



Diocese of Bristol

† TRANSFORMING CHURCH.
TOGETHER.

Transforming Church. Together:

A short course.

**OPENNESS
GENEROSITY
CREATIVITY
BRAVERY**

Booklet I: Openness

“Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is old and what is new” - Matthew 13:52



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Space for notes

Introduction

This is the first of four booklets exploring the four values that have been discerned as part of the Transforming Church. Together process in the Diocese of Bristol.

This booklet explores the value of openness and how we are loving and open to all. It seeks to invite us both individually and as a group to ask how we can be open to all – where we see the door of our Churches open and be challenged where our doors are shut.

This session includes:

The Transforming Church. Together prayer to start the session.

An introduction to the value.

Opening questions for us individually and to discuss as a group.

Images to explore and reflect on the value.

Bible passages to be explored together on the value.

A prayer to finish the session.

Within this booklet is an opportunity to feedback to the Ministry Team and PCC your thoughts on the value of theme of openness within the context of your church.

This booklet is based on material provided by the Revd Dr Simon Taylor and the Revd Cheryl Hawkins.

The Transforming Church. Together prayer

You may wish to light a candle and use this prayer at the start of this session.

God of the Way, you call us to leave familiar places and to set out on new paths.

Enlarge our vision of your work in the communities we serve, speak to us through the people we encounter and open our hearts to the love.

Give us courage and boldness to engage together in this time of prayer and discernment, and by your Holy, life-giving, and creative Spirit, renew your church in prayer and service, and in sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.

Transforming Church. Together

Housegroup Feedback Form - Openness

STOP

What gets in the way of achieving this value at our church?

START

What should we start doing to show this value at our church?

CONTINUE

What should we continue doing to show this value at our church?

What words would you use to describe the value of openness in the context of our church?

Closing prayer

Silently sit and hold before God who or what God has placed on your heart during the session.

We pray together:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the Kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

Now and for ever.

Amen.

O Holy Spirit, giver of light and life.

impart to us thoughts better than our own thoughts,

and prayers better than our own prayers,

and powers better than our own powers,

that we may spend and be spent

in the ways of love and goodness,

after the perfect image of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

(Eric Milner-White and G W Briggs, Daily Prayer, 1941)

Openness

We are loving and open to all.

The image of a door that opens (and conversely, shuts) is found in many places in Scripture, during this study we will be exploring some of them, but to start with, to the lukewarm Church in Laodicea, St John the Divine, speaks of Jesus standing at a door and knocking.

“If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me” (Rev 3:20).

There is an invitation into relationship in these words. William Holman Hunt's painting of the Light of the World of this passage famously had no handle on the outside of the door. “The door of the human heart can only be opened from the inside” was the painter's explanation.

Before answering the opening questions take time to look at reflect on William Holman's painting on the next page.



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Discussion questions

1. We gather as a community around a table, in Eucharistic Prayer B the following words are said:

“He opened wide his arms for us on the Cross”.

How can the openness of God in Christ enable and encourage us in our openness?

2. How can we sit around tables that would make us feel uncomfortable? Are we prepared to be scandalously willing to do so?

The Open Door and the Welcoming Table - a warning

In Matthew 25 the bridesmaids who go to buy oil because they were foolish not to take oil with them, when they return the door was shut on them and Jesus' hearers are told to “keep awake... For you know neither the day nor the hour”

1. How do you see this as a warning for us as Christians in our openness?
2. Are we prepared for the hour when Christ calls upon us to be open to those that we meet both in Church and outside?
3. Have there been times when we have failed to act on what we have heard from Jesus' teaching.
4. Have we learnt from past failures when because of our foolishness those trying to enter have found our door shut and our table unwelcoming?

Take time:

Before moving on to the next section, take a moment in prayer to lift before God your discussions. For the things you have found helpful, for the things you have found challenging.

Sitting round the table:

Jesus is open to everyone, including and especially those on the margins and those looked down on by others. Jesus showed us his open approach to table fellowship which led to criticism from the religious authorities and gatekeepers of the time:

“Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (Mark 2:16)

In his table fellowship ministry, Jesus is never seen at his own table.

Explore one or more of the following passages:

- Mark 2: 15-17 Jesus is at Levi's table,
- Luke 19:1-7 Jesus invites himself to Zaccheaus' table.
- Luke 7: 36-50 Jesus accepts a place at the table of Simon the Pharisee and a woman who was “a sinner” came and anointed him.

Jesus sits at all these tables, he does not limit his ability to be open, there is a scandalous willingness of Jesus to eat with all kinds of people.

Opening questions

Who opened the door for you to belong to your Church Community, and can you remember your reaction at the time?

Write a list of everyone who opened doors for you including perhaps the person who first introduced you to Christ. What, or perhaps rather who, do you think motivated them?

Are there any situations that have closed the door for you in your faith and belonging to your Church Community and what did you learn from it?

Share briefly what you are comfortable with in answering the above questions with the rest of the group.

Reflecting on images

Below and on the next page are some images of doors, reflect quietly on them. Which one resonates with you the most and why? Does a different image come into your mind?

If you feel comfortable in doing so, share with the rest of the group.



“When he knocked at the outer gate, a maid name Rhoda came to answer. On recognising Peter`s voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the gate, she ran in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate”. (Acts 12:13-14)

1. Think about welcome - how good is the welcome at our Church?

2. Are we so overjoyed that someone new arrives that we miss something and shut the door?

3. If you were to visit another Church, what would a good welcome look like for you?

4. Are there times when we shut the door?

“Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking, and when they opened the gate, they saw him and were amazed. He motioned to them with his hand to be silent and described to them how the Lord had brought him out of prison”.

How easy do you find it to tell your story of how the Lord brought you to faith?

- Can you do that with openness and confidence?
- If not, what holds you back?
- If yes, share how you have gained that confidence.

How open are we to listening to each other`s stories?

- What are the challenges to listening to someone else`s story?
- How do we listen well?
- How do we honour someone else`s story which is different and challenging?
- How do we ensure we do not shut the door on someone else`s story?

Bible reading:

Opening the church door.

Context of Bible Reading:

Jesus has fulfilled his earthly ministry and has ascended back into Heaven. His remaining followers on earth have formed an early church to continue his work in extending the kingdom of God to all but they are seen as a threat to the authorities and are being persecuted and imprisoned.

Read out loud Acts 12: 1-17 leaving a short time for silence afterwards.

Discussion questions

You may wish to limit these to one to two questions per section depending on time.

“The very night before Herod was going to bring him out, Peter, bound with two chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison”. (Acts 12: 6)

- 1. How does the door of your Church feel – does it feel guarded and watched over?**
- 2. Are there positives and negatives to a watched-over door?**
- 3. Should some doors remain shut?**
- 4. When do you find (both individually and us as a Church) it hard to open doors?**





