



Renewed **Beginnings**: part one

Slide 1: Welcome

Slide 2: Crossroads

It feels like our churches are currently at a crossroads, which may be for a variety of reasons. Some factors we have known for a while - which have contributed to big changes in size of denominational churches like the URC.

However, the added effect of Covid-19 has exposed serious questions about the future for all sorts of organisations and activities, including our churches.

There's a strength to be gained when we face reality together, openly and honestly. Looking at things as they are, in the company of others who share our concerns and share in support of one another, is a good way to respond to a crossroads moment. Conversation allows us to respond and move forward – silence doesn't help!

Slide 3: Which way?

In order to move forward from the crossroads we're at now we need to be able to see a way ahead. **Renewed Beginnings** is a set of tools being offered by the North Western Synod to help us all as we begin to do this. This isn't another new initiative that leaves us feeling overloaded, but rather an offer of supportive materials to help all our churches in the need to have a set of conversations about their future.

Slide 4: Where are we?

In order to find a way forward we have to begin by assessing the situation we're in. We need to ask the question 'Where we are we on our journey?' both in terms of our relationship with God and what's going on in our Missional Partnerships and local churches.

Slide 5: What's happening?

Then we need to assess what's happening around the immediate neighbourhood of the local church, in other churches within the area, in our Missional Partnership and perhaps beyond that.

Slide 6: Where is God in this?

The next step is about asking 'Where is God in this?' We need to discover what God is saying to us through events and the situation we find ourselves in.

Slide 7: How do we respond?

Finally, the big question is, How do we respond to all of the above? Not a question of how do we survive - but how do we thrive! What may God be calling us to do and be, today? and How can we best use the resources we are blessed with?

Slide 8: The Pastoral Cycle (Laurie Green)

The tool we have chosen to help us have these conversations is known as The Pastoral Cycle. It isn't a new thing, and some of you may already be familiar with this approach, which asks us to consider our life together in four important stages.

Slide 9: Experience

We start with our experience - that's something which we all have. It requires no special knowledge to share with others how you see things. Sharing how things 'feel' is an important place to start, so at this stage ... we simply share with one another how the experience feels, and hear from others ... how they are feeling and what sort of experience it is for them." (Green: 2009, p20)

Slides 10-12: Explore

When we have shared our feelings honestly, then we need to explore further details to understand more deeply the situation we're in. Green reminds us we need to avoid being hasty and rushing this stage as it is vital to better understand the situation we are in. (Green, 2009, p21)

Thorough analysis of the situation using whatever tools/experts/fields of study we have access to will help.

Slide 13: Reflect

Then we need to draw on all the reflective tools that are available to us in the Church – bible study, prayer, worship, hymns and songs - that shed light on what we've experienced and explored. This might involve us in talking about theological issues like salvation and creation. We might find that a film, a novel, a TV series plot, a song or a situation from the news that sheds light on what we've been working on and helps us to reflect more deeply.

Slides 14-16: Respond

Green says, "We can sit and reflect till the cows come home. If that's all theology is ever going to do for us, then we would be right to ignore it ..." (2009, p23)

Taking action rather than just talking about it is a significant moment. It's where lots of well laid plans fall down – when we try to put them into action. It is a test of our authenticity as disciples of Jesus.

Orthopraxis (right action) as well as orthodoxy (right thinking) is vital– our actions have to match our beliefs and our words – faith and action need to clearly correspond. (see Thompson 2008, chapter 1)

Slides 17-21: The Doing Theology Spiral

Exploring the four stages of the Pastoral Cycle in greater detail. (see slides)

Slide 22: Westbury Gardens

Westbury Gardens URC: Situated in a more deprived area of Blackburn, a Community Hub, Fare Share project, Sport Club, serving a multi-cultural Housing Estate behind the church.

(See video)

Slide 23: Break



Renewed Beginnings: part two

Slide 1: Title slide

Slide 2: New reality - same Mission

Last year the URC brought out a short booklet – **New reality, same Mission** – to help us all to start thinking about the needs of those around us as our churches emerged from the pandemic. Little did we know, then, that we would still be waiting to emerge fully from lockdown a year later.

Slide 3: What can you do differently ...

The central question of this booklet, **'What can you do differently to express more fully God's love in word and action?'** is where our conversations using the Pastoral Cycle should lead us to.

Slide 4: Meeting our neighbours

Throughout lockdown, lots of community activities and initiatives like standing outside our homes every week to 'clap for our carers' have helped us to become better at meeting our neighbours in the last year. As well as being taken outside our homes and getting to know those around us better, we have also been required to leave our church buildings, and likewise, many churches are beginning to find new ways to connect with their communities - without the use of a building.

Slide 5: Let's start!

Renewed Beginnings provides us with material for four guided conversations, each lasting about 90 minutes, which our Synod is now making available through the Synod website.

www.nwsynod.org.uk/renewed-beginnings

Slide 6: Conversations can begin anywhere!

Conversations can begin anywhere - Elders meetings, Church meetings, Missional Partnerships, on Zoom or in person, even with friends over coffee!

Slide 7: The Pastoral Cycle

The conversations are guided by the Pastoral Cycle we talked about earlier, which was used so successfully with Westbury Gardens. Beginning with our experience we go on to explore what's happening around us in more detail, to reflect on what we've found using Biblical resources and others from the arts and literature, and finally we respond with new actions.

Slide 8: What's happening in our neighbourhood?

The Renewed Beginnings sessions begin with explaining the Pastoral Cycle. Then the second session gets people to ask 'What's happening in our neighbourhood and local community?' from the perspective of a church or a Missional Partnership.

Slide 9: What's happening in our congregations?

In the third session we ask 'What's happening in our fellowship/fellowships/congregations?' There are questions about what's happening, about people's understanding of mission, about how many people are actively involved, about the aspects of ministry people feel they're doing well and how they might share their experiences with others.

Slide 10: What do we have to offer?

The fourth conversation is about answering the question 'What do we have to offer?' We look at resources of people, grounds and buildings, finance and energy for the future. This session needs to make notes on the outcomes of all four conversations and then arrange to share findings with others – the Missional Partnership Steering Group, Elders, or Church meetings.

Slide 11: End