

INSPIRING UNITY

Final Report of Pilot Evaluation 2016-17



**A course developed by the Ignatian Spirituality Centre Glasgow and
the Craighead Institute of Life and Faith**

on behalf of 'In Wi' the Mix'

with participants from North Motherwell Churches Together

pilot hosted by St. Bernadette's Parish, Motherwell



**The Craighead
Institute** of life and faith

“We must make ourselves open to their stories, which may profoundly conflict with ours. We must even, at times, be ready to hear of their pain, humiliation and resentment and discover that their image of us is anything but our image of ourselves. We must let our world be enlarged by the presence of others who think, act and interpret reality in ways radically different from our own”

(from ‘Forward Together’ discussion, St Kentigern’s Church, February 1st 2014. Source: Jonathan Sacks, 2003, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilisations*, 2nd edition. Bloomsbury: Continuum. Quoted on the front of course booklet)

With warm thanks to the course participants and facilitators, Sr Eileen Cassidy, Jackie Gillespie, Kareen Lennon and Anne Macdonald, for their patience with the demands of evaluation and their rich reflections.

Lisa Curtice, April 2017.

The Course

The course was been commissioned by 'In Wi' the Mix' (Conforti, Faith in Community Scotland and Place for Hope) as part of the Scottish Government's *Tackling Sectarianism* Initiative. Its purpose is to enable those who have been part of this work to deepen their engagement and conversations with each other in order to be strengthened for their next phase of activity and to discern together what that might be like. There was a sense that building relationships had been of fundamental importance for the work that had been achieved so far, but that even for those who had been on a journey together for some years, there were still difficult conversations to be had. By providing opportunities for attention to spiritual understanding and growth it was hoped to further the development of relationships, understanding, exchange and action.

The course has been jointly developed and delivered by the Ignatian Spirituality Centre Glasgow and the Craighead Institute for Life and Faith, who together bring experience in spiritual reflection and supporting social action grounded in Ignatian spirituality.

The course is called 'Inspiring Unity' because it proposes that, by considering their relationship to God and unity in Christ, participants will experience a sense of oneness and a desire to go further in their work towards unity.

The overall aim of the course is

"to reflect on topics, within the framework of Christianity, that will support individuals in their journey beyond sectarianism and provide tools and resources to encourage others to embrace this journey".

The Motherwell pilot course

Funding for the course was awarded in early March 2016 after some 6 months of development. It was initially advertised to run with 20 participants over 3 and half days at the Ignatian Spirituality Centre in Glasgow beginning in early April 2016. However, although promoted by the In Wi the Mix Steering Group, it did not prove possible to identify interested participants. A taster session was held and attended by two members of North Motherwell Churches Together which had been very active through In Wi' the Mix and it was agreed that it might be necessary to make the delivery of the course more flexible. It was therefore decided to try and identify groups who might be interested in the course and to offer them a taster session in which the groups themselves could help determine the length of sessions and where the course was held.

Opportunities were identified by the Steering Group to offer taster sessions in Wishaw (Wishae Women's Group) and Motherwell (North Motherwell Churches Together). Evening taster sessions took place in Wishaw on 30th August 2016 and in Motherwell on 12th September. As a result some of the group brought together by North Motherwell Churches Together decided they wanted to proceed with the

course as evening sessions and St Bernadette's offered premises in their church hall. The pilot course began the following week with participants drawn from the Roman Catholic and Church of Scotland traditions.

Participation

After the taster session which had been attended by 14 people, nine participants returned for the next sessions. Over the seven sessions of the course, the average attendance was 8. 13 people participated in some way, totalling 158 hours of time spent in the sessions, together with time at home on reflection and reviewing course materials. Two participants withdrew after attending only one session, one on health grounds and one with no reason given; another priest attended for the session that took place in the parish house. Four participants attended all the sessions and a further three all but one. Wherever possible participants were given the materials for sessions they had had to miss. This level of attendance, for sessions spread over five months, shows considerable commitment from members of the group that signed up to the course,

Course attendance

No 2 hr sessions	No attending	Total hours
7	4	56
6	3	36
5	1	10
4	0	0
3	1	6
2	1	4
1	3	6

The journey week by week

Taster Session

The session aimed to offer potential participants a feel for the content and approach of the course and to agree how and when it could take place in North Motherwell. By the end of the evening it had been agreed to meet in St Bernadette's Church Hall for 7 Monday evening sessions between 7 and 9 pm and a set of dates was decided. The first session was set for the following week. During the evening there was:

- An opening and closing reflection
- An outline of the course given
- Names placed around a centrepiece with a candle and open Bible
- An explanation of how the course had come about and shared memories of the journey so far
- Flip chart exercise on hopes – what a good course would look like to you
- Outline of course
- Personal reflection
- Music.

Session1: A Point of Departure

“Take us from where we are,
to where you want us to be.”

(from ACTS Commitment Prayer used as closing reflection for session 1)

The session aimed to re-engage participants with a journey of understanding to value diversity in unity. Expected outcomes for participants were:

- To reconnect with the outcomes of work over the past three years
- To identify their contribution and how it had affected them
- To identify hopes and anxieties for the next stage.

Participants were invited to introduce themselves by sharing something about themselves, what they were passionate about and what group they had been part of. They were provided with quotations from the 'In Wi' the mix' project reports and invited to reflect on these appreciatively in small groups. Then they were asked to share their feelings, anxieties and hopes now. They were introduced to the principles of non-judgemental listening. The evening closed with the prayer of commitment 'we commit ourselves to travel this journey with you as pilgrims and not as strangers' (ACTS 1990).

Session 2: Images of God and Human Behaviour

The overall aim of the session was to explore the relationship between images of God, self-image, behaviour and relationship with God and how these can change. Intended outcomes for participants included:

- To reflect how their own images of God changed in the course of their lives, what triggered these changes and the impact they had
- To consider developments in the understanding of God in the Bible and human progress and what this means for behaviour
- To be aware of how the image we have of God affects our behaviour.

After hearing the song, 'Come as you are', participants were invited to look at pictures of chairs and note which they would identify with God and which themselves! They had a variety of visual images of God to look at and they shared which reflected their younger image of God and which was their image now. Then they were given an input and handout on developing understandings of God over time and in the Jewish-Christian traditions. They were invited to reflect upon their learning about God, themselves and the work for unity.

Session 3: Biblical Images of God and Lectio Divina

The aim of this session was to explore and pray with Biblical images of God to notice their effect on self and relationship with God and others. Outcomes for participants were intended to include:

- To identify the feelings that favourite Biblical images of God evoke
- To become aware of the diverse images of God in Scripture and what they mean for their understanding of God
- To experience Lectio Divina as a method of praying Scripture.

In this session participants shared in pairs and then in the larger group, their favourite Biblical stories about God. The core of the session was a led Lectio Divina on Psalm 23 and the 'homework' included praying with Biblical images of God and writing a personal statement.

Session 4: Self Awareness: Who Am I? Made in the Likeness and Image of God

The aim of the session was to encourage participants to become self-aware in the light of their Christian identity and human journey and to reflect on what this means for behaviour and work to inspire unity.

Intended outcomes for participants included:

- To become aware of their essential human identity and what this means for attitudes and behaviour and for work to inspire unity
- To consider the potential for change in attitudes and behaviour.

Activities included finding a picture card to express something of who you are and hearing from others in the group what they recognise of you in the picture. Then individual and group discussion using a four quadrant handout, based on the Johari window, to consider:

- Who is the God in whose image I am made?
- How do I reflect these qualities?
- In what ways am I still in process?

- What does this say about inspiring unity?

Session 5: Building the Kingdom of God

The aim of this session was to explore the nature and experience of community and the call to become community in the light of the Kingdom of God. The intended outcomes for participants were:

- An appreciation of their communities and where they may be called to be Kingdom builders
- An awareness of the radical nature of Kingdom values and their relevance to the challenges in community today
- Understanding of where they feel drawn to deepen their work to inspire unity in their local communities.

After a review of the last session and homework, participants worked in small groups using conversation cards, to talk about what fosters community. A modern rewording of the Beatitudes was then the basis for considering how Kingdom values might be at work in communities today. After an input on Jesus's radical reframing of the Kingdom of God, the group had some quite reflection and were asked, as homework, to consider where God was calling them now.

Session 6: The Kingdom of God and Justice

The aim of this session was to explore the relationship between the Kingdom of God, communities of difference and justice. Intended outcomes were for participants to:

- Acknowledge legacies of bitterness in communities
- Consider the place of justice in overcoming divisions
- Appreciate the value of dialogue in overcoming divisions within and between communities
- Consider how stumbling blocks to reconciliation can become points of transformation.

After asking where people had felt themselves called in this work, the group considered a (fictional) monologue of a person who was outraged by something that had happened in her church and discussed in small groups and then together, how this made them feel and how they might respond. There was then an exercise to consider how there can be different perspectives on the same situation. Finally, each person was asked to select a stone to represent the stumbling block or challenge they perceived to the work of peace and justice in their community. They were asked to take this away and during the week to think of a word of reconciliation liberation or justice to write on the stone.

Session 7: Drawing the Threads Together and Thinking Ahead

The aim was to recap on the course and encourage concrete thinking on moving forward. The intended outcomes were for participants to:

- Consider the cost of work to inspire unity

- Identify their own desires and strengths for the next stage of the journey
- Identify the resources they have in their communities to support this work
- Identify what the course has meant to the individually and as a group
- Be encouraged to work as a group with less reliance on the facilitators.

For this session we met around a table. Participants were offered the chance of taking their previous evaluation forms and asked permission for photographs to be taken. After the stilling, last week's stones were brought to the table and participants presented their liberating words to counter the burdens the stones had represented. Between sessions they had been asked to watch an extract from the film 'Two Sided Story' about bereaved Palestinians and Jews meeting to share their stories. There was discussion about how this made participants feel and the cost of reconciliation. They then worked individually and as a group on the strengths and resources in their communities, what else was needed to take the work forward and who else could help. The contributions were displayed on the wall. During tea and cake everyone took a prayer slip with a name in to pray for another member of the group. Next each person selected a picture card to explain what they felt ready to do now. Visual reminders of the course were offered and people reflected as a group and individually about the gifts and learning they had received. Future filming was discussed and the course ended with people passing a candle from hand to hand and a closing blessing.

The Evaluation

Expectations

During the taster session we asked what the people who came might want from a course; their thoughts are shown in the table below.

Hopes. What would a good course be like for you?

- Sharing- experiences, time together, learning from each other
- How deep must we go?
- Better understanding of differences and greater appreciation of what we share
- Times of sharing – worship, joint action – Faith and time together, Exploring
- Learning from other faith traditions
- Break down divisions and take a uniting message to our communities
- Expand on what we have covered and have deeper conversations
- Deeper spiritual awareness [listening to what is happening], Understanding of myself and others
- Meet groups in other areas. We have explored a lot, but need to share with communities and church
- Sharing ideas and hopes

These seemed to agree with the aspirations of the course and also added the idea of learning from other faiths. One person would have preferred if we had been able to offer the course in a way that drew together people from different areas to share experiences. From the start the group seemed very open to each other and already a long way along the road to awareness of self and others.

Evaluation framework

Each session of the course had its own learning outcomes as summarised in the week-by-week course descriptor (above). As a course team we also identified overall identified outcomes that we might expect to see by the end of the course:

- Successful opportunities provided for participants to learn from each other
- Participants more open to difference
- Greater awareness of common values across traditions
- Improved access to resources for spiritual growth
- Improved access to resources to tackle sectarian attitudes and behaviours
- Increased motivation to tackle sectarianism.

We hoped that these would provide participants with a foundation for further and deepened social action to tackle sectarianism. We also proposed a set of indicators to enable us to know whether these outcomes were being achieved. A further set of outcomes and indicators were developed to measure longer term change and we intend to go back to participants three months after the end of the course (May 2017) to see if there are any signs of the experience of the course having influenced work locally to tackle sectarianism (as indicated by participants feeling able to tackle deeper issues, engagement across traditions being based on more contentious areas, materials and tools from the course being used in the work and drawn on by participants and any collaborative action having developed following the course). The table below summarises both sets of outcomes and indicators.

Outcomes and indicators for pilot course

Intermediate outcome (end course)	Indicator	'End' outcome 3 months	Indicator
Successful opportunities to learn from each other	Participants report that the course has given them the time and space to share	Conversations are deeper across the communities	Former participants report that they can tackle deeper issues from other traditions
Participants more open to difference	Greater willingness to hear different views/practices without anger (observation/self report)	Able to accept difference as valid and not 'error'	Example of engagement not based solely on 'easy' (ie shared) areas – worship, theological exploration etc
Greater awareness of common values across traditions (and even faiths)	Can name specific values they have realised to be shared during the course (course exercises)	Explicit use of materials from other traditions	Materials in use/activities use illustrations prayers from other traditions
Improved access to spiritual resources	Specific resources identified as helpful (self report/interview)	Participants feel strengthened in their spiritual life (notebooks, self report)	Can name practices./resources from the course they still draw upon

Intermediate outcome (end course)	Indicator	'End' outcome 3 months	Indicator
Improved access to resources to tackle sectarian attitudes and behaviours	Participants have tools that help them to engage in dialogue/challenge sectarianism	Wider range of resources available locally	Tools/approaches from course developed or used in local activity
Motivation increased to challenge sectarianism	Participants ready to commit to more challenging joint work	Joint work reinvigorated	Examples of collaborative action initiated following course

Evaluation methods

This was a challenging course to evaluate as any change happening for participants was likely to be to a great extent, internal. However we have tried not to restrict the evaluation to the most measurable aspects, such as whether participants found particular tools useful, but also to use qualitative method to tell the bigger story of what being part of the course meant to participants and how this might relate to their future engagement with tackling sectarian attitudes and behaviours in their communities.

The sources of evidence we gathered comprised:

- Participant evaluation forms after the sessions
- Observations by facilitators (for example of group interactions)
- Materials generated during the session exercises.

Participant feedback

Formal feedback from participants was not introduced until the second session. Thereafter evaluation forms were given out at the end of each session for return the next. At the final sessions forms were completed as part of the session. This was not possible for all sessions because it was necessary to vacate the room quickly and also because participants wanted time to reflect. However the delay is likely to have reduced the response rate. The evaluation forms were designed to capture learning specific to that session as well as information relevant to the outcomes defined for the course as a whole. They included a lot of space for comment which has enabled some rich reflections on the course to be captured. At the end of the course, when the material had been typed up, participants were given the opportunity to take back their forms to keep as part of their record of their journey through the course.

Evaluation response rate

The overall response rate for the participant evaluations was 70% (35 forms in all).

Session	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Total (session 2 onwards)
	19 Sept	24 Oct	21 Nov	28 Nov	23 Jan	30 Jan	13 Feb	
Attendance	(9)	10	7	7	8	9 ¹	9	50
Evaluations	n/a	5	6	5	6	5	8	35
Response (%)		50	86	71	75	55	89	70 (ave)

Facilitator observations and reflections

As facilitators we used the pastoral circle (experience/analyse/reflect/act) to frame our approach to reviewing the course so that we could end the course, alongside participants, with a more developed view of the course's potential and its possible application. Debrief forms were completed by facilitators after each session to comment on how the material had been received, the group's learning and interactions and how the facilitators had experienced the evening. As there were several facilitators this provided the opportunity for one person to act as a listener at any one time and this added a dimension to the awareness of what might be happening in the room, especially given that participants' own log books were private. Recognising that this was a pilot course, we also took time to reflect on aspects of the course delivery that work well or things that should change. The debrief included questions about this, and when facilitators this met to prepare the next session they also discussed how the last session had gone. Adjustments were made as the course unfolded in order to respond to any issues that arose.

Materials from the session exercises

As the course progressed, participants generated their own material and learning through their responses to the various exercises. We took notes of these contributions so that we have a qualitative account of the understandings created by participants during the session. As this is a new course and also one which is interactive in approach, aiming to provide an environment in which participants can share views and experiences with each other, we recognised that the direction that the course might take might differ from our expectations. It was therefore important to find out how participants actually contributed and responded in each of the sessions.

¹ Plus 1 visitor

After introducing the participants, the rest of this report will draw on the three sources of evidence to consider the end of course outcomes and to explain the journey of participants through the course.

The Pilot Participants



In the first session those present introduced themselves with something they would like others to know about them, their passions and the group they came to the course from. North Motherwell Churches Together was the overall umbrella that connected the participants who included members of the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions. Most of the group were lay, including two Church elders, and there was one religious. The group of nine who completed the course comprised four men and five women and included two couples. Participants came from Motherwell and Wishaw. All were active in their local churches and communities and had been part of joint work activities across traditions. Some had been part of In Wi' the Mix.

I am passionate about	My group
Family and friends	North Motherwell Churches Together
Be with others	Spiritans
Growth – plants and people (me)	St Bernadette's North Motherwell Churches Together
Singing World mission Working with children	Conforti Hamilton presbytery
Sport, any sport	Conforti Cambusnethan and Morningside Parish Church
Family and friends, children	St Bernadette's
Rugby	North Motherwell Churches Together

In session four the participants were asked to name their gifts and to share how they have been called upon to use them in the areas of their life.

Gifts and areas of calling

- Love and generosity
- Good communication skills and have used with young and old; always caring; aware God always pushing me on – when young not so confident; still being pushed (when) say 'can't do that
- Insight; wife and mother; quite generous, helpful, caring, quite strong
- Acceptance not to rail against what has happened and courage to speak up; naturally shy, painfully so; speaks up for justice
- Hospitality, kind, feels a lucky woman – list is endless
- Gift of being approachable, makes no difference, open up to anyone. Justice – has suffered for (pursuing/championing) justice. Can't compromise when it comes to justice - if wrong, it's wrong. Some say that there is to be dialogue, but it is not dialogue if the decision has been made already. Sometime not polite (speaks out). At the end of the day, be happy
- Father, grandfather, quite good communicator/leader. Fairly generous

The responses (which were voiced with humour a bit tongue-in-cheek) demonstrate a confidence in, and appreciation of, their God-given gifts, as well as the many roles and experiences that they bring.

What difference did the course make?



Stones – session 7. Picture - Jackie Gillespie

'Choose a stone to represent what you most want to roll away: Write on it a word of liberation, reconciliation or justice'

This section describes the results of the course evaluation in terms of the substantive outcomes (outcomes 2, 3 and 6). Longer-term outcomes are indicated in brackets in italics. The following section will look at process outcomes – how any changes were achieved.

Participants more open to difference (*so able to accept difference as valid rather than error*)

- **shown by greater willingness to hear different views/practices without anger**

Openness – growing confidence

The facilitators felt that this group were very open from the beginning and showed a great desire to listen and learn from each other. In the closing moments of the first session one person commented on the importance of being sensitive to the words we use – that what they mean to us might not be what others think you are saying.

Participants themselves reported recognising the benefits they were gaining from other members of the group. Of session 2 we asked, 'did you benefit from others in the group this evening?'. All five respondents said that they had. The comments

remarked on other people's openness (2), the experience of hearing different views (2) and developing relationships:

"Trust developing within the group, willingness to contribute and to listen."

"I liked how honest people were and pushed people out of their comfort zone."

"Each evening I have attended I have come home feeling I have made new friends and have enjoyed the healthy comments."

"Listening to all the different views."

"Good to hear the views and interpretations of the group."

These themes of valuing the opinions of others, views being openly shared, awareness of the benefits of listening to different perspectives and growing together as a group of people are echoed in comments made in response to other questions and indicate a growing respect for the opinions of others. The comments suggest that this appreciation was fostered in the context of relationships being built and that, within these relationships, there was space for difference. One facilitator reflected of this session "great openness in sharing and acceptance of the other" and another "the group already have a great depth of understanding and sharing".

From time to time those on the course expressed appreciation of the fact that others were speaking out. For example, "The fact that we are all comfortable to speak out and express our thoughts" (what was the best part of the evening for you? session 2) and "the friendship and companionship within the group and the willingness to share viewpoints" (session 3). This was a common thread in the responses after session 5 to the question, 'was this an evening well spent?':

"I think the group is speaking out and giving more to each of us at each session."

"Very enlightening in every aspect."

"It was good meeting after a long break and we had so much to say. Everyone is finding it much easier to share conversation and experiences."

"What is community? It was good to hear the different opinions, this has shown that there is hope and love within communities. Our church need[s to] reach out and bring the community in. "

"Always good to talk and reflect."

"Overcoming initial adversity was good as was the development of mutual respect for a range of views/experiences – but also much in common."

And after session 6 one person noted "The group appeared to be more confident and give their points of view quicker".

Listening skills

Many participant evaluation forms throughout the course highlighted the value of listening (both by themselves and others) as a growing skill and a vital component of

the growing understanding between course members, for example “listening to other people and their openness” (what was the best part of the evening for you?, session 3). “Listening helps build my belief in the other person. Move from not just belief in ideas and dogma, but belief in the validity of the other’s story – the Good Samaritan did not just bind physical wounds” (‘have you seen anything differently this evening?’, session 6).

Part of session 3 consisted in group members sharing their favourite Bible stories and hearing these was for some an ‘aha’ moment in terms of recognising the positive value of difference within God’s love for each: “The value and sincerity of each story – each deserving respect and offering a belief that we are each valued by God and can, have to, share this oneness” (‘did this session say anything to you about your work to inspire unity?’). A facilitator noted “Very deep sharing of stories was given and I noticed that when invited to share, participants referred to what their partner had discussed with acknowledgement, respect and reverence”. The sense of unity was not at the expense of eliminating challenge. One facilitator noticed how group members could be surprised at an insight or comment from someone else. This happened in session 3 when someone spoke about “re membering” as reconstituting what is broken. Like participants, facilitators were asked ‘Who was the God you met this evening?’ and one responded “a God who is always trying to communicate with us and who encourages our exploration, affirming but also challenging”.

Responding to challenge

At this point in the course (not quite half way) a couple of facilitators reflected that there might be more challenging issues about anti sectarianism work than were being expressed (not between members of the group but in relation to what they had to deal with in terms of the attitudes and behaviour of others).

By session 4, where the topic was developing understandings of God and their relationships to changing attitudes and behaviour, there were some stronger statements about the challenges of difference, suggesting that there may have been grappling with the challenges of sharing across traditions. In the course of the session one person said “I struggle with compromises – it doesn’t satisfy anyone. Conciliation or reconciliation is more appropriate. Listen, but also speak out what you believe positively. Be willing to reach out and be prepared for what you believe in a way that doesn’t put people down. The imperfections come from that”. And another said, “Can I say something about inspiring unity? Forget about doctrinal differences and respect spiritual equality”. One person said they were accepting that change is hard for some and takes time and told the story of a woman in a care home who doesn’t want to join in because ‘they don’t sing in her church’, although she is ‘coming round’. Moving beyond right and wrong was applied by another to relationships between people of different faiths. During the session they commented, “Life has changed so much, especially during the last five years (the world in general). For example, Muslim friends, expressing fears. We need to make an effort to understand some of these changes. Even within churches things have changed, what is right and wrong. Sometimes it is about meeting people halfway.”

A facilitator noted of this session, “challenges are beginning to be voiced”. Another facilitator commented that the group’s willingness to embark on their own spiritual growth, in which they were being encouraged by the course, was contributing to the depth of their sharing. She wrote; “I noticed in particular that evening that when it was mentioned, ‘if we really want to grow as humans...’ around the room heads shot up”. She felt that this showed that the group was aware, or was being made aware, “that we can continually grow in faith as humans”. This view of what was going on is confirmed by some of the participant feedback for that evening, in which we had used a version of the Johari window. In response to the question, ‘did you experience any insights into yourself?’ comments were:

“The image of the window - perhaps I am not as open as I thought! I think I could/want to look a bit deeper at myself.”

“Still this ongoing struggle to “let go” a bit more – move from my own “faith corner”, may be the negative legacy of tradition and my own faith limits – thank God for the Holy Spirit!”

“I have enjoyed each evening. I have learned lots about each other’s Faith commitments and practices. This has been good and has helped me understand that we all worship God in our own ways, and that’s OK.”

This was a group that took great pleasure in hearing what others had to say. It was noticeable (for example in session 5) that they encouraged each other to speak. However one facilitator did express a caution that the range of activities attempted in each session may not have left the space to explore any potential differences in any depth.

Evidence of change?

As already suggested, despite the group having started from a strong position in terms of their openness to others and willingness to share, there was evidence of movement during the course. At the end of session 6 we asked about readiness to address difference and all five respondents said that they did feel more ready to do so. The responses are given in full.

Do you feel more ready to address points of difference with those in other traditions? (5/9 evaluations received)

- “We may [be] ‘all Jock Thompson’s bairns’ but that does not make us all the same. We must work at supporting our right to be individuals but also to respect that we are incomplete without God or each other – the search goes on, and no one can go it alone.”
- “We are all equal in God’s eyes and good is in everyone, an acceptance and understanding of others’ problems and traditions. Lots of wonderful talents in our community.”
- “Just as at the beginning of this course I would just listen to all points of view.”

- “I have listened to difference between other traditions and I have understood the differences better. We should spend more time trying to understand than trying to change.”
- “Am able to pace my understanding and it helps to tackle most problems presented.”

As one participant noted, faith differences are not exclusively differences *between* traditions. They said that one benefit experienced from sharing within the group had been “Sharing, even within my own tradition allows fellowship and even greater understanding. To be able to disagree with confidence that there is no malice.” In the closing session, one person identified consideration of others’ perspectives as the change they had found in themselves during the course: “more thoughtful about other people’s point of view and perspective”. And on a stone representing their particular challenge in this work - “frustration” - a participant wrote the liberating word, “patience”.

Conclusion

Whilst there was not explicit discussion of doctrinal or practice differences during the course, participants were offered, and themselves fostered, a safe space in which to listen to others. Participants reported that there were more comfortable having their own perspectives challenged and hearing different interpretations. It is notable that there was evidence also of even the longer term outcome – seeing differences as valid – being met or at least struggled towards. The various exercises provided opportunities to hear different perspectives and course participants clearly used these experiences as material for reflection, both in their own spiritual development, and in relation to the problems that lead to sectarian attitudes and behaviours. While the facilitators sometimes wondered if potential differences should have been more explicitly addressed, the story participants tell is that hearing different perspectives in the context of reflecting of God’s inclusive love and witnessing the individual gifts of group members enabled them to feel more comfortable with difference which diminished in importance in relation to what they shared in Christ. The course enabled these developments to happen in a safe and gentle way.

Greater awareness of common values across traditions and even faiths (so they make active use of materials from other traditions)

- **shown by participants able to name specific values they have realised to be shared during the course**

“I feel closer to you now than when I came in. Shared points of view.” (comment from the end of session 1)

In the image of God

The starting point for participants recognising commonality was an awareness that everyone is made in God’s image. Session 2, where different visual images representing God were examined and participants heard what others said about the images, seems to have been pivotal in building this awareness. Thinking about God and self, evoked an openness to the other.

Did you experience any shift in your understanding of God and self? (3 yes, 1 maybe , 1 blank). Three additional comments provided:

- “Hearing how others see God widens my own perceptions of God and how others see God relative to themselves and my sense of how open God is to me.”
- “I think the session[s] so far has made me think that I don’t think enough! It is so easy to just jog along but I am now thinking about other faiths and lost faiths also. Also how we treat and tolerate others.”
- (maybe) “There were lots of images of God and listening about each one opened my eyes and made me think and be thankful for the meaning of each one.”

There were similar reactions to hearing others’ favourite Biblical stories about God in session 3. One person reflected afterwards “We all have our own individual image of images of God, perhaps the one we feel most comfortable with” and another, “despite doctrinal differences we are united on the same spiritual plane”.

During session 4 members of the group confidently (and with humour) shared their individual gifts and it was clear that relationships went beyond recognition of equality to real appreciation of what others bring. Moreover this was being applied more widely than to the group itself. For example one person said in the course of the evening “the gifts given to us are to share, not to keep for ourselves....It’s not our religion that matters, it’s that we are all brothers and sisters. Share image and likeness with others in how we are with others.” A facilitator noted “When thinking how all are made in the image and likeness of God, I think there was a deepening of this recognition and appreciation of gifts and how, with this knowledge, we are called to respond.”

Faith journeys: hearing each other’s story

Rather as seeing that there are multiple perspectives on God led to an awareness of commonality, so hearing different people’s stories seems also to have built an awareness of a shared journey. One facilitator noted “...participants were able to say that their background led them to their Image of God and through the evening’s activities see how the different upbringings/journeys lead them to where they are now and how people perceive/others.” Asked, ‘where did you meet God in this session?’ she responded: “In the people I encountered – in their experiences and sharing – in our individual stories and shared histories”. The input in session 2 focused on humanity’s changing understanding of God over time in the Jewish and Christian traditions and another facilitator noted the apparent effect of this on appreciation of the common faith journey, “Input on developing understanding of God – shifts in understanding not vocalised but nodding agreements as to how, over time, this came about and why – gradual change”. And again “They listen deeply to one another, respect what is shared. There is, I think, an awareness of sharing in a common journey. There have been some very deep personal sharings where hopes have been expressed. Perhaps some of their real challenges have been faced, probably more to be so.”

Call to action for unity

After participants had looked at different images of God (session 2) they were asked in their feedback, 'Did this session say anything to you about your work to inspire unity?' Four out five respondents said that it had, one that it maybe had. All the responses show a motivation to work together.

Did this session (2) say anything to you about your work to inspire unity? (5 out of 10 responses)

- "The opportunity to hear from others this common thread of a loving Jesus and how we must listen ... as well as putting forward our views."
- "It reminds us that God loves all of us. I think I do some things to help bridge the gap in some area but now feel that I could do more as I am still in my comfort zone."
- "We must never give up. We must try for peace and unity, especially in the West of Scotland and also all over the world."
- "We can work together and listen and learn."
- (maybe) "Proved that working together is beneficial."

A facilitator noted "The question was asked at the end about how this evening related to the project [to inspire unity] and the response of one participant was a heartfelt expression that we can all be united and there was the sense that she spoke for all. In their willingness to engage, their sharing and listening and the hopes they express they put into action a desire to understand and move ahead together."

The sense of oneness leading to a call to action grew in strength as the course progressed. For example, participant comments after session 3 (Biblical images of God) included: "God loves all of us equally and I sense a strength in the room and a sense of unity and friendship. If we want it to work with God's help then it can. Step by step we can do good things to bind us together." After session 4 one facilitator described the hope for greater unity as "tangible". Asked (after session 5) what they could use from the course to inspire unity one participant wrote, "The shared belief that the journey is worth it, that praying together demands action. That people really want to build the Kingdom of God." After session 5 one facilitator felt that the tone in discussing anti sectarian work had become more optimistic. "There were moments of people acknowledging that things have moved on – for example people welcoming and joining in the Watch procession and [more people] coming to prayers for unity". Another facilitator had the same feeling about the mood of the group: ('can you identify any signs of participants being called more deeply into work to inspire unity?') "The desire is there and, I think, is shown in their enthusiasm when talking about what is and has been going on in their communities. (There have also, at times, been references to the past, often with a sense of pain, to the distance that once existed. There has been a sense of wonderment when thinking of a distance now bridged.) Sometimes there has been a palpable joy when speaking of what they are involved in and know about with regard to the building of community, the welcoming of the stranger and the lost. That is building unity in the here and now and a reaching out, in very practical ways, to a wider community." A participant had noted

after session 4, “I think I do try to unite and in the last few weeks I have been aware of a number of good experiences of unity. Perhaps because it is Advent, trying a bit harder and heightened awareness due to sessions”.

Conclusion

In this outcome the spiritual development underlying the course seems to have been particularly important in creating change. We had thought that a marker of greater awareness of common values might be the naming of specific shared values. In fact what was stronger was a deep inter-personal respect and the awareness that a common humanity, rooted in God’s love for each and all, was stronger than any differences related to particular traditions. The awareness expressed seems to have been built on a growing understanding of where different perspectives arise from as well as on the trusting relationships developed within the group. Moreover this awareness of a common identity as addressed in the course (see learning outcomes for session 4 for example) led directly to a call to action. The course is called ‘*inspiring unity*’ and some of the reactions expressed suggest that the reflections of participants on the course material and exercises inspired in them a deep desire for greater unity.

Motivation increased to tackle sectarianism (*leading to collaborative action reinvigorated and initiated*)

- **shown by participants willing to commit to more challenging work**
“I’m inspired. I’ve been involved in other anti sectarianism groups – this is different. Prayer, meditation made me think about anti sectarianism. Catholic/Protestant, it’s wider than this, it’s different faiths, refugees. We need to understand other people’s faith. A group like us can put a hand out and help others. Taken away from Catholic/Protestant perspective there are lots of faiths. Listen, understand, accept.”

To what extent did the course encourage and equip those who took part to continue to challenge sectarianism in their communities?

Starting point

Asked, in the taster session, for memories of that journey so far, those thinking of joining the course recalled memories of good experiences which included joint worship and ‘deeper conversations’ and dialogue. Some participants had got to know people from the Orange Order and no longer saw it as “a sectarian organisation”. They had become aware of the complexity of the issues “Sectarianism is wider than we realised...not all, bitter, horrible people, Not the whole picture.” There was also a desire from the very beginning not to give up – “we won’t let it die away”.

However some of the challenges of experiences to date were also set out in session 1 as participants reviewed a selection of quotes from the reports from the partners in ‘In Wi’ the Mix’. These included people growing up apart (separate schools) – “never the ‘twain shall meet””; getting the work known in the wider community beyond churches and getting more support from leaders above the local level. Some felt that these issues put a brake on the work having wider influence. For example,

“Big problem is how we start, how we tackle it, we’ve been over this field before, look at outside world, not succeeding very well. ...Challenges still there.”

“Bigger institutions [are a problem]. Churches are working really hard but the wider community outside churches is not aware of the work done. We need to be brave enough to open dialogue lovingly with places we’re not comfortable with, not ‘we know best’ where isn’t mutual understanding of faith.”

“We go so far then run in parallel. Those who are influential just above local level are the hardest to deal with. Own turf. Institutions within football part of the same problem. Fear of control.”

The journey

The individual journeys that participants made during the course included awareness of the strength of inherited images of God and more understanding of how these are shaped and changed through different life stages and roles (session 3). This understanding seems to have led to greater openness which may in turn have helped people to feel more equipped to tackle divisions and distrust. Reflecting on a Bible story, one person commented on Jesus being tested by the Pharisees and remarked “boy, did he handle the situation well!”. And after the session, one person wrote, “Stories shared showed common theme of knowing God and wanting to know and share him with others”. The self reflection which participants engaged in during and between sessions also seems to have made them aware of where they were at in terms of attitudes that would affect their own engagement in anti sectarianism, as one facilitator reflected about the same session “ In this session, a few spoke of what they are aware of personally in themselves – e.g. their stance with regard to compromise; what was perceived as a matter of justice; acceptance etc and while this may not be exactly an ‘aha’ moment, their public voicing of these is important.” Commenting on the homework after this session, a participant wrote about integrating their learning and using Scripture to move to a place where their own faith tradition did not always take them: “Brought issues from session into my personal life. Focused me on areas that faith tradition does not normally centre on for me. Scripture centred prayer extends my faith sharing experiences.”

Drawn to what?

Sessions 5, 6 and 7 included an exploration of where participants felt drawn to act now and what they felt ready to take on. In discussion it was to become clear that the question for some was not about doing more, but about selecting, engaging others and even, letting go in the light of other commitments. In their own feedback after the session all those who completed an evaluation from responded to an open question on call (responses given in full).

How do you feel God is calling you now? (6 out of 8 possible responses)

“To fight sectarianism.”

“It appears to be getting louder and a bit clearer.”

“Following my heart, throw out apathy. Listening to others sounding so positive helps. In time change can happen.”

“I’m not quite sure, but I know God is with me, guiding me on my journey.”

“To be able to help where needed.”

“To smaller range and narrower focus – do small things well.”

The range of responses suggests that the course was helping people to find their own discernment about the direction for them. One person commented “Aim low, go slow ... try to be actors not viewers – more than an appreciative audience – a bit scary!”

As part of the feedback on session 6 there was a question about challenges that remained. Responses indicated that tackling sectarianism was still felt to be a work in progress, but that individuals had found some peace and encouragement with their own role. Responses are given in full.

Any challenges? (session 6, 5/9 responses received)

- “No rest! We have to match our words and the message we share with actions – aiming for joy and love, but also knowing that growth can be part of sharing trial and sadness. No one of us has all the answers towards peace and justice but we must play our part.”
- “I have been involved in unity fundraisers recently and up against setbacks. I have thought at times, “is this worth it”. I have had to take a step back and these sessions have helped me to remember that time and sharing the burden helps. Also knowing that Jesus is always there.”
- “I still think we have a long way to go tackling sectarianism. Keep these courses going, the more people learn about different faiths, the more chance of understanding and peace.”
- “To discuss my experiences with others.”
- “To be able to handle most issues confronted with?”

The challenge of tackling sectarian attitudes had been introduced in the session by asking people how they would respond to someone who was bitter at what they saw as an affront to their own church tradition. All the participants felt able to handle it and said they would do so sensitively by offering to meet and talk and build a relationship. However there was an assumption that the case study was about someone of a traditional bent who had been offended by something progressive, whereas it had been constructed to be entirely neutral about the nature of the offence.

Over sessions 6-7 issues of justice and of the legacy of bitterness within communities were introduced. Before the final session participants were asked to watch the trailer for the film “Two sided story” about Israelis and Palestinians who had lost a family member engaging in dialogue including speaking as if from “the

other side". Course members engaged very actively with the film which provided a wider perspective on sectarianism, conflict and reconciliation. Comments included:

"People want peace –it's sectarianism on a bigger scale – Government need heal the differences – people were there to learn."

"Both sides are the same as ourselves."

"Put yourself in the other person's shoes."

"We didn't see one half of the things that happened during the [second world] war. Men returned from the war full of hatred."

"Don't take sides."

"We have been in Israel and Palestine. Lots of hatred. It's not the normal ordinary people, it's terrorists who keep these wars going. Angry on both sides – it's a sad situation. Neighbours sad, but it is happening – seeing it here too."

"No 10 year old wants to pick up a gun."

"Where you have conflict you have entrenched opinions. You get just soundbites, slogans."

"Politicians have vested interests. They should represent people but represent select few (money and power)."

"Those who have get and those who have nothing don't."

There were a range of views, but participants acknowledged the anger and hatred that could exist and some related it to their own experiences.

In order to try to help people move through their feelings about the challenges they faced in this work, participants were asked to take a stone and write on it a word to represent their biggest challenge and then bring it back the following week with a word to transform that challenge. This provided a symbolic way to explore values that could challenge entrenched positions and barriers. Not everyone wanted to write the challenges, but these were the results

Stones

Peace and justice (from fear and hate)

Freedom (from hand over mouth)

Peace Patience (frustrated)

Fairness to all (chosen not to write)

Shared time

Courage (fear)

Share. Love

The exercise was powerful in showing that participants could find sources of strengths to oppose to their biggest obstacles.

During the final session the question of motivation was approached again.

What do you feel ready to do now? (session 7 exercise with picture cards)

- Being welcoming to everyone
- Being ready to keep going
- Change starts with me, and from there spreads abroad
- Continue what we have already being doing: this has been confirmed with the course
- Prayer: it brings God's perspective into how we see and do things
- Training gives confidence and a format for things that need to be done
- Really inspired and energised by this group and the Christian perspective of all that we share and are doing
- Be aware of sectarianism having a much wider frame of reference that Catholic/Protestant, for example the refugee situation. We can open our hearts to these people and **hear** their stories
- Build on our sense of togetherness Exchange, appreciate each other's views.
- **Listen** to other people more intently
- The opening of ourselves to each other here makes me ready to open myself to others

These responses are individual and suggest people taking on future challenges in ways that draw upon the course as well as their own gifts and skills. The way the group expressed their motivations with the images conveyed a sense of confidence. For example²:



“Inviting others in is my asset. I’m quite good at that.”



“Opening our hearts to accept our talents and gifts”

Changes experienced during the course .. Gifts received from the course to help sustain us in what we do? (participant comments from final session)

- The opening of the session, together with the listening and meditation, which brought calm

² Images courtesy of NHS Education for Scotland -- Envision cards

- I feel much calmer
- A feeling of warmth
- The awareness of a spiritual understanding
- More patience with self and others
- Greater understanding of others and their positions
- Courage
- Feeling less overwhelmed

Conclusion

This group had much experience already of work to inspire unity and had also experienced positive changes in attitudes and behaviours over the years. However some started with a sense of frustration that work only got to a certain level and then stalled. There is evidence that during the course participants gained in understanding of different traditions and of shared stories leading to a greater openness. In the later sessions the experience of conflict that can occur in communities was more directly raised through the course content. Participants acknowledged the obstacles they faced and most appeared more confident to tackle them. They said that they see sectarianism through a wider lens. They have each felt a call in a particular way and it is too early to say if this will lead to more challenging work, but it seems likely they have considered their own roles and will shape these according to their new understandings which may include being more realistic about what they can do by themselves and more open to seeking the contributions of others. There was a sense at the end that course members were perhaps more optimistic and at greater peace with themselves in this work.

How did these changes happen?



Centrepiece and words from course members (session 4).

Image - Kareen Lennon

The course aimed to provide participants with successful opportunities to learn from each other and improved access to spiritual resources (intermediate outcomes 1 and 4).

During the sessions a range of creative approaches and spiritual resources were used to enable those taking part to learn from each other and reflect individually and as a group. Participants have been introduced to a variety of approaches to encourage their individual and collective growth. Over the course of two hours they have opportunities to engage with each other, to listen, to take part in exercises, to pray together and to reflect. The facilitators lead different parts of the session which also offers a variety of voices and styles. The group sits in a circle around a centrepiece which includes a candle and an open Bible and sometimes images for the evening or words contributed by participants. The approaches have included:

Group work

Tools (e.g. for non-judgemental listening - three levels of seeing from values based reflective practice, sessions 1 and 4; for dialogue – conversation cards on ‘what is community?’, session 5).

Exercises with flip charts and post-its (e.g. community chest, session 7)

Work in groups, small groups and whole group.

Sharing of personal faith stories.

One word feedbacks e.g. a ‘feeling word’.

Spiritual resources

Stilling exercise at the start of every session with music

Scripture – throughout (Biblical images of God session 3)

Lectio divina exercise (collective and individual) (session 3 and homework)

Handouts e.g. ‘This is the word of God about (name)’

Exercises e.g. personal statement, Johari Window (session 4)

Creative approaches

Use of image (picture cards (sessions 1, 4 and 7) and images of God (sessions 2 and 3)

Use of symbol (stones, session 7)

Material for learning

Brief inputs (eg developing images of God, session 2, the Kingdom, session 6)

Handouts and reading

Tools e.g. Johari window - adapted (session 4 and homework)

Led reflection at the end of the evening ((e.g. session 1, ‘What stands out? What might you want to share with God?))

Recap of previous session, review of ‘homework’

Personal reflection and learning

Quiet time during sessions

Structured suggestions for work between sessions (e.g. ‘Who is the God to whom you pray?’, session 2)

Session booklet with content of the evening and further materials

The rest of this section reports feedback and observation on the use of these approaches and how they met the three process outcomes (opportunities to learn from each other, access to spiritual resources and access to tools to tackle sectarianism). There is overlap between these outcomes. A list of key resources is given at the end of this report.

Successful opportunities to learn from each other (*leading to deeper conversations across communities*)

- **shown by participants reporting that the course has given them time and space to share**

The feedback from participants was unequivocal that they had benefitted from opportunities to learn from each other. For example, ('was this an evening well spent?', session 5).

"Time spent sharing, positive feeling of coming together – different yet same."

"I think this evening was positive time together and being with people who want to explore faith and friendship shows community spirit."

The sharing could help with personal struggles that individuals may have been grappling with to change their own mind set:

"Still in process of trying to inspire myself. 'Compromise' is not enough for me. Find it hard to "park" issues of doctrine – to want to "correct" others – to say "hello" and listen and pray (together). We won't do this alone!! Or by ourselves!! Time shared is so important – with God and with each other!"

Providing a space to share

The tone for sharing in the group was set very early by an exercise on non-judgemental listening which participants recalled when it was used again in session 4. This approach was modelled throughout as one participant noted after session 3 "everyone's interpretation is accepted without criticism".

One facilitator summarised how she thought exchange between participants was being enabled "Encouragement by the team for participants to: share, setting the scene at the start with a reflection/stilling in a sacred space, inviting them to make sure everyone gets a chance to share, if they wish, and that there are no right or wrong responses, recognising that each person is an individual with their own personal experiences to bring to the group, and that is where the wealth of sharing is. I think the sessions provide a good balance of allowing participants to reflect, to share with another person or as a group, with time for moving about so they are not sitting in the same spot all evening." (session 4 debrief).

The exercises could provide a way of looking at challenging issues safely (for example the film and the stones, sessions 6-7). One person commented after this on "the different feelings presented: anger, touch and feeling. And thoughts!"

Witnessing different perspectives

It is important to note that these opportunities were carefully built around exercises that included exploration or learning and usually provided the occasion for people to hear different perspectives from each other. Diversity was emphasised wherever possible, for example Psalm 23 (session 3) and the monologue (session 6) being read twice in different voices. It seems that the material of such exercises may have

helped the development of shared understanding and language and connection into a broader framework on specific topics. For example, after the exercise of looking together at quotes from previous anti sectarianism work in session 1, someone said:

“The statements here gave us something to hook into. Hard to put into words - gave us something to link into and share not just our own ideas but a common topic not necessarily easy to agree with.”

Opportunities to share were an essential part of the development of a sense of common mission (as described earlier) but did not come only through one approach – exercises, the stilling, all contributed to the possibility of mutual exchange. Quiet was as important as talking. This is illustrated by the feedback on session 2 (responses given in full).

Was this an evening well spent ? (‘yes’ - 5/5 responses out of 10 attendees)

- “Time spent sharing, positive feeling of coming together – different yet same”
- “I think this evening was positive time together and being with people who want to explore faith, feelings and friendship shows community spirit”
- “I feel the group is speaking out more”
- “Group sharing is good”
- “Very peaceful and thoughtful, with a lot of learning”

One of the issues that the facilitators became aware of early on was that some people were more ready to share in the big group or to speak at length than others. In order to make sure that everyone could take part, without making them share more than they wanted, a form of feedback was introduced where everyone was invited to share a single word or a phrase to the whole group, for example they were invited to share a ‘feeling’ word after they had picked an image card in session 4.

Participants directly linked the opportunities to share with each other to the development of trust within the group. For example one wrote after session 3, “Time spent together increases trust. Self discovery is aided by sharing.” Two people wrote of fellowship and trust within the group as what would stay with them from session 4. Participants were also asked after session 6 if they had benefitted from sharing within the group:

Please comment on any benefits you have experienced from the sharing within the group (session 6, 5/9 responses)

- “Sharing, even within my own tradition allows fellowships and even greater understanding. To be able to disagree with confidence that there is no malice.”
- “Friendship, learning from everyone and listening to all. Using images and Scripture, meditation and music has been enjoyable.”
- “More confident and happy to listen to other people’s opinion.”
- “Sharing opinions with the group has been a great benefit to me.”
- “The amount of experiences that group members have had and how they have tried to tackle these issues.”

Conclusion

It was very clear that group members had learned from each other and not only from the course materials. However the conditions set in the course enabled differences to be safely shared and conversations to deepen.

Improved access to spiritual resources (so they feel strengthened in their spiritual life)

- **shown by participants identifying specific resources as helpful (so materials in use locally enhanced)**

“It has enhanced my understanding in many ways – prayer, worship, commitment.” (session 4 feedback)

Stilling

The stilling exercise at the beginning of each session where there was music and the group was talked through a brief relaxation/focusing and similarly the closing reflection was identified as very significant by participants and described by some as ‘prayer’ or ‘meditation’. It was said to have built togetherness in the group, enabled learning and set a spiritual tone – a statement of what the course was about. Here are some reactions from participants in their own words:

“The opening relaxation helps to concentrate for the evening” (best part of the evening, session 2).

“The music set the tone well and created a relaxed atmosphere” (useful resources?, session 2)

“At the beginning of each meeting I enjoy the lovely music and the calmness. It feels like a most welcome small meditation” (session2).

“How significant shared silence can be, effective as a shared prayerful experience“ (session 4)

What was the best part of the evening for you? (session 3 6/7 responses, 1 blank for this question)

“Reflection time at the beginning.”

“The opening prayers and devotions.”

“Listening to other people and their openness.”

“All of it.”

“Time spent in silence and then to share.”

Facilitators also noted the importance of the stilling exercise for participants (as well as their own concern if anything got in the way - late start, poor sound quality etc), for example “two or three participants commented on how the stilling had made them feel relaxed/help them focus on the evening’s content/made them feel good” (session 2).

In the course of a session it was possible to see people’s feelings change. For example, session 3 where people were asked to provide a word of how they felt at the beginning and at the end:

Start	End
Respect, contented, deeper understanding, comfort, relaxed, sad, apprehensive	Calmed, blessed, refreshed, felt respect (‘each valued by God and can share this oneness’), educated in new areas (Lectio Divina), calm (‘You always get me back down to myself... liked reading the words of the song with the reflective music. I can savour it like that.’), ‘this stressed me in a nice way from all we have learned’ , ‘we can go home and think about it all’

Lectio Divina

In session 3 the group experienced a led Lectio Divina on Psalm 23 which they were then asked to try at home. A very experienced facilitator led the group through this imaginative meditation on Scripture. Participants’ comments afterwards indicate that they found this spiritually enriching; for most it was a new experience.

Did you find it valuable to experience Lectio Divina? (‘yes’ 6/6; 6/7 responses overall) **‘Please tell us why’:**

- “I found reading the Scriptures was like meditation: - thinking about [what] it was saying to me, helping me to talk to God and listen.”
- “Learns you how to position yourself when reading and hearing Scriptures. Tests memory when memorizing phrases and verse of Scripture.”
- “I enjoyed my experience of this type of meditation as well as finding it valuable. I have never been keen on meditation but this suited me so a huge learning curve!”
- “Meditating on the words – especially the 23rd Psalm which condenses so much of our Christian belief into 5 short verses.”
- “Providing a centering focus, more time with less volume.”
- “The words of prayer meaning more.”

This effect was sustained/reinforced when practised at home: “I enjoyed practising lectio divina, this gave me lots to think about, the stages of prayer, the listening, thinking, feelings. Speaking to God and listening to feelings is important to me when talking to God” and

“The use of Lectio Divina has given new insight into meeting God in prayer and helps to absorb and understand better all aspects of worship and belief”.

Scripture

Scripture was drawn upon throughout the course and in the session booklets and ‘homework’. The opportunity to learn was noted as important for some participants, for example, (‘were any of the approaches from this evening useful to you?’, session 2) “My homework, a developing understanding of God” and “I feel that I am thinking quite deeply about my personal statement and picking out words or sentences and holding on to them, knowing that holding on to something little but meaningful can be more beneficial to me at times”.

In session 3 people’s own faith and life stories and Biblical images of God in Scripture were brought together in an exercise. Afterward participants reflected on their learning.

Did you experience any shift in your understanding of God and self? (4 ‘yes’, 2 ‘maybe’, 5/10 responses)

- “God is my friend, he speaks to me and I feel one with him.”
- “Helps understanding in all aspects.”
- “I see God as loving and compassionate. I feel even stronger in my belief that God works through us and got glimpses of it in our session tonight.”
- (maybe) “We all have our individual image of images of God, perhaps the one we feel most comfortable with.”
- “God needing me for others and needing others for me.
- The time to get close to God and allowing time for God to be close to me.”

Participants were moved by hearing which Bible stories were significant in each other’s lives and, noticing differences actually built their sense of participating in a shared spiritual journey. They valued the meaning that others gave to the image of the Good Shepherd, for example one person spoke about being descended from shepherds and his sense of them as good, quiet men.

Did you benefit from any other approaches/resources used this evening? (favourite stories/Biblical images/other) (5 ‘yes’, 1 blank but positive comment; 6/7 responses)

- “Moses taking the Israelites to the Red Sea was my story. I am sure (?) that God is still working in Israel with all that is happening there, he is guiding and supporting, he is a true God.”
- (“Learned the practice of Lectio Divina.”)
- “I enjoy the session booklet that I am given and enjoy it even more at home when I have more time to go over it again and again.”
- “Having to think about my favourite Biblical story/stories and what it means to me.”
- “Background music as a means of relaxing, similarities of searching process, how some focused on Old Testament and others on New Testament.”

Their comments about the God they had encountered illustrate how, starting from this point, helped to build their sense of unity as Christians.

Who was the God you met this evening? (session 3)

- “My awesome God.”
- “The God for all people.”
- “A God who is with me at all times and with everyone in the room. I sometimes feel that it is just me and God but was humbled by comments from others tonight.”
- “A God of peace and love.”
- “The God of repose.”
- “Putting back the God in Re membering together.”

And again “God is with everyone, even people it is hard to see”. There were signs that the spirituality underpinning the course contributed to challenging people in a supportive way and this continued after the session had ended as participants continued to reflect on the material.

“I felt God was present at all times, just giving me a little push sometimes.”

“I came home thinking about the evening and have thought about some of the comments from time to time and look forward to the next session.”

Conclusion

Participant feedback shows that improved access to spiritual resources was definitely an outcome of the course. However this rather passive phrase underplays the place of spirituality within the course. Spiritual practices were demonstrated, experienced and explained and were complemented by Scripture-based learning. All these ‘resources’ were directed toward enabling the spiritual development of individuals and the group and participants’ reflections indicate that the various opportunities that the course provided for members to continue/refresh their own faith journey interacted with the group sharing to produce renewed commitment and a strong sense of unity.

Improved access to resources to tackle sectarian attitudes and behaviour

- **shown by participants having tools that help them to engage in dialogue/tackling sectarianism**

“These sessions are helping to understand and learn more how to inspire unity” (feedback, session 4)

There was not really a distinct set of tools for this purpose – learning and spiritual resources were all available for this. The overall finding was that the journey of understanding each other more deeply and being able to share faith issues with respect for each other’s differences fed their confidence to tackle sectarian attitudes and behaviour. A facilitator commented (session 3) “I feel there is much to be

learned from the practice of the process – encouraging and nurturing a deepening in personal prayer and growth is essential for those working and giving to others”. However certain of the approaches that particularly elicited positive reactions to the awareness of difference and the possibility of dialogue are described here.

Visual images of God

Participants were presented with a range of images of how God can be portrayed – vengeful judge, mother, shepherd, suffering servant etc. They were invited to pick one that was their childhood image of God and one they identified with now. Many focused on the image that resonated most with them. Sharing with the others what the image meant to them proved an effective way of eliciting deep sharing on different perspectives on God and built a sense of commonality rather than division. The same was true of the preceding exercise where people were asked to look at different chairs and think about how these related to their image of God. For example, one of the facilitators reflected of the exercises “People gave it much thought, some chose multiple images and discussed in pairs so gained different perspectives which they were able to speak to. Some felt the same about the same images and for others it meant something very different. Great openness in sharing and acceptance of the other”. And another wrote “chairs and images of God brought deep sharing and listening. Very thoughtful.” Participant feedback showed that the images of God (reinforced by that evening’s input) were powerful in building a sense of unity:

What if anything, will stay with you? (4 out of 5 respondents answered this question)

- “Range (?) of ways we each see God as a person and as an image”
- “Some of the images. The image of Jesus’s death on the cross. Remembering that he died for all of us and his love for all of us.”
- “The different images people have of God.”
- “Reflections, the fellowship and the learning together. A better understanding of God.”

And also “Praying together and sharing. Our images of God brought us closer together” (‘what was the best part of the evening for you?’). Two of the five respondents mentioned the ‘images of God’ as the resource from the evening that had been most useful to them. Creative approaches such as this worked on an imaginative level – for example “ I can imagine God in the other chair.” “God as chair - supporting, resting, shaping me as chair – offering support.”

Stones

This was another example of a creative approach that, in this case, aimed to focus participants on how they could reframe the obstacles they felt to be in the way or work to inspire unity. Having identified the stone with an obstacle they were invited to write on it a word to overcome it of justice, liberation or reconciliation. Course

members took part enthusiastically and brought their stone back from the previous week to the closing session (see picture above). Feedback from participants (in answer to the question 'what if anything will stay with you from this evening?') included:

"The stones. We picked our own this evening but often the stones are not of our choosing. The pebble in my shoe can worry me more than the boulder I make others walk round."

"The simple stone. It is practical, simple and I can see it and hold it in my hand and feel it. Session 6 was the right time for me to receive it because I can see things quite clearly."

At the end of session 5, after considering Kingdom values in their communities and where God might be calling them now, participants were asked to comment on what resources from the course they would be able to use to help with this work.

Responses are given in full.

What can you use from this course to help you? (session 5 evaluations 6/8 responses)

"All the back-up from everyone at each session and if I have to think about anything dealing with the topics we have had discussions about I can refer back to all the wonderful pamphlets I have been given."

"I have learned to be a bit calmer and more understanding!"

"The meditation, sharing experiences, prayers and images. 'This is the Word of the Lord about me' is helpful, good to go back to and reminding myself that Jesus thinks this about all of us."

"This course has been excellent and the information I have learned will stay with me."

"Quiet time and listening more."

"The shared belief that the journey is worth it, that praying together demand[s] action. That people really want the building of the Kingdom."

"The Our Last Supper!" [reference to the picture by ID Campbell of the Last Supper set in Glasgow City Mission]

The range of responses shows that the different approaches of the course all represented preparation for further action for some participants – the home materials, the stilling, the quiet time – and that it was the combination of these, rather than any one tool that seems to have been effective – for spiritual development, for learning, for building the group and for readiness to go further into tackling sectarianism. As a participant reflected after session 2 ('were any of the approaches from this evening useful to you?'), "I like the different short approaches and the thought provoking exercises. It was good to hear about other people's perceptions of some of the images and made me think about mine."

A similar message comes from the final feedback gathered during the closing session. Responses are given in full.

Have you received any gifts from this course to help you in your work to sustain unity? (7 'yes', 1 'maybe'; 8/9 responses)

- “How to inspire and create togetherness.”
- “I learnt to receive other people positively and to appreciate other people’s talents.”
- “Gift of awareness that others share enthusiasm but also doubts and fears, but not overwhelming in any way.”
- “To listen.”
- “Self awareness, courage.”
- “A sharing of friendship. Meditation! Has always been difficult in the past but now much easier.”
- (maybe) “Patience – both with myself and others.”

Have you received any gifts as a group? (8 'yes')

- “Learned to listen and meditate. The opening meditation has been most beautiful in creating the right atmosphere.”
- “Sharing with the people of other faith positively was very enriching.”
- “Sharing each other’s experience, confidence to take the project forward.”
- “Gift of praying and sharing. A real reverence for prayer, sharing of views but also fun and joy and a developing relaxation.”
- “Deeper friendship and understanding.”
- “Communication skills have improved.”
- “A strong warmth and people being very open and sharing some deep thoughts.”
- “Unity, friendship, awareness of this community and the similar issues with our own in Wishaw.”

Specific skills gained, such as communication and listening are mentioned, also, some of the course approaches, but primarily the key features of the experience of the course for participants – spiritual development, awareness of, and sharing with, others and the development of trustful relationships. These seem to be the building blocks for deepening future work.

Conclusion

It is not yet known whether any of the participants will make active use of these, although their desire for this course to be made available to others is clear. We hope to engage some of the participants in the pilot course the delivery of future courses.

These were the summary points that participants made themselves in the final session:

Evaluation Summary

- Prayer and stilling
- The progressively deeper sharing of the group
- God has been a part of our journey
- Images of God, lectio divina, non-judgemental listening
- The desires and hopes that the course has generated.

Overall conclusion

The participant feedback highlights the importance of a mixed approach and shows how the periods of prayer and quiet have set the tone for learning. The emphasis that participants place on learning from each other also indicates the importance of active and participative learning to the group's unfolding awareness of a sense of unity and strength.

What next?

North Motherwell

The last parts of the course (sessions 5 to 7) began to zone in on the communities that participants belonged to, how their future role was crystallising for them and what they felt was needed to take the work forward locally to inspire further unity.

Themes started to emerge as participants worked together to consider how they saw the Beatitudes ('Kingdom values') at work in their communities. Important qualities identified were:

- The value of listening
- Positive action rather than complaining
- Forgiveness
- Being open
- Recognising your own worth and skills and respecting those of others
- Assertiveness.

The group was able to identify a wide range of developments that they were already involved in or knew of and that represented signs of hope of progress towards greater unity locally. These were fed back to them in the shape of a Celtic Cross.

Signs of the Kingdom among us

holiday clubs

Duke of Edinburgh

Holy Soles Ramblers

days away with both churches together

involving non-churchgoers in community activities

fun evening to raise money for good causes

days away with both churches together

Daffodil for all Mothers

SVDP

elders

craft club

lunch clubs

MADE4U in ML2

Community Café

film club and faith

Holy Soles Ramblers

They showed appreciation of the untapped assets in the people in their communities and the challenges they faced.

“North Motherwell may be a poor area to live in but between Motherwell North and St Bernadette’s Churches we work well. Also we have a community cafe twice a week where an average attendance is 65-75.”

In December we had a joint Advent service and some of us from this small group help[ed] to organise the tea etc. We had a great turnout and the service was very moving and thought provoking. People from the community commented on how lucky we are to have such a great relationship.

I have seen people who were poor, sad, hungry – and who thought they had no skills, no hope. Some were able to lift themselves up with God’s help. This has given hope.”

“People are generous with their time and talents.”

In the final session the group worked on identifying the assets in their communities that they could build on, but also what else they needed for this work, who else could help and where they could be found. In terms of assets there was appreciation of the resources that were already present in the community, particularly in terms of people and the range of activities already mentioned. The course group itself was recognised as a strength, but there were also structures and leadership, particularly in North Motherwell Churches together. The point was made that in such a community many people did not realise or were not confident about their own skills and potential contribution.

Assets – examples

Churches together
Commitment of this group
Community group activities
Present structure in community of North Motherwell
Community project is an umbrella to bring together all ages and activities
Leadership (clergy, elders)
People around the parish
“People – assets often are not recognised by themselves or others”

There were three strong themes on what was needed to take work forward:

- Wider engagement through involving more people and an increase in opportunities for joint activity,
- A desire to move outwards; and
- Belief in the capacities and qualities that the group had demonstrated and had been developing and confidence that these were what was needed.

It was as if people were reaching for a step change in the intensity and range of commitment to this work, whilst also recognising that this could only happen by

growing the number of people involved. Moreover it was being said that certain key attitudes and behaviours were needed to inform this work if it were to be successful. Any future steps would need to continue to be informed by qualities and values that would promote mutual respect and understanding.

What do we need?

More
More people to be involved
More church activities together
More joint services
More interaction`
Churches working together
Skills
Broadening outwards
Opportunity to learn from the assets of other communities – use their experience
Building relationship with community people
All denominations
Needs commitment from “Big Picture” churches of all denominations
Community
Qualities and values
Courage and love for one another, caring
Self belief, shared belief
Trust
To believe in what we are doing
People need to feel their thoughts count but also to learn different ways to be
To be able to speak to a stranger about our feelings
Listening
Unity
Support

Encouragement (2)
Instilling confidence in others.
Publicity of groups such as these. If people realised that such a forum existed then a change could take place for the good of communities.
Communication (3)
Enthusiasm from others

The wish to continue to engage others and the belief that the circle of support could be grown was reinforced by responses to the question ‘who else could help?’ Moreover, this was building on, not instead of, what the group could do. As one person put it, “ME, family, colleagues, fellow Christians, neighbours.”

Who else can help?

Who?
Anyone we talk to
Involvement from as many people as we can get
Who have gone before – successes and failures
People around us!
Friends (2)
Trying to get the youth involved in all aspects – worship, organisation, consultation
Ministers, other elders
Community people (2)
Governments
ME, family, colleagues, fellow Christians, neighbours.
Where?
Opportunities to pray together – build on Advent service
Ongoing opportunities to use Christian Scripture and other sources
If there were openness and non judgemental dialogue then more people would come forward to drive change and stamp out negative thoughts and actions
Lottery funding

The responses here were not very specific, except for the reference to young people. It was interesting that an emphasis continued to come through of the need for forums, for spaces for non-judgemental dialogue, rooted in Christian sharing.

We will feedback this summary to participants and bring them together again to hear of their experiences since the course. It is hoped that there will be opportunities to share the evaluation within North Motherwell Churches Together and to consider how the participants' commitment to following the journey of this course can contribute to supporting the development of work towards unity locally.

Sharing the learning

This evaluation has tried to capture the learning from the course. In order to share this learning more widely a short film has been commissioned from Kate Burton which will include interviews with course participants. The purpose of the film is to give a feel for the course experiences and to demonstrate its impact on participants and its relevance for work to inspire unity This will be available as a resource on relevant websites including In Wi' the Mix.

Future courses

It is hoped to deliver the course in other communities where the legacy of sectarianism continues to divide Christian communities and where there is scope for stronger relationships and greater understanding to develop common witness and action for social justice. Some of the participants in the North Motherwell pilot will be invited to contribute to future courses elsewhere and it is hoped they can also use the materials locally.

In their final session they drew up a message to future participants (in the first instance expected to be in Ruchazie).

What message would you give to those who may be starting the course in Ruchazie in a few weeks? what would you ask for them as they start their journey?

To enjoy and understand and be prepared to share and be open as you start is journey.

Openness to the spirit, to listen and enjoy each other's company

An open mind, honesty, a positive outcome, God's blessing.

Discussion and conclusions

“As for me, I believe that we are being summoned by God to see in the human other a trace of the divine Other.” Jonathan Sachs (ibid)

The outputs from the pilot course include:

- A cohort of people in North Motherwell who feel re-energised to inspire unity in their communities
- A fully designed and piloted course with resources and a team of five facilitators experienced in its delivery
- Learning about the value of such a course and what works to tackling sectarianism in our communities.

The pilot course was conducted with a group who were already active in their communities over many years, were spiritually mature and open to sharing across traditions. Nonetheless they report considerable benefits from taking part in the *Inspiring Unity* course. They became more confident in sharing their opinions and even stronger in their own sense of unity, despite differences. The range of approaches used in the course has contributed to this. Moreover, its fundamental premise, that an opportunity for joint spiritual growth would lead to a deepening of understanding across traditions, has been confirmed. There is a sense of renewed optimism and an openness to engage others. It remains to be seen what contribution this can make to further work to inspire greater unity in North Motherwell and Wishaw. Creating the conditions for this cannot depend solely on course members and we would hope that they will be supported to take forward what they feel to be the next steps following this course.

Recommendations

- Take findings of this report to leadership groups in North Motherwell to determine next steps
- Explore ways to run further courses in local areas
- Develop new facilitators from previous course participants
- Film experience of pilot course to form a web based resource.

Learning Points

Recruitment

- It can take time to recruit a group able to commit to taking the course. Expect that it may not come off first time.
- What helps: a local champion, introductory taster session, flexible approach to delivery (times and place)

Timing

- It would be better if the sessions could be more evenly spaced, for example mostly weekly. However it is also valuable for participants to have time to reflect between sessions. Where there is a gap between sessions it could be suggested that participants meet up themselves.

Participation

- Not everyone is equally comfortable sharing in a group. It works well to have some exercises where everyone is asked to contribute briefly (e.g. by sharing one word)
- It is important to stress commitment to the full course. However it is inevitable that due to health, family or other commitments some participants may miss a session. Another participant can be asked to catch them and they should be sent the materials.
- The course is more than the sessions. Having a booklet to summarise each session is valuable to enable participants to continue to reflect on the material.
- Providing participants with a notebook and encouraging them to keep their own reflections helps to reinforce learning.

Preparation

- Hospitality is important; facilitators need time to set up (room and materials)
- Even once the course is designed, time is needed for facilitators to meet prepare and debrief between sessions.

Delivery of the sessions

- Sessions need to allow for group work and quiet time in addition to a meditation and inputs. It may be necessary sometimes to reduce content to make this possible.
- Learning from each other has been really important for participants in terms of increasing understanding. Time needs to be allowed for this.
- Having several facilitators can be helpful in a number of ways. It enables there to be multiple roles at any one time (delivery, note taking, listening etc) and also gives a variety of voices and perspectives for the group to engage with.

Resources

Resource	Use	Source/Acknowledgement
Tools/exercises		
'Hello my name is...'	Introducing each other by something personal, which group we belong to and what we are passionate about (session 1)	#Hello my name is campaign, Dr Kate Granger hellomynameis.org.uk Andy Hyde, Asset mapping training
Three levels of seeing	To model non-judgemental responses (session 1)	Paterson M and Kelly E, 2013. Values Based Reflective Practice, Practical Theology 6(1) 51-68.
Gradual Revelation of God/ Developing Image of God	To illustrate how images of God in Scripture have changed over time (session 2)	Handout
A Personal Statement	To consider how each person sees God and their relationship to God (session 3, homework)	Kathleen Fischer, Woman at the Well
Personal Word	For prayer to reflect on the identity of each person beloved by God (end of session 4)	Passages of Scripture with the person's name inserted in place of 'you'
Johari window (adapted)	To reflect on personal growth in relation to our image of God (session 4)	Luft and Ingham adapted
What is community ?	Set of conversation cards to elicit experiences of what builds community (session 5)	Developed for the course
Signs of the Kingdom	Group exercise on how Kingdom values (Beatitudes) at work in communities today	Based on: Praying with the Beatitudes in Millar, P., 2001. An Iona Prayerbook. Norwich: Canterbury Press, p.102
'I'm not normally one to speak out'	Monologue to practice responses to someone who is upset because their attitudes have been challenged (session 6)	Written for the course
(alleged) Radio	Dialogue to illustrate risk of assumptions and how two sides	

Conversations off the coast of Newfoundland, October 1995	can read a situation differently (session 6)	
Envision picture cards	To enable expression of feeling and meaning (sessions 1, 7)	NHS Education for Scotland
Reading (in addition to many Scripture extracts)		
Great Uncle George	To stimulate reflection on our changing images of God as we grow up (session 2 homework)	God of Surprises , G. Hughes, p. 35ff
Ministry of Beauty	Reading after session 3	D. O'Leary
Musical and prayer resources		
'Come as you are'	(hymn) (session 1 stilling exercise)	Deirdre Browne (1999) Together in Song, The Australian Hymn Book.
ACTS Commitment Prayer (adapted)	Pasted inside participant notebooks as a reminder of the group's mission and commitment to it (session 1)	From inaugural services of ACTS, Sept 1990 www.raadvanckerken.nl/?b=2597
'I am with you on the journey'	Music for closing reflection (session 2)	? Chris Anderson
'Bring many names'	(session 3 , stilling)	Brian Wren
'Abba, Abba father, you are the potter, we are the clay'	(session 4, stilling)	John Michael Talbot
'Jesus Christ is waiting,	(session 5, stilling)	John Bell, French carol melody, WGRG 1988

waiting in the streets'		
Homo quidam faecit coenam 'A certain man made a great supper'	Stilling (session 6)	Music by Thomas Tallis played by Chapelle du Roi, Music for Divine Office -2
Our Supper	Closing reflection on The Kingdom (session 5)	Painting by ID Campbell at Glasgow City Mission
The work of Christmas begins	Close of session 5	Howard Thurman
Shekinah	Session7 (stilling)	From In Search of Peace, Teresa Brown
Film		
Two sided story	For discussion of reconciliation after bitterness – seeing from another’s perspective (between sessions 6 and 7)	Tor Ben Mayor www.theparentscircle.com/Content.aspx?ID=60#.WFVaVnTfWhA

New Ways

(Opening Reflection, taster session 12th September 2016)

God of our lives

you are always calling us

to follow you into the future,

inviting us to new ventures, new challenges,

new ways to care,

new ways to touch the hearts of all.

When we are fearful of the unknown, give us courage.

When we worry that we are not up to the task,

remind us that you would not call us

if you did not believe in us.

When we get tired,

or feel disappointed with the way things are going

remind us that you can bring change and hope

out of the most difficult situations.



Acknowledgements: The Pattern of Our Days, Liturgies and Resources for Worship (1996)
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