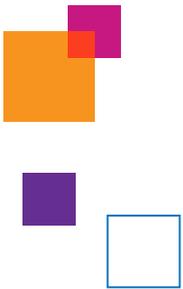


JOURNEYING
24:7
WITH GOD



**Walking Alongside God's People
Training Materials for Group Facilitators**

INTRODUCTION
WALKING WITH GOD'S PEOPLE



ERTP | Eastern Region Training Partnership
<http://www.ertp.org.uk>



THE PROGRAMME PACK CONSISTS OF:

1. An introduction to the pack itself
2. Four Workshop Activity Sessions designed to last 1½ hours each:
 - How Adults Learn
 - How Groups Work
 - The Role of the Facilitator
 - Facilitating a Christian Group
3. Leader's Notes
4. Supporting Handouts or Resource Sheets
5. Guidance and Materials for Inter-sessional Activities

INTRODUCTION

These materials are intended to help those who want explore how they can develop their skills as facilitators of Christian study or learning groups.

The thought to develop facilitation training materials for Christian Group Facilitators came out of research being undertaken by the churches who belong to the Eastern Region Training Partnership. We were looking at how to help local Christians grow and develop as followers of Christ. From the initial research came a focus on creating materials that would help to develop the facilitators of our lay groups.

Alongside these facilitator training materials, we are creating an audit of resources available to Christians exploring what it means to be a disciple today. The way that the audit is being developed means that it will help a Facilitator to design a learning programme that meets the needs of his or her group.

The hope is that Christians in the Eastern Region will become ever more Christ's Body in the world today so that God's transforming love can flow even more powerfully into the world by His Spirit.

WHY DO WE NEED CHRISTIAN FACILITATORS?



At some point or other – whether through church, at work, as a member of a club or organisation, or through study or school – we have all been a member of a group. Consequently, we will all have views on what makes someone a good group facilitator and what makes for good group learning and a good group experience.

In these groups we may have felt valued and able to make a contribution or possibly felt overlooked - perhaps feeling rather shy or unable to participate. We will have experienced really good group facilitators who have built people up and drawn them out, creating ways of learning that meet the needs of most so that all participants grow and flourish. We may also have experienced group facilitators who have contributed to making the experience of belonging to that particular group a less rich and more unsatisfactory experience than we hoped.

These training materials are designed to help both those who have had experience of leading Christian Groups and those who wish to explore how they can become more effective as group facilitators. The materials and learning activities contained in this pack are drawn from a range of sources and some of the ideas and learning may well be familiar. The aim is to help people who wish to support other Christians' learning and growth in a group

context to reflect on what they already do well and, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and their fellow learners, to identify the qualities a good group facilitator needs as well as to identify and practise the skills these facilitators need.

Language is always crucial. When we think about 'leading' a Christian Group it helps to look at the assumptions behind the language we use:

- Sometimes the word 'teacher' can have the unfortunate old-fashioned connotations of one who knows what you don't! His or her job is to impart knowledge to those who don't have it or who need it. A crude way of looking at this is to think of the 'talk & chalk' style of teaching – a lecturing approach – which leaves the student as a passive learner and assumes a preferred sort of learning style. Similarly, the phrase 'education for discipleship' carries some of the connotations of a body of knowledge – a curriculum or syllabus - that has to be imparted and learned.
- The notion of 'trainer' implies that it is specific skills which have to be learned as well as specialist knowledge. This image is perhaps more useful in terms of Christian Discipleship in that it suggests on-the-job learning at the master's knee. This is an image of a more active form of learning, but there is still the notion of being subordinate – learning 'from', rather than 'with' or 'alongside'.
- The word 'leader' carries within it a sense of authority suggesting that others in the group are somehow subordinate.

Implicit in these learning materials for facilitators of Christian Groups are some key notions and definitions:

1. We are all learning what it means to be followers of Christ throughout the whole of our lives at whatever our age or stage of our journey. This means that as we 'lead' a Christian Group we are learning too. As we accompany the group on its learning journey so, too, the facilitator learns and grows – it is a shared journey and shared learning. As the Facilitator, we are walking alongside members of the group learning with and from them as they are from each other and from us.
2. It is the role of a Christian Group Facilitator to support or 'facilitate' the learning of the group, but not to dominate or lecture. By creating a variety of learning opportunities and deploying a raft of skills, the facilitator enables others to learn individually and together more about what it means to be a follower of Christ in the world today.
3. Leading a group requires some key personal qualities and skills. The Christian Group Facilitator may already have many of these but, through reflection, and by seeking feedback on how they lead - holding up a mirror to their behaviour as a facilitator – he or she can see what needs to be protected and polished or where they need to change an approach or learn new skills. Implicit in these materials is the notion that feedback from others on how well we have led is good, and that we can all always learn to do things better in God's name and through His Spirit and that our journey is always on-going.
4. Lastly, these materials embody the view that – although some may be naturally gifted at leading a Christian Group – most of us who feel called to serve God in leading groups can learn the skills and approaches that will help others grow in their faith as members of a group. By reflecting on our performance, being brave enough to ask others how we did and exploring facilitation approaches and practising relevant skills, God can help us lead groups better so that he can touch lives even more deeply.

One way of thinking might be to use the word **'Accompanyist'** when we think about facilitating a Christian study or learning group. The word 'accompany' has a clear meaning of walking alongside: it implies sharing and being on the same journey. It also suggests shared learning and growth. The 'ist' bit suggests an active engagement – something one works hard to accomplish and has set oneself to do.

SO IT IS THEN, THAT 'WALKING WITH GOD'S PEOPLE' IS ABOUT:

- Exploring what it is to be a Facilitator and Accompanyist – someone who is supporting and enabling, but also learning. Seeing ourselves more truly – our strengths and areas for development – and allowing ourselves to grow and be changed. It might even mean stepping aside from some of the ways that we do things now and taking risks in trying new approaches.
- Not being afraid to ask others how we can better help them learn and grow.
- Understanding how adults learn on their own and in groups, and about exploring techniques that help learning.
- Being ready to operate initially out of our comfort zone or having to put up with more uncertainty as the learning will not just be about 'content' or facts.
- Focusing on approaches and processes rather than facts or content.

Wonderfully, the Christian facilitator is given by God a unique and uplifting privilege: that of helping others draw closer to Christ and to live more effectively for God in the world whilst also themselves growing and developing as an individual disciple. It is an amazing opportunity that God gives if we are called to lead a group of Christians in exploring their faith. God will support, guide and strengthen but, as these materials seek to show, expects us to work hard in his name.

WHAT MAKES SOMEONE A GOOD FACILITATOR OR ACCOMPANYIST?



This course explores the answer to this question, but below are some core qualities and ways of working.

A Facilitator accompanies and supports the Group on the learning & growing journey. He or she plans learning opportunities, sustaining an environment of trust and openness where everyone feels empowered and able to speak honestly. The Facilitator as accompanyist wants those with whom they journey to be passionate about knowing Christ, so that they are helped to become really fully human and thus change the world through being themselves.

A Facilitator is thought to have a particular set of personal qualities and skills:

HUMBLE	SOMEONE WILLING TO LEARN FROM MISTAKES	AN UNDERSTANDING PERSON	A GOOD LISTENER
AN ENABLER	HAS A GENEROUS NATURE	DYNAMIC	IN CONTROL OF HIS/HER EMOTIONS
ACCEPTING	SENSITIVE TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS	PATIENT	INCLUSIVE
CONFIDENT	AFFIRMING	KINDLY	MOTIVATING

An effective Facilitator is thought to operate in particular ways:

- Is well prepared
- Says clearly what to expect
- Sticks to times without being driven by it
- Is positive, committed & enthusiastic
- Encourages humour and respect
- Offers encouragement, praise & recognition
- Pays attention to participant reactions, moods, and attentiveness

- Understands that people like to learn in different ways
- Stays neutral and objective
- Paraphrases continuously (good at summarising others' ideas)
- Asks good probing questions
- Asks open ended and closed questions
- Asks questions using different formats

- Encourages participation
- Makes clear and timely summaries
- Moves smoothly to new topics
- Knows when to stop
- Listens actively
- Uses good body language
- Maintains eye contact
- Ensures a variety of activities are used

There are approaches towards Facilitation that it is best not to copy!

- **The Drill Sergeant**—the Facilitator who is rigidly stuck on the agenda and puts the clock above content
- **The Guardian**—the Facilitator who makes certain that all conversation goes through him or her and not from participant to participant
- **The Know-it-all**—The Facilitator who always has the answer. The know-it-all can't say "I don't know."
- **The Ice Cube**—the distant and aloof Facilitator who is unwilling to personalise the experience
- **The Blabber**—the Facilitator who loves the sound of his or her own voice.
- **The Pretender**—the Facilitator who doesn't ask real questions, but only "pretense questions" that are really designed to give the Facilitator an excuse to pontificate.
- **The "I Can't Hear You" Guy**—the Facilitator who refuses to listen
- **The Marathon Man**—the Facilitator who piles activities on top of one another, doesn't allow for breaks, and ignores the need for groups to reflect on a topic or idea
- **The Parrot**—the Facilitator who relentlessly recaps information, restates ideas, and summarises the obvious
- **The Molasses Man**—the Facilitator who is painfully slow and doesn't have a feel for pacing, variety, or style
- **The Passenger**—the Facilitator who lets people talk too long and gives up the reins of facilitation,
- **The Storyteller**—the Facilitator who tells far too many stories and never really gets to the content.
- **The Centerpiece**—the Facilitator who makes himself or herself the real content of the workshop
- **The Tunnel Driver**—the Facilitator who keeps doing the same thing hour after hour

It is important to note that there is a significant difference between how someone might learn in a classroom and how they learn when part of a facilitated group.

TEACHING & CLASS

- The teacher has a formal & superior status
- The teacher has knowledge or skills to impart to others
- Often passive learning
- There is a set curriculum to be learned
- There tend to be 'right answers'

LEARNING SUPPORTED BY FACILITATION

- The Facilitator & Group share equal status - mutual respect
- The Group has knowledge from which we can all learn.
- We explore actively together
- We have agreed what we want to learn or the skills we want to develop.
- There's a real exchange of views

There are some key principles that Facilitators need to establish with groups so that participants feel safe and secure:

- Avoid a sense of competition
- Ensure participants have opportunities to identify issues or ideas they don't understand
- Value participants and their views
- Learn people's names and use them (name tags can help).
- Draw conclusions/summarise discussion based on people's contributions.
- Don't allow others to interrupt while someone is speaking.

Facilitators can sometimes find working with a group challenging and there are some strategies which can be adopted when dealing with challenging behaviours:

- Try to stay impartial when there are disagreements. The Facilitator's role is to assist the discussion and draw out the different viewpoints, not to come down in favour of one of them. If there are strong differences, summarise and move on.
- Conflict is OK if it's focussed on the issue not the person. Everyone has to feel safe about expressing their views, even if they are unpopular.
- Slow things down and stay calm.
- Emphasise listening.
- Create closure – assist people to close discussion on an issue and move on.
- Ensure the group deals with issues such as respect and confrontation as part of its 'ground rules' for working together.

Dealing with an overly dominant group member is quite a common problem that Facilitators to have to tackle.

- Be open from the start, and say there is a common problem in all learning circles – some people talk a lot while others stay silent. Emphasise that we learn both by listening and talking, and we all need to talk and we all need to listen.
- Reinforce alternative behaviour.
- Give turns. This is the most common technique to encourage involvement and prevent one or two people dominating. Say politely, 'you have already spoken on this issue, let's hear from someone else who has not yet had a chance.'
- Hold the conch. Let the group choose an object (a ball, book, pen or whatever) that gives authority to speak. Only the person who holds it may talk; others must wait. When finished, the speaker hands it to someone else. This promotes the idea of taking turns and listening, regulates itself, draws attention to who talks and who does not, reduces interruptions, and can give time and confidence to some who otherwise might have stayed silent.
- Recognise those who tend to dominate and give them responsible roles. For example, make those who dominate recorders and observers.
- You can ration remarks by everyone, by giving each member of the group five or more match sticks (or stones or seeds). Each time a person speaks they put one of the matchsticks into the centre. When they have none left they cannot say any more in that session.

Another challenge the Facilitator might have to deal with is one of those theological, way-off interpretations of scripture or one of those church tradition moments. There are some approaches that could be used in this situation:

- Honour the speaker by listening to the question or the point being made.
- Don't immediately squash the point or brush aside the question.
- Reflect back what you are hearing to make sure that you understand the question or the viewpoint.
- Remind everyone that intelligent & faithful people can and will disagree with each other from time to time on these kinds of issues. Such disagreements do not reflect one's lack of faith.
- With the permission of the speaker, turn the question over to the larger group for discussion so all participants have an opportunity to share their thoughts, insights or similar questions.
- Work to maintain a level of respect and consideration in the group and for each other which is rooted in a shared faith and God's love. Harmony is more important than 'resolving' intellectual differences.

'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law'. *Galatians Ch 5v22*

USING THE 'WALKING WITH GOD'S PEOPLE' FACILITATOR TRAINING PACK



THERE ARE THREE KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN USING THE MATERIALS:

1. The training and learning activities should be delivered in a way that **models** the facilitation approach. Ideally, two facilitators will deliver the sessions between them: this both reduces workload and pressure whilst always allowing for a friendly observer to note what is going well and what could be improved. Ideally, all Christian Groups will have co-facilitators for these very reasons although it is acknowledged that this is not always possible.
2. The activities and processes are designed to appeal to a variety of learning styles and are built around what research says about how adults learn. The facilitators should endeavour to allow every participant to make a contribution and to ensure that everyone is valued whilst not letting some dominate or allowing the occasional awkward person or those with challenging behaviours take up too much time or hog the limelight.
3. As a course on facilitating Christian groups, 'Walking with God's People' consciously builds in opportunities for meditation, reflection and worship. It has been said that 'discipleship is not what you know, but what you are becoming', and it is in communion with God as well as in study of the scriptures or doctrine or in engaging with our faith tradition that God works to make us the people we were intended to be.

The materials in the Pack set out the suggested timings and learning objectives for each session along with questions for reflection. **There are handouts and inter-sessional materials** for the facilitator to use with the group. The resources required for each session are detailed as is the way in which participants can use a learning journal or log to capture key points.

At the end of each session outline, further guidance and support is offered to the group facilitator in the *Facilitator Notes Section*.