**An Introduction to the “Way Forward” Workshop**

**How the Workshop can be used**

This workshop was developed to help churches discern God’s purpose for them and hence their best way forward. It has evolved over several years of being used in a couple of Circuits in the Bolton & Rochdale Methodist District.

The workshop should be used in churches that recognise that they’ve got into a rut or are at a turning point. It will work less well with churches that don’t see the need for change, in which case something like a Healthy Church review would be more suitable.

It has been found to be particularly helpful several times by a minister shortly after arriving at new churches.

The workshop is most often used to consider all areas of church activity. However, it has also been used (with a bit of adapting) to focus on a particular aspect of the church, for example the role of the church in its community and specifically which groups of people to reach out to and how.

The workshops run to date have been found to be invariably useful to the church and has helped churches to become more mission orientated, with everyone working together better to achieve common goals. Most people who attend the workshops find them enjoyable and rewarding.

**The structure of the Workshop**

The workshop is based on consultancy techniques commonly used in Industry but with a focus on discerning God’s will through prayer.

There are four main parts:

1. **Where are we now?** This gets everyone into groups to discuss what their church is good at and what it’s not so good at. It may seem odd wasting time on this when we’re supposed to be looking at the way forward but it provides a foundation on which to build and also allows people to get things off their chest at the start.
2. **Where should we be?** This starts with a meditative prayer that leads people to listen to what Jesus wants the church to be doing. Then, in groups, people capture a vision for the church in a picture/diagram. Finally, everyone individually contributes the things that they believe are most important for the church to be doing, which is then used to identify three or four things that the church should focus on.
3. **How do we get there?** People get into groups to work out the first steps that should be taken to achieve God’s purpose for the church in each of the three or four things discerned. Each group looks at just one thing.
4. **What can I bring to the party?** This helps people identify their gifts and then prayerfully consider how these gifts could be used to achieve the steps that the church needs to take. (This part can be omitted if time is limited and may not always be appropriate).

Details of all the sessions can be found in the supporting material.

**Preparing for the Workshop**

It’s really important that the workshop is well attended, with a good cross section of the church represented. It’s important that the Stewards are there but it’s equally important that people new to the church are there as their views and perceptions are very important. Therefore, the workshop must be given a lot of publicity and people made to realise that they’ll miss out on an opportunity to shape the future of the church if they don’t attend.

It’s strongly recommend that the church prays for the workshop beforehand. Several churches have produced a prayer guide for the week leading up to the workshop. An example prayer guide is included in the supporting material.

Do not get people to think about what they want to input into the workshop beforehand. It’s far more productive if people come with an open mind and be guided by the Holy Spirit.

**Practicalities**

Each church is different but here are some things to bear in mind when working out the practical aspects of running the workshop:

* **Facilitator:** If possible get an experienced facilitator who is a member of a different church to run the workshop. This person will need to prepare the material, run the day (and keep to schedule), make sure the group discussions stay focused, process the outcome of discussions and write up the outcome of the day afterwards.
* **Group leaders:** It may be useful to appoint a leader in each group, who can be trusted to stop the discussion going off track and ensuring that everyone is enabled to contribute.
* **Location:** Getting away from your own church building can be useful but not essential. When choosing a location, remember that you’ll need space for the break out groups and preferably a projector and screen. Some churches have a workshop during their annual weekend away.
* **Stationery:** The supporting material details the stationery required and a trip to Staples may be required.
* **Catering:** Get someone from outside the church to do the catering to avoid some people having to come out of the workshop to sort out the drinks and food. This is an important day for the church, so don’t begrudge spending money!
* **Young people:** If the church has families with children then something must be provided for young people otherwise you may prevent the parents from attending. As with catering, if at all possible try and get someone from outside the church to lead the young people’s groups if needed, otherwise you risk excluding the church’s youth leaders from the workshop. Try and get input to the workshop from the young people’s group, especially the teenagers, for “Where are we now?” and “Where should we be?” as their input is valuable (and often very challenging).
* **Reciprocal arrangement with another church:** If another church in your Circuit is also having a workshop consider helping each other run the workshops, e.g. by providing the catering, the youth leaders, use of building and facilitator.

**After the Workshop**

It’s very important that the outcome of the workshop is comprehensively and accurately captured into a report. This will require all the flip chart sheets to be collected together and taken home. The pictures can be easily included in the report by taking a photograph of them with a digital camera. Be aware that writing up the outcome isn’t a trivial task (a recent report ran to 15 pages!). The report should be distributed as widely as practical, at a minimum to all the Church Council.

Consider displaying the “vision” pictures in the church for a couple of weeks after the workshop to remind those who attended and for the benefit of those who didn’t.

Bring the actions that are recommended in the report (i.e. the “first steps” identified in the workshop) to the Church Council for approval.

It’s recommended that each of the things that it was discerned that the church should focus on (i.e. the outcome of “Where should we be?”) should become items on the Church Council and AGM agendas. This will help the church to focus on its mission.

**Supporting material provided**

The following supporting material is provided:

* An agenda
* A detailed script for the workshop
* A meditative prayer
* The “Discover you gifts” questionnaire
* A PowerPoint presentation for the workshop
* An example prayer guide.

**If you have any questions**

If you have any questions on how this workshop could be used or run then contact [richard\_j\_selby@hotmail.com](mailto:richard_j_selby@hotmail.com).