative you could give one question (or one bible verse) to each sub-group to think about, and then have feedback to the larger group.

Remember you're there primarily to lead, not to teach. Insights you've gained from your own study will be useful but shouldn't be presented as authoritative. Equally, don't be afraid of silence - gaps in discussion will seem longer to you than others, and some people need longer than others to let the question sink in. If the silence persists, resist the urge to answer your own question, but try to

Share each other's needs and those of people close to us, and pray for them, either all together or in twos and threes.

Record Songs of Praise and watch some of the highlights together.

Jan Watson has some books of creative resources for worship in small groups.

## **Word** *(or tips for leading a successful bible study)*

People are often put off from leading bible studies because they think they need either the 'gift of the gab' or a theology degree. Fortunately, neither is important! Leading successfully is more about helping to draw out insights from others than dazzling them with your own. The following tips will hopefully help you, but remember it's YOU God wants to use, not your 'perfect' method!

### **Before the Day**

Pray, that God will help you in your preparation and leading, and that each member of the group will hear His voice through the study.

Prepare. The golden rule of bible study is that you need to understand something of what the passage meant in its original context before you apply it to your own. Fortunately, brief, accessible background material is easy to come by – Tom Wright's 'For Everyone' series is particularly good for the New Testament. Also, avoid using either ultra traditional or ultra modern translations for study – NRSV (New Revised Standard Version), NIV (New International Version) or TNIV (Today's New International Version) are all fine.

Apply the passage to yourself. What did you find interesting/confusing/challenging? What issues arise from it that the group might find helpful to consider in their own lives? Draw up a few 'open' questions (e.g. no 'yes' or 'no' answers) which you think will help people engage with the text, things like:

What difference will that make in your place of work, family, with your neighbours, at church?

Is this an instruction that still applies today?

With which famous person would you least like to be stuck in a lift?

Which actor would you like to play you in the film of your life?

What is the worst job you have ever had?

If you had the time since we met last all over again, what would you do differently?

Describe yourself in four words

What music did you listen to in your teens?

Can you tell us a piece of good news that you could not keep to yourself but had to pass on?

What is your biggest or longstanding 'unfinished task'?

What do you like best about church?

What is the biggest crowd you have ever been in – where was it and why were you there?

What do you still want to accomplish with your life?

What ability do you possess which you like the most?

Who in the world or in history is a hero for you?

Think of one time when you found a criticism helpful.

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about God?

What is the most encouraging thing said to you this week?

Who in your life has been a memorable neighbour?

For what are you thankful?

Recall your first day at school.

Have you ever been given a gift that didn't cost much but meant a lot?

What would you like on the menu at the great supper?

Sum your day / week / year /life up in one short sentence (inspired by Twitter!)

## Worship *(not just talking about God, but talking to him!)*

When we think of worship we might first imagine lots of people in church, but there are plenty of ways we can worship God in smaller groups. Some ideas are louder; others may be quieter and simpler, but when leading it's important to ensure that worship is not rushed, and that the mood is prayerful. Here are a few ideas for starters:

Simple liturgy e.g. evening prayer, or Compline which is ideal at the end of a meeting. Anglican texts can found at:

<http://cofe.anglican.org/worship/liturgy/commonworship/texts/>

Having pictures of different modes of transport and choosing one to represent your spiritual journey.

Listening to worship music, perhaps beginning with a verse or short passage from scripture.

Meditation video or presentation on a laptop computer.

Re-Writing a verse each of a Psalm then saying it together.

Putting stones in the freezer, then warming them in your hand and feeling God's love warming you.

People bring their diaries, and put in them an 'appointment with God' for the near future.

Low lighting, Taize CD and candles

Lectio Divina – a monastic practice of slowly and prayerfully reading scripture – for tips on how to do it see here:

<http://www.laybenedictines.org/index.asp?id=872>

Sing hymns or worship songs either with guitar, keyboard, to a CD or unaccompanied.

Choose a Psalm of praise and either say it together, one verse each, with space in between verses for reflection, or have it read by someone slowly. Also works well with other poetic parts of scripture or the Lord's prayer.

Ask everyone to name the one thing they need that helps them come into God's presence - stillness, beautiful things, a symbol or icon, wild landscape, desert? Spend a little time thinking how to

spend more time with the real thing.

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, because.....? Count some blessings.

Spend time in intercession for those who are suffering bereavement, loneliness, homelessness or persecution, and others who find it difficult to celebrate.

Take a bible story, such as the stilling of the storm in Luke 8:22-25 or the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 and read it. Then take people back through the story slowly, scene by scene, asking people to imagine they were there at the time, having them reflect on their changing experiences and emotions. Finish with prayer and praise. Find out more about 'Ignatian prayer' here:

<http://www.prayerwindows.com/ignatian.html>

Ask people in advance to come prepared with a brief contribution to the worship, e.g. reading, song or prayer. In the worship time let people contribute when they feel it is appropriate.

Give each member a piece of plasticine or modelling clay, and ask them to make a shape or object that represents their relationship with God or what they feel about him. As each person puts their clay on the table they say something about their object as if they were saying it to God, either to the group or a partner.

Remind people that God can speak in many ways, including through what goes on in our minds. Read a verse or short passage of scripture then invite people to 'listen' to God in five minutes or so of silence, then allow them to share what God might have said, however small or insignificant it seems.

Use an object to focus on one aspect of God, e.g. a pottery vase reading Jeremiah 18:4.

Use a world map to invite prayers for different countries (especially those where there is currently trouble or unrest) and those people we know who live and work far away.

Pick a favourite devotional story or poem to either just read or read and reflect on, followed by silent or vocal prayer.