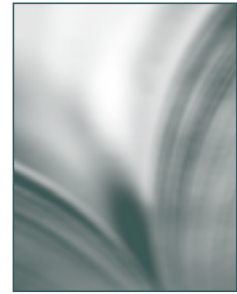


How to use this book



This book is designed for you to pick and mix. It offers suggestions for a range of contexts from short conversation starters to whole day workshops. The material is for use with adults, although experienced youth leaders may be able to adapt activities for young people.

IT IS WRITTEN in a prescriptive style, so that those people who feel less confident about leading conversations or workshops can do so more easily. Those used to leading discussion groups will feel more comfortable about making alterations and adapting the material to fit their own style. It is important to ensure that the core criteria of ALTERnativity are not lost in any changes made (see page 10).

The book has four main sections:

1. The Big Picture
2. Re-inventing Traditions
3. Bible Studies
4. Worship Resources

1. The Big Picture

The activities offered in this section are a way-in to talking about the whole Christmas celebration.

Sometimes people need convincing of the need to talk about Christmas and how we celebrate it, so we begin the book with a series of conversation starters which can stand alone or be used as an introduction. Some short activities are designed to

encourage people to unwrap and explore the meaning of Christmas, underneath all the trappings that can sometimes obscure it. These activities can be used at the beginning or at the end of an evening in Advent, in the course of a service or any other church event from a business meeting to a youth group.

Longer than the above conversations, there are also activities that look at the big picture which are designed for a whole meeting.

2. Re-inventing Traditions

These look at a range of issues in detail, including the traditions and actions surrounding the festive season, and the challenging concepts of sustainability and justice in the wider world. All are designed to offer an opportunity for people to reflect on their own responses, lifestyles and actions. As a guide, an indication of timings is given for the leader at the beginning of each section.

3. Bible Studies

Because the Christmas story is so familiar to us, it is sometimes hard to look at it afresh. These studies are designed to do that, to look again at who was there and what was happening and to reflect on their meaning for the twenty first century.

4. Worship

Suggested worship and reflective resources have been linked to particular activities, but can also be used on other occasions.

Notes for Leaders

Preparing the space where the group is to meet is vital. Arriving five minutes in advance and making do with the straight rows of tightly packed chairs and a table at the front of a freezing cold hall is in no way conducive to active participation. Attention to details such as heating, appropriate lighting and the way the chairs are laid out all make a huge difference to how welcome and comfortable people feel in the room. Ensure the furniture, props and necessary handouts are all ready. Check that there are comfortable gaps between chairs and at least two entry and exit points from a circle or horse-shoe layout.

There are several styles and approaches to leading a workshop or discussion group. Here are some pointers for our preferred way of working with this material.

- ★ It can be useful to set out some expectations with the group in advance — for example, when things will break for tea and for how long, what time the session will end. Agreeing respectful

behaviour, listening but not judging and confidentiality are important but should be done with a light touch. Ensure that the group members know each other, especially if people come from different places or churches.

- ★ Introduce the aim and contents of each session carefully. Finding the right words to begin any activity is crucial, therefore we have offered a script for **Leaders** that can be read out as it is or amended to suit.
- ★ All the material in this book follows a similar style. It is based on the profound belief that people can find their own solutions to what concern them if they are given opportunities and space to explore these concerns. The main role of the **Leader** is to facilitate this process. Therefore, although the group **Leader** may have some insight, s/he is not the sole expert with whom all the correct answers reside. S/he is charged with enabling the group to explore, share openly and complete the session, despite any temptations offered by group members to play the role of expert.
- ★ The **Leader** should ensure that no one voice dominates the conversation (their own or anyone else's!), be mindful of who isn't speaking and find ways to include and encourage quieter members to participate.

For more information on how groups work, try the following publication:

Once upon a group Michael and Maggie Kindred, 4M Publications (1998, 20 Dover Street, Southwell, Notts, NG25 0EZ) ISBN 0 9530494 2 6

We hope you enjoy working with this material and making it your own.