

Baptism - a six session reflective journey
Facilitator's Guide



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INTRODUCTION

Background:

As an Urban Expression team we have always felt it important to include our children, now teenagers, in discussions about our faith and decisions related to how we live out our faith. Community meals are anything but quiet as this is the place, gathered around bread and wine, where many lively discussions have taken place. So we were delighted when last summer, Imogen McBeath, now 13, asked to be baptised.

But it did cause us to ask some questions. Our teenagers and young people have not grown up in a traditional church with Sunday school and youth groups. They have not grown up with a systematic understanding of Christian doctrine or using the usual church jargon. What they have grown up with is an ability to question and to challenge. And, we've realized, they have grown up with a strong sense of living out the values of Urban Expression particularly of relationship and creativity.

And so we quickly decided that we would need a different approach to baptismal classes; it needed to make few assumptions about someone's experience of faith and church but rather to allow these to be explored in an open ended and creative way. It needed not to focus so much on doctrinal beliefs wrapped up in traditional church jargon but rather to be based primarily on relationship with God and one another and with living out the values of following Jesus.

Who is the reflective journey for?

What we offer here is a reflective journey aimed predominantly at teenagers and young adults who come from a church planting, missional church or new expressions context and is also suitable for adults who have a non churched background or those who are wanting to step outside of a traditional church context.

It is designed for people who want to explore baptism and whether this is for them. It does not assume that people know much about baptism, what it is to be part of a Christian community or about the Bible. It allows space for the people participating in the reflective journey to access this at different stages of faith development and also to make up their own mind at the end of the reflective journey about whether to go ahead with baptism or not.

The reflective journey can be used by one person working on their own with a facilitator or by a small group of up to four people working with a facilitator. This is because the reflective journey is deeply relational and allows space for each person to respond to God and to the facilitator and to each other creatively. This should not be hurried. If you have more than four people interested in the reflective journey we would suggest you run more than one reflective journey.

What does the reflective journey consist of?

The reflective journey is based on Urban Expression's core values of relationship, creativity and humility, and in reading the gospel stories in a way which encourages us to live in relationship with Jesus and with one another to enable us to live out these values in daily life.

As such it is deliberately designed to be open ended and so uses some of the practices of Ignatian Spirituality and Spiritual Direction to see where God is challenging us to change and grow and to deepen our faith. These are introduced near the end of the first session but are then practised as a way into each subsequent session. Sometimes you will be asked to use your imagination as a way to engage with stories from the Bible and as a way to explore your relationship with God.

We are also conscious that people have different ways of learning and so the reflective journey encourages each participant to choose how they respond using visual and tactile images, written words in prose or poetry, discussion, music, dance and art as ways to explore our relationship with God.

The reflective journey consists of six sessions of 1 ½ - 2 hours each. Ideally these would be run on consecutive weeks as each week builds on the week before and also to allow the relationships within the group to develop.

Each session concludes with something to do or reflect on through the week.

The facilitator's role:

Your role as a facilitator will make a big difference to participants' experience of the reflective journey and the depth of relationships formed. It is important to focus on the participant/s and to allow space for them to think things through and to respond. You may need to ask or prompt but when you do make sure this is open ended – there are lots of examples of open ended prompts in the materials for each session.

It is really important to create a safe space for the participants so you may need to discuss and agree a few ground rules at the beginning. These will need to include confidentiality by yourself and the individual, or the whole group if in a group setting, but also be clear what the limits of confidentiality are e.g. you cannot offer confidentiality if someone discloses something that could relate to a safeguarding issue.

If you are facilitating this in a group setting you may find that some participants talk more than others. This is fine but try to make sure those who are quieter also have the space to talk if they want to. On occasion this may mean sensitively asking the more vocal to keep quiet to allow others to speak. It is important to make sure there is no pressure to share anything personal if participants don't want to and that all views are respected and received in a non-judgmental

manner. Where there are differences of theology or doctrine it is important to allow these differences and not to impose your own views. The emphasis is on participants being free to explore their faith in dialogue with others including being open about things they are not sure of.

It is important that you keep within the time allowed for each session but feel free to use the time within each session flexibly or to finish early as led by the participants. It is important that the session does not feel hurried and that time limits are not imposed on participants' creative responses. You may on occasion need to move people on with the suggestion that they can take a piece of artwork or poetry home to work on between sessions.

Learning styles and the use of a creative box:

Each person will have their own learning style. What this means is that everyone learns differently. While some people will learn by listening and then discussing something, others will learn through visual or tactile media or by being active and doing something for themselves. Some will need space to think and reflect, others like to think by talking something through. This is all fine – allow people to find the styles that suit them best but make sure these are not then imposed on others.

To help with this you will need to gather a creative box together before the start of the reflective journey that can be available for people to use in each session. It is up to you and the participants what you put into the creative box.

Some people may find this approach rather threatening or see art materials as childish. It is important to say something about different learning styles at the beginning of the first session when you introduce the creative box and to make it clear that participants do not have to use the creative box if they don't want to. Sometimes it helps to model being creative with the materials yourself as this can give permission for people to play and have a go. Stress that it is the process of being creative that is important not the production of something artistically stunning at the end!

Some ideas to get you started: wipe clean cloth to cover table or floor, paper and pens/pencils, plasticine/clay, paint, paintbrushes and pots for water, different textures and patterns of paper, a candle, stones, feathers, shells, cross, journal, newspapers, jug for water, scissors, glue, access to a computer, means to play music e.g. speakers, CD player, musical instruments, pipe cleaners, wire, string/wool, a roll of lining/wallpaper paper, space to dance...

Some practicalities:

Make sure the venue provides an informal, comfortable space with appropriate facilities for creative activities. You may want to provide drinks or light refreshments as people arrive but don't allow this to eat into the time allowed for each session so you may want to build in some extra time, say half an hour, at the beginning for this. Likewise, be aware that some participants may want to talk to you at the end of a session. It is important to be open to this but not to allow it to become a counseling session.

Make sure you are familiar with the introduction to the reflective journey which sets out who the reflective journey is for and some of the ethos of the reflective journey. It also gives an overview of each session.

The "participant's booklet" is designed to be printed out so that each participant can have a copy to take home and bring back each week. You may want to put each copy into a folder to keep it and any notes a participant makes together. There is space within the reflective journey for the participants to add their own notes and thoughts so don't be tempted to change the layout to cram it into fewer pages. You will also need a copy of this yourself to lead the reflective journey alongside this "facilitator's guide".

Read through each session ahead of time to check what you need in the way of Bible stories, values, video clips etc. Rather than assuming people can find their way around a Bible it might be easier to print out the Biblical stories or to at least have the page numbers for the stories to hand. You will need the creative box every week but may need to replenish supplies or allow participants to add items to it.

Session outline and aims

Session 1: exploring my faith

Aim:

- to enable each participant to explore their faith journey.

Be prepared to meet each participant where they are at as you seek to enable them to grasp God's presence with them throughout their life. By encouraging them to ask God for what they need in each session (grace) we challenge a culture of individualism and nurture dependence on a relational God. Be attentive to healthy and unhealthy images of God.

Session 2: exploring my baptism

Aim:

- to enable each participant to explore baptism by immersion.

Be aware that not everyone may have witnessed baptism by immersion (I hadn't when I got baptised!). A video of Imogen's baptism can be found and viewed on www.urbanexpression.org.uk

Some may know 'baptised' people, others may need steering to those prepared to share their baptism stories and what God is doing in their lives today.

Session 3: exploring my calling - the value of relationship

Aim:

- to enable each participant to explore a relationship with Jesus and explore his values.

Encourage reflection on gospel stories, in particular, 1-1 encounters Jesus has with others. Also encourage participants to encounter the Jesus of the gospel for themselves.

Session 4: exploring my calling - the value of creativity

Aim:

- to enable each participant to explore what core values they may embody in life.

The appendix includes a set of the 21 core values used by Urban Expression. Participants are encouraged to reflect on the values of creativity to imagine how they may choose to live out the gospel values.

Session 5: exploring my calling - the value of humility

Aim:

- to enable each participant to explore the value of humility.

Time is taken to grasp how humility impacted Jesus' life and how the value may impact a participant's life today.

Session 6: reflecting back and exploring the day.

Aim:

- to enable each participant to reflect on the reflective journey.

Encourage participants to reflect back on the reflective journey, being attentive of God's presence and action in their lives. If a participant chooses to be baptised, time is taken to think through the practicalities of the day, to begin to form their testimony, and to help to form the promises they want to make.

Some final notes:

The primary focus offered to participants is on having a relationship with God and others, living out the values of following Jesus and to engage with those who may not know much about the bible. To do this we focus on gospel stories rather than 'dipping' into the old testament or the wider bible. The material is very much set in a specific local context in Openshaw, Manchester. Facilitators will need to consider and reflect the cultural context and the journey for each particular person. What would this journey look like in your particular context? How might it be expressed in a similar or different way than is offered here?

The notion of being baptised into Christ and his church, i.e. the wider christian community, may need more unpacking than the material explicitly states. Participants will need to be made aware of this should they go on to be baptised. How might this be included in your context?

It is possible that at the end of the reflective journey, should the participant decide that they do want to be baptised, that you will be invited to be involved in planning the baptism but don't expect this. If you are you will need to liaise closely with the church, missional community or team and the participant themselves as to the practicalities and the content bearing in mind that the baptism may not take place in a traditional church context. You may have to fit into various constraints or you may have the opportunity to work with the candidate to shape a baptism that is innovative, creative and missional.

Facilitating a reflective journey of this kind can be deeply rewarding and help develop long lasting relationships. It will also further develop your own skills in facilitating and participating in Ignatian Spiritual practices and thus hopefully deepen your own self awareness and relationship with God.

Above all – enjoy!

Angie, Clare and Imy

Postscript

We are delighted to say that Imy went on to be baptised in an open air baptistry, in the garden of Hawkshead Hill Baptist Church in the Lake District. She was also recently welcomed into membership in her local church.