

# WEEK 1: STEWARD FAITHFULLY

## LEADERS RESOURCES

### A. COURSE OUTCOMES: OUR OVERALL GOALS

By the end of the course people will be able:

- To articulate the gospel for themselves and communicate it to others, without embarrassment or distortion
- To understand how the above actions help us to interpret and practise the breadth and depth of the gospel
- To recognize how the good news of Jesus Christ is rooted in the book of Acts and in the 4 Gospels

### B. AIMS FOR THIS WEEK: WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE

- 1 To engage with the theology of creation and God's vision to offer a full life
- 2 To understand the responsibility we have before God to steward what he has made
- 3 To explore the values of the Early Church and their attitude to what they were given.

### C. PLAN YOUR SESSION: A CHECKLIST

- Pray for your session and for those who will attend
- Read the passages, perhaps in different translations, to bring out the meaning
- Read the notes summary for the week
- Note the key words and other passages you can explore if you have time
- Read through the session plan
- Remember to review your session afterwards

### D. SUMMARY FOR THE WEEK: TO INFORM YOUR THINKING

God made the world and gave humankind the responsibility for caring for all that he had made in their service of him. As his sons and daughters, we are responsible for sustaining, renewing and guarding it until Christ returns as King to liberate creation to be all that it was intended to be. We are co-workers with him, by his Holy Spirit, in bringing freedom to every aspect of his creation.

Jesus came to bring salvation to the cosmos, ie not just people but creation too! His resurrection is the first fruits of that new creation (re-creation), a new beginning, a new hope. And as his people we are called to join in with bringing in this kingdom, this new life, in the way we manage what he has given us to oversee.

In the readings for this session, we find God always provides more than enough, if we are willing to share it. Our task is to steward faithfully what he has given to us. The Early Church too found that each person had enough as they lived together as a new community. What we believe as God's people about his creation needs to be lived out in the way we manage and steward his glorious world.

When we look at our churches, we are often populated by over 50s. Yet these themes of preserving creation are attractive to young people and children, who intuitively understand the need to do so – their sense of wonder is not yet lost! How can we engage these ages to participate in sustaining, renewing and guarding?

## E. WORDS FOR THE WEEK: KEY WORDS FOR THIS SESSION

**Stewardship: *oikonomos*.** In terms of the New Testament this word is used of a manager of an estate or household (oikos=house, nemo=arrange). Adam and Eve are charged with working and keeping the garden (Genesis 1:15).

**Salvation: *soteria*.** Deliverance from the bondage of sin, personally, and of creation in its widest sense too. Through the work of Christ creation is set free from the ravages of sin, and there is a new beginning for the world under the rule of Christ as King.

## F. OTHER SCRIPTURES TO REFERENCE

*Genesis 2:15 The Lord God took the man (humankind) and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.*

*Romans 1:16 I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith...*

*Romans 8:21 ...the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God*

## G. LIVING THE MISSION OF JESUS

We know we have responsibility for the care of creation, going right back to the commissioning of Adam and Eve in the garden. As a Diocese we want to work at this through the way we are church (as pioneering faith communities) and how we live as global citizens being salt and light (prophetic global citizens). This is also shown in the 4th of our strategic priorities, living together sacrificially and generously – and that includes our overseas partner dioceses, as well as the wider global context in which we live.

## H. REVIEWING YOUR SESSION

We would encourage you to spend a little time reviewing your session once you have led it through.

Here are some questions to think about:

- What went well and why – what evidence is there that it did?
- What would you change if you did it again?
- What advice would you pass on to the person who is leading the group next time?

## CORE MATERIAL

Use the following structure to guide you through your session. Each part has a suggested time to enable you to be finished in 90 minutes.

### 1 OPEN WITH PRAYER (3 MINUTES)

Use the following verses from Psalm 104 and then wait on God for a short time before you begin:

*You set the earth on its foundations,  
so that it shall never be shaken.*

<sup>6</sup> *You cover it with the deep as with a garment;  
the waters stood above the mountains.*

<sup>7</sup> *At your rebuke they flee;  
at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.*

<sup>8</sup> *They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys  
to the place that you appointed for them.*

<sup>9</sup> *You set a boundary that they may not pass,  
so that they might not again cover the earth.*

<sup>10</sup> *You make springs gush forth in the valleys;  
they flow between the hills,*

<sup>11</sup> *giving drink to every wild animal;  
the wild asses quench their thirst.*

<sup>12</sup> *By the streams the birds of the air have their habitation;  
they sing among the branches.*

<sup>13</sup> *From your lofty abode you water the mountains;  
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.*

Or this prayer by Peter Lippiett

*We thank you, creator God,  
for the goodly heritage you offer us,  
from green downland  
to the deep salt seas,  
and for the abundant world  
we share with your creation.  
Keep us so mindful of its needs  
and those of all with whom we share,  
that open to your Spirit  
we may discern and practice  
all that makes for its wellbeing,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.*

Or

Use these words of Pope Francis to reflect on before you begin:

*Nurturing and cherishing creation is a command God gives not only at the beginning of history, but to each of us. It is part of his plan; it means causing the world to grow responsibly, transforming it so that it may be a garden, a habitable place for everyone.*

### 2 INTRODUCTION (2 MINUTES)

Read the following aloud or use your own words to explain what it says:

*This week we are looking at how God intended us to care for the world he has made. He is generous and gracious, and has provided all we need.*

*The Early Church lived together as a community, sharing what they had in common and giving to those who had need. As we wait for Christ's return as King, we continue to live as his chosen people, caring for all he has made in a generous and gracious way.*

How is he calling us to live?

### 3 BIBLE BASE (30 MINUTES)

Read Luke 9:10-17

<sup>10</sup> *On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. <sup>11</sup> When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.*

<sup>12</sup> *The day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, 'Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here*

*in a deserted place.’<sup>13</sup> But he said to them, ‘You give them something to eat.’ They said, ‘We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.’<sup>14</sup> For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, ‘Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.’<sup>15</sup> They did so and made them all sit down.<sup>16</sup> And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.<sup>17</sup> And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.*

#### Questions:

As you heard this passage read, what stood out for you?

Jesus is Lord of all creation – the cattle on a thousand hills belong to him.

Describe the part of creation that makes your heart sing.

What could you do to steward that part faithfully?

In this account there is enough for all. In fact there is loads left over - God is overwhelmingly generous.

How can we reflect his generosity in the way we steward what he has given us, together and individually?

#### Now read Acts 4:32-37

*<sup>32</sup> Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.<sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.<sup>34</sup> There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.<sup>35</sup> They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.<sup>36</sup> There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means ‘son of encouragement’).<sup>37</sup> He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.*

#### Questions:

What do you find attractive about the way the early church lived together?

Together they had more than enough.

How can we ensure we are open and generous about what God has given us to steward?

The land that Yahweh led his people to, a land of milk and honey, was always his – his people were given it on loan to live on, to feed their families and to care for the needy. Barnabas sold a field that God had given him!

As we consider the world God has given us to steward, what issues would you highlight that we need engage with as prophetic global citizens? What do we need to do now to guard and preserve all that God has given us for future generations?

#### 4 WORKING IT OUT (10 MINUTES)

Either watch the 1st film on the USB stick people are engaging with the issues of managing God’s great creation today.

Or

Read one or two of the following examples out loud as examples of what people are doing about this in the Diocese of Winchester.

#### Solar Panels for Clergy Housing.

The Diocese has installed solar PV panels on 70 clergy houses. Over a 20 year period this investment pays for itself and provides a return of about 2% per annum but the real advantages are that clergy can make free use of the electricity produced by their panels and carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere is reduced (Anthony Smith, the Diocesan Office).

### Environmental Gold Award.

Achieving our gold environmental award was challenging and required the support of a lot of the congregation. The hardest thing was lobbying our MP; the funniest was when a visitor commented that we 'even had a water hippo in the cistern' (we were amazed he bothered to look). The most enjoyable was a lunch after the service (all LOAF ingredients of course – Locally produced, Organically grown, Animal friendly, Fairly Traded) where the children made bird boxes (Claire Thompson, Nursling with Rownhams).

<http://www.winchester.anglican.org/resourcecategory/environment/>

### Working Together for Growth.

St John's Lockerley worked first for its Bronze Environment Award and then for the Gold. It took 9 months and helped us to grow together, not least, because we swapped seeds, seedlings, plants, and surplus produce! Two people even shared unused space on their land for others to grow vegetables: a harvest of goodness (Jay Greene, Lockerley).

<http://www.winchester.anglican.org/resourcecategory/environment/>



### 5 COFFEE BREAK (15 MINUTES)

During this time of coffee encourage people to talk about what they have heard and seen. Make sure everyone gets a chance to contribute if they want to.

#### To open up discussion:

What would you do if you had £1 million to use to change the world?

### 6 STEWARD FAITHFULLY

This is God's world, and we've been talking about how to steward what he has given us faithfully. We know God reveals himself in and through his wonderful world.

Now show the group the **photos for session 1** either using a laptop or having printed them off. Or use your own pictures and photos of God's creation.

#### Together as a large group:

How has God revealed himself to you in the past through his creation? Can you give a specific example?

#### For personal reflection:

How has God revealed himself to you recently – when, where and how?

It may not have been dramatic or clear – it may have just been whispers of his loving presence.

## 7 COMMUNICATING MY STORY

Choose a recent experience you have had of God that you are willing to talk about.

Now get together in 2s and 3s. Decide who will speak first, who will listen first (and who will observe first, if you are in a 3). Take it in turns to explain your recent experience of God to the other – you will have 6 minutes each if you are in a pair (4 minutes each if you are in a 3).

In the same groups, use the enclosed **sheet on listening skills** to assess *how well you each listened*, not to assess what was said (if you are in a 3, the observer will have a chance to reflect on what they saw).

### **Together as a large group:**

What did you learn about how people encounter God through creation? How did you feel talking to another person about your experiences of God?

## 8 THIS WEEK'S TASK

This week, put together your life story as a disciple of Christ using one of the following methods, or your own:

- Use a timeline, marking the key moments in your life of faith
- Divide up your experience into decades, and chart what happened and when
- Produce a series of drawings to illustrate your journey of faith over the years
- Identify and describe the key incidents that have led you to where you are now as a Christian

There is more help in the individual booklet to help you.

## 9 PRAYER

Close this session in prayer, giving thanks for what God the Holy Spirit is doing, and for the beauty of his glorious world.

## 10 RESOURCES

The photos for this week and the individual booklet can be found on the USB stick and on the website.

The listening skills sheet can be found at the end of this section, on the USB stick and on the website.

## 11 NEXT WEEK'S THEME

Next week we will be looking at what it means to play our part in this wonderful world for the common good – to Act Justly.

A large rectangular box with rounded corners and a black border, containing horizontal dashed lines for writing.