

altered images - a workshop on christmas cards

You will need:

- A collection of Christmas cards with scene from the Christmas story, including some more unusual ones e.g. from Latin America or Africa (Traidcraft/Christian Aid)
- Emmanuel God with Us (Reflections from Christian Aid in words and images)
- Pile of newspapers and magazines
- Scissors, glue and Blu-tack

Then...

- Explain that the idea of the workshop is to explore some familiar and not so familiar depictions of the nativity, and the characters involved, not to say some are good and some are bad, but to refresh the way we see familiar images.
- Spread the cards, including the more unusual ones around the tables or if preferred, blu-tacked to the walls. Ask people to move around slowly, looking at them all and then to choose one they particularly like.
- Sitting in a circle, ask each person, if they wish, to show the card they have chosen and say why. If more than one person has chosen the same card, that's OK - it may be for different reasons.
- Listen carefully and affirm all the reasons given; there are no "right" or "wrong" answers.
- Once all who wish to have participated, initiate a discussion about what insight we have gained about what people are looking for during the Advent season (peace? hope?)
- Now ask them to go around again and choose one which they find unsettling or even disturbing
- Again ask people to share their reasons.
- Generate some questions based on what people have said. For example, is it OK for different cultures to picture the holy family as belonging to their culture? Should we avoid being unsettled at Christmas? What does "God with us" mean for our world now?
- Read "Christmas is really for Children" by Steve Turner (The Oxford Book of Christmas Poems; OUP1999) or Mary's Journey (Cloth for the Cradle, Wild Goose Publications)
- Once you have explored thoroughly the idea that God comes to our world now, introduce the idea of a contemporary nativity scene. Who would be Mary/ Who would be Joseph?
- Supply a pile of newspapers and scissors, and ask people to search for different people (assign different people to different characters).
- Stick on to paper and label appropriately.
- Gather people around the poster you have made. Ask for reactions...
- End with a short reflection - this could be a quiet song, or silence or a prayer or use the images as the basis for prayer. For example, we pray for all who like Mary and Joseph are forced to flee their homes...