

HOW TO NURTURE A FAITH-SHARING CULTURE

PRACTICE 4 – PRACTISE FAITH CONVERSATIONS

SUMMARY

Many people struggle to own up to their faith in their workplace, school, neighbourhood, social group and home. Practising faith conversations with other Christians builds both confidence and capability in knowing what to say.

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‘Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace and seasoned with salt.’

Colossians 4:5-6

EXPLANATION

Sharing our faith is a soft skill, like problem solving or public speaking. Soft skills can be learned. They are best developed under certain conditions:

- In a safe place where the pressure isn't on, it is ok to make mistakes, and there is a healthy amount of fun.
- Through practice, reflection, and refinement. This is aided by swift and specific feedback.
- Where the learning process involves us stretching ourselves beyond what we currently feel comfortable to do.

There are a variety of potential 'safe places' in gathered church life where we can practise faith conversations, for example a home group, a youth group, a Lent course, a PCC, a Group Council, one-to-one interactions, mentoring, or an evangelism training course. It may work in a service too, unless there is usually a reasonable number of visitors or enquirers, in which case it may need to be carefully adapted – or not done at all.

This practice can be introduced in stages. Start at the stage that is most appropriate for your context, and then build up to the following stages.

Stage 1

Invite people to chat about an aspect of their faith in pairs. If people are unfamiliar or uncomfortable talking about faith matters, start here.

- How did you come to be a part of the congregation?
- Who has been most influential in helping you on your faith journey?
- What is your favourite Bible passage, hymn or prayer, and why?
- When has God been especially close?
- In what ways does your faith impact your life?
- What do you struggle with in your faith?

Swap the pairs around week by week. Over time, gently invite people to share some of their conversation with the larger group so they get used to speaking in that context. The idea here is to help people to become more comfortable talking out loud about their faith.

Stage 2

Take some common scenarios and explore how to say something suitable when opportunities arise. For example:

- A friend shares they are going through a hard time: how to offer to pray with or for them.
- A colleague asks what you got up to over the weekend: how to own up that you go to church.
- A classmate notices you have made a behaviour change: how to speak of the difference Christianity has made in your life.

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LEAD ON

- A neighbour comments that they wish they had your faith: how to invite someone to read a booklet, or come to an event (see Practice 6).

Stage 3

Link it with Pray for Five. As we pray for people and for opportunities to share our faith, it is fairly easy to ask whether anyone has had an opportunity this week to share their faith with any of their five, or with anyone else? If they have, then invite them to share what happened, whether it went well or not. Then explore what can be learned from this encounter for a similar opportunity in the future. Play with how the conversation might go, and possible things that might be said.

Stage 4

Take one of the common questions that non-Christians ask (there are only around 15; identify the one to explore, as a group) and work out together how you might respond to it if it came up in a conversation. If you get stuck, ask someone who could help to visit your group.

is what Jesus did. Practise questions that would help open up a conversation about matters of faith. Pray for opportunities to arise to use one of the questions in the coming week. Discuss what makes a good listener and how you know you are being listened to.

- Work out how to intrigue people, to make the conversation 'salty' – that is, sprinkled with little comments that might prompt a reaction or question. For example, when someone says, 'It is a terrible world', ask, 'Why do you think that is?'



RESOURCES

See Guide 4 for some great courses to help equip people to speak about their faith, however be a little careful about depending on a course to do this. They tend to attract the interested and also require more time, so may best be seen as complementary. The approach above can involve more people and build into what already exists.



'However inadequate you feel, if you ask the Holy Spirit to speak through you, he will.'

Nicky Gumbel, church leader



TIPS

- Explain that evangelism is a soft skill and that soft skills are developed with time and practice. It often leads to an 'A-ha' moment as people realise why it is best to practise faith conversations before having faith conversations.
- The key to this practice is to practise. In group contexts, ideally make this a normal part of how the group meets.
- Of course, this feels very odd to begin with, awkward even (but probably less awkward than trying to say something to a contact outside of church). Acknowledge the awkwardness, be sensitive to how people respond, but gently persist and people will become more relaxed and natural talking about their faith.
- Try to build some fun into it. Suggest some terrible ways to respond, really cringe worthy, and have fun going over the top.
- If someone is sharing their attempt at talking about their faith, be as encouraging as you possibly can.
- Remind people that God has assured us of his help, that it doesn't all depend on us.
- Encourage people to listen to others and ask questions – it