

evangelism

On The Way

Number 1

**Journey into Faith:
Stories for Reflection**

The On The Way Team

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This leaflet can be used by PCC's or other groups in the church to think about evangelism strategy.

The two stories can help to discern:

- some of the key factors in coming to faith today and,
- their implications for developing a parish evangelism strategy.

Spend a few minutes reading the stories and then use the questions.

- What was significant for S and J in coming to faith?
- Is this echoed in your own experience?
- What other factors were important in your journey to faith?
- What implications does this have for your church as you look to see adults discover the Christian faith?
- What would be the next step for your church?
- What help do you need?

In addition to these two stories you may like to listen to some stories from members of your own church and feed their experience into your strategy. 'Telling our Faith Story' by Janice Price (CHP) is a helpful resource in this regard.

A further resource would be the Travelling On The Way resource file which is now on the Diocesan Website and offers many practical ideas for growing a strategy of welcome, initiation and nurture in the local church. It is also available in printed form from Paul Buxton at Trinity House (price £5). He is contactable on 020 7939 9412.

The 'On The Way' Team worked together from 1997 to 2000 and comprised Ann Wright, Justine Allain-Chapman, Richard Bainbridge, Nigel Stone, Chris Chapman, Richard Truss and Jerry Lepine.

J's Story

J is now a committed Christian who sings in the worship group of her church as well as having a house-group in her home every week. All this is combined with bringing up her five children with her husband P. But her way into faith has not been smooth. From her teens to early twenties, church was not part of her life.

As a child, she went to church with her father. He was involved in the social activities of the church as chairman of the bar committee. Her mother came on special occasions. As a teenager she felt there was nothing for her at church so she stopped going. At nineteen she became pregnant and her first daughter was born. Life was not easy as a single parent. Then at twenty-one, her father died unexpectedly. By this time she had met P and she was realising that his faith was important to him. Soon she was pregnant again with twins.

Tragically, one of the twins died and this loss proved to be a turning point. She was overwhelmed by the support and love from the church which P had belonged to. She really valued the prayers for the babies and began to feel that church was a place she wanted to be.

She started to go to church regularly and she and P became good friends with the curate and his wife. Although the rest of her family and P's were not church-goers, she found church was a good place to be. She was still struggling with a feeling of not being worthy. Helped by a friend she came to be more a part of the church's life. The feeling that she wanted to give her life to God grew, but she says, 'It was not a conscious thing. Very gradual.'

One day her friend dragged her along to a lively church. In the afternoon she was part of a small group talking and praying for each other. For the first time she did not feel as awkward as

before. This was a new experience. It felt like a real time with God and she said a prayer of commitment. In the evening there was a big celebration. The leader invited anyone with something to share to come up to the front and tell people. For once she did not feel shy. She came up and told everyone, 'Today I've committed my life to the Lord!'

That was a high spot and perhaps inevitably it was followed by a slight sense of anti-climax. But there was still a longing for more, for a better knowledge of the Bible; for a closer walk with God. The housegroup has been a great help in this. She started to pray, although the children make it difficult to have a regular routine for this. She enjoys singing and joined the worship group. Praising God and leading others in praise is a contribution she loves to make.

S's Story

S is forty-five years old, lives in East London, has two sons and is an office manager in a major British institution.

Born in Jamaica, her parents came to England when she was only a few years old, leaving her in the care of grandparents. By tradition her parents were Pentecostal and grandparents were Methodists.

At the age of fifteen, she joined her mother in England. In common with her peers she opted out of church almost immediately. Initially relationships at school were difficult, and she felt that her strong West Indian accent only compounded a sense of alienation.

Occasionally she went to church with her mother but she felt forced into it and the 'pushiness' of her mother (and friends)

only served to turn her off. For nearly twenty-five years S did not really bother with church.

Then a number of significant events took place in her life - the first son left home, a relationship broke up and she became very ill. By her own admission she did not turn to God in any of these crises.

However, after returning to fitness, she had an overwhelming desire to say 'thank you' to God, not just in words but also by personal commitment and service. Prayer started up again - on her own. Also S began to explore the churches in the area. At some no-one spoke to her; at others the ritual was unfamiliar and she was afraid of making a mistake - even the Lord's Prayer had changed!

Eventually she settled at an Anglican church where the worship was lively and she 'felt comfortable'. It had a warm welcome that was not too pushy; good preaching and clergy who were willing to chat about her questions.

In 1995, after a few months at this church, S took the initiative and asked about confirmation. The classes were a good way to get to know people in the church and to begin to support each other in the faith. The confirmation by Bishop Roy in December 1995 was a significant moment. Since then S has continued to explore the faith with others in a home group and has grown in confidence - particularly as a Christian at work.

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