
A Note about Using *Impact*

Impact aims to encourage members of small groups to support one another in engaging in practical action as Christian disciples in the Church and in the wider world. The material has been produced by Rev. Dr. Robert Foster, the Nottingham & Derby Methodist District's Discipleship and Vocations officer and Superintendent of the Derbyshire Dales Methodist Circuit.

It is hoped that *Impact* groups will be just one part of a range of a Church or Circuit's discipleship development groups. Committing to the kind of action suggested in this booklet will need to be thought about carefully in order to ensure a positive effect on group members and their communities. *Impact* group members may sometimes need to undertake appropriate training (e.g. for visiting) and should comply with Safeguarding procedures.

Although the *Impact* material was produced in support of an Extending Discipleship / Exploring Vocation initiative in the Nottingham and Derby District of The Methodist Church, there is no restriction on when or where it may be used. The material is ©2013 the author, but may be reproduced in full, or in part, for use in *Impact* groups, to promote *Impact* groups, or for use in other contexts, as long as the authorship of the work is acknowledged and no payment is received for using the material.

Robert's contact details are:

Rev. Dr. Robert Foster
16 Hillcrest, BELPER, Derbyshire, DE56 0JF.
Tel: (01773) 839795
Email: robert.foster@methodist.org.uk



Active Christian Discipleship

Committed to Christ
Growing in Faith
Changing the World

Group Leadership



The **Methodist Church** 
Nottingham and Derby District

Why *Impact*?

People come to faith in many different ways and in many different places; some come to faith slowly, whereas others can say that a particular experience or event led them to become a Christian. However we have come to faith, there is a common question to be asked of us all, as disciples of Jesus: what difference does being a Christian make to our lives?

In the New Testament, it is clear that following Jesus as a disciple, or becoming a Christian in the early Church after Jesus' death, often had a significant effect on people's lives. Examples of this include Simon and Andrew, who responded to Jesus' call to follow him by leaving everything to catch people (Mark 1:16-18), Zacchaeus, who gave away a great deal of money after meeting Jesus (Luke 19:1-10), and Lydia, whose whole household was baptized when she responded to Paul's message about Jesus and who then opened her house to Paul's group. There are, of course, many more.

But how often do we set out to actively follow Jesus in daily life? Are there times when we simply get so caught up in life that, although we do not cease to *be* Christians, we do not actively aim to *do* things that being a Christian might lead us to do. The idea of *Impact* is to encourage small groups - of perhaps 3 to 12 people - to deliberately support one another in being and doing what they believe Christ would expect them to be and to do. *Impact* groups commit together to live for Christ and prayerfully support one another in doing so. The impact should then not only be on the members of the groups, but also on the people they meet from day to day - people who may or may not be Christians should then see Christian discipleship in action through a variety of short-term, medium-term and long-term projects.

Robert Foster

Suggested Ways of Making an *Impact*

A key aspect of the *Impact* group is the themes that it decides to focus on each time that the group meets. These should enable the members of the group to go out into the world and to be and do things that will have a real effect on people and communities.

Each *Impact* group will have its own unique set of members, so each theme will need to be chosen with those people's life experiences, personalities, passions and opportunities in mind. An *Impact* group whose members enjoy physical activity may not be too successful at convincing others to spend time in quiet contemplation; an *Impact* group whose members all enjoy reading may feel that joining a book group where they may share a faith perspective is right for them. *Impact* groups might commit to a long-term project during which they also work on a number of medium-term and short-term projects. Three themes are suggested below and there are examples of short-term, medium-term and long-term projects in a separate booklet.

1. Creating Community (short-term)

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47

Possible action: organising a neighbourhood party

2. Going Greener (medium-term)

Scripture: Genesis 1:26 / Ezekiel 34:2-4

Possible action: environmental audit with follow-up

3. Living Sacrifices (long-term)

Scripture: Romans 12:1-3

Possible action: a group project to serve or help people

Impact group leaders may initially recommend some of the suggested themes, but it should soon be possible to choose themes that fit well with the people in the groups, or to enable groups to spend time together deciding which themes to adopt.

Hearing the Scriptures

Time to study one or more Bible readings related to the theme. It may be that the Bible is read by one person or a number of people; it may be that the scripture is dramatized, or a video clip is watched, or that the scripture is presented in another way.

Unpacking the Theme

It should be helpful to reflect on the effect that people in the scriptures had on those around them, rather than doing an in-depth study. It may also be helpful to watch video clips, discuss a few questions, look at newspaper articles, or study information about particular situations.

Worshipping God

God can be worshipped through singing or listening to songs, in prayer and in many ways which could include the group doing, drawing and making things.

Established groups may also need to consider future themes.

3. Committing

Being part of an *Impact* group will always involve committing together to go out into the world as disciples - followers of Jesus. Key to this is considering what individual or group action, linked to the theme, will be taken between one meeting and the next. It may take some time to reach agreement on this, so this should be seen as a significant part of the time together.

Having decided what to do, the group should then take part in an act of commissioning - perhaps including something visual, or something to take away, as well as a memorable prayer such as:

Lord Jesus, as we go from here,
help us to {do/be whatever has been decided}.
We ask this in your name and for your sake. Amen.

Leading an *Impact* Group

Experience

Impact leaders may have led groups already, or they may be first-time group leaders; what is important is their enthusiasm for Christian living and their desire to encourage the members of their group to follow Christ in daily life - wherever they may be.

Maturity of Faith

Leaders of *Impact* groups will need to be mature enough in their Christian faith to bring an understanding of Christian teaching to bear in discussions about faith and life. However, *Impact* assumes no particular theological standpoint or qualification.

Servant Leadership

In many situations, it is the quality of leadership that makes the difference between success or failure and the leadership of *Impact* groups could have a significant effect on those groups' effectiveness. People may want to be leaders for many different reasons, including a desire for status, a desire to be listened to, a desire to be obeyed and a desire to serve. *Impact* is intended to encourage and enable Christians to develop their own approach to Christian living, not to give leaders an opportunity to tell other people what to do, so *Impact* group leaders will be most effective if they have a desire to serve. Servant leadership will encourage all members of the group to reach their full potential as disciples.

Sensitive Group Facilitation

Leading an *Impact* group does require an ability to be sensitive and an ability to facilitate the group in such a way that people will participate and feel valued, supported and encouraged.

Responding to People as Individuals

The ministry of Jesus is remarkable in that he was simply brilliant at seeing people as individuals and at responding to different

people in ways suited to those particular people's situations. He fed the five thousand (Matthew 14 / Mark 6 / Luke 9 / John 6) yet he encouraged his own disciples to pick corn on the Sabbath (Matthew 12 / Mark 2 / Luke 6) - even though others objected. Further examples include the woman at the well (John 4), the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22 / Mark 10:17-22) and Nicodemus (John 3). Paul's ministry also had a real impact and he wrote that he was "all things to all people ... for the sake of the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:22-23, NIV).

Risk Assessment and Management

Impact leaders will need to be able to understand potential risks for the groups' members (e.g. health and safety or Safeguarding) and may sometimes need to reign in the enthusiasm of group members, where their ideas may potentially cause offence or harm. *Impact* group leaders do, therefore, need to be able to exercise their authority, but not in a way that says "I am always right, so do it this way".

Self-Involvement

Another important quality of an *Impact* leader is a willingness to be as involved in the group's action as all of the other group members. An *Impact* group leader who is involved in what is being done by the group will try to keep in touch with what is happening between meetings, so should find it easier to understand how the successes and struggles of the group feel and to encourage mutual accountability when groups gather.

Risking Unpopularity

As *Impact* groups embark on projects to make a difference in the world, they may sometimes become engaged in campaigns and actions that challenge the status quo. Leaders of *Impact* groups may not, therefore, always be popular - with people outside of the group, or with people outside of the Church. Such unpopularity was experienced by Jesus and by the prophets and is still experienced by many Christians in the world today.

Impact Group Meetings

Impact group meetings will happen as often as the group members feel is helpful, in order to support one another in being at work in the world. Depending upon what they are doing, groups might meet weekly, fortnightly or monthly, but all *Impact* group meetings should have three parts lasting 30-40 minutes:

1. Gathering

When an *Impact* group gathers, its members do not just sit down with a drink and a biscuit to catch up on the gossip. Far from it! Gathering may naturally involve the host(s) providing some refreshments, but the focus of gathering is intended to be on Christian living, rather than on life in general. Gathering should definitely include a time of welcome (yes, the refreshments may be served here), a time of catching up and a time of prayer. When catching up, it is important for a leader to ask questions about discipleship, such as:

"Did you manage to stick to your commitment?"

"How did your faith grow as a result?"

"How do you believe that you have changed the world?"

A key reason for catching up is not just to get a sense of how people are, but also for the group to see how the commitments made at the previous meeting have been followed through and then to thank God for this.

2. Receiving

When *Impact* groups gather, the intention is that they will be open to receiving from God and from one another. Receiving should therefore include times to focus on:

Introducing a Theme

A short time to set the scene for receiving so that people know where the focus will be.