



Advent Windows

What? Local schools and groups are invited to create a window display for a shop / pub / community building in the parish. One window display is revealed each day (or once a week if only a small number are involved). The reveal could be accompanied by, for example, a story-teller, the school / group singing carols or any other interactive event which brings the community to gather together. This can also be shared on social media each day and could culminate in the church's Christmas celebrations.

Who For? Visitors to the area, as well as local families, will see the windows and spend a moment reflecting on an aspect of Advent. Local schools and groups will have the opportunity to delve deeper in to the season as they prepare their window display.

Why? To enable the whole community to engage with and travel through Advent together. This gives opportunity for questions, for invitation to church events and Christmas celebrations. Additionally, businesses, schools and groups get free local publicity!

Local example...

Bishop Auckland Town Team have hosted this annually since 2018.

<https://www.facebook.com/batownteam>





Sharing A Meal

What? Food and fellowship could come in many forms: a church hosting an evening meal or a hot lunch, individuals inviting others round to share food with them, a small group gathering regularly, 20s and 30s having a dinner and movie night, students invited to have a home cooked meal in a family setting... The list goes on!

Who For? Visitors to the church, locals in the parish, friends, family, individuals of all ages.

Why? To create easy, informal opportunities for the post-church coffee chat or over-the-fence chat with a neighbour to go deeper and relationships to grow. To promote and develop opportunities for fellowship in order to nurture the family aspect of being church together, whilst at the same time fighting loneliness and helping share the cost of feeding our families.

Local example...

Holy Trinity, Southwick provided 'Winter Warmers' (a hot evening meal) each Tuesday through the Winter months.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthWearsideParish>





Who Let The Dads Out?

What? A Who Lets The Dads Out (WLTD) session (often on a Saturday morning, once a month) provides a safe, free environment which gives dads (or grandads/other carers) two hours of time to play with their children (aged 0-11) and develop relationships with other dads. Breakfast is also provided. The activities and faith input (usually very light-touch) can be adjusted according to the needs and desires of the attendees and the community.

Who For? Church community, visitors to the church, locals in the parish, friends, family.

Why? To create easy, informal opportunities for conversation, friendship and parenting support within a church context.

Local example...

St John's Church, Hebburn have been running a thriving Who Let The Dads Out group since 2015
<https://www.facebook.com/stjohnshebburn>

National website:
<https://www.wholetthedadsout.org.uk>





TeaTime Church

What? TeaTime Church provides a meal and an all-age, easily accessible worship environment. Mainly front-led, there are interactive parts throughout the worship and all-abilities and levels of knowledge are catered for.

Who For? Church community, visitors to the church, locals in the parish, friends, family.

Why? To provide a worship environment and a family meal which is inclusive. It creates opportunity for individuals and families to dig deeper into faith questions, to worship in creative and interactive ways and receive both physical and spiritual food.

Local example...

St Luke's Church, Ferryhill started TeaTime Church with a desire to be a blessing to the community, providing an easy environment for families (often with members who have additional needs) to be in – and to provide food. In March 2019 19 people were confirmed from this new congregation!
<https://www.facebook.com/Luke1853>





Coffee Shop As A Base

What? There are many uses for a coffee shop! Perhaps a place for a one-to-one informal chat, a location to host a 'big questions' style discussion session, a regular 'café-style' church or a regular place for a listening ear (chaplaincy style), among other ideas – and all come complete with coffee and cake!

Who For? Church community, visitors to the church, locals in the parish, friends, family.

Why? Coffee shops are places of conversation, fellowship and relationships. They are often a natural community hub. This is a gift for the church as its members can help widen conversations into some of the deeper aspects of life and faith as they share their own experiences and knowledge.

Local example...

Billingham Team Parish utilised their local Costa to run a Bible Study on a Sunday evening twice a month – They described the evening as: "A time to meet together, chill out and drink coffee whilst talking about Jesus"
<https://www.facebook.com/pg/BillinghamCofE>





Taste

What? A regular bring and share meal with the opportunity to hear someone's testimony (as much as they'd like to share of the story of their life and faith journey up to this point). The speaker could be an invited guest or one of the group. A short discussion may follow as people reflect on and respond to what they've heard.

Who For? Open to anyone, as an addition to small groups or Bible study groups. An easy informal event to invite friends or visitors to the church to.

Why? Hearing another's faith story can both inspire and challenge us within our own journey. Often the human connection of hearing another's experiences can trigger our own questions or prompt us to dig deeper. This may be a light-touch group for those new to faith, or a place of renewal and refreshment for those further down the line. And, of course, food and fellowship are an excellent pairing!

Local example...

St John's Church, Neville's Cross have been encouraging each other and sharing together in their 'Taste' group for over 14 years!

<http://www.sjnx.org.uk>





Extra-curricular Activities

What? Around the school day are many opportunities for clubs and groups, all contributing to the 'wrap-around care' which most schools now offer their families. Some examples during the day could include breakfast clubs, lunchtime clubs or groups, after school activities.

Who For? Although the activities are aimed at children and/or teenagers, the relationships can go wider through other holiday activities.

Why? While doing activities and in regular conversation, relationships form and strengthen between the young people in the parish and the more mature members of the church. As 76% of practicing Christians come to faith under the age of 18, this is a key time to be nurturing their spiritual life in fun and relevant ways. The influence and effect on the teaching staff can also be felt when they are supported and aided in their work.

Local example...

St Mary's Church, Coxhoe run a very popular JAM (Jesus And Me) after school club each week in their local primary school.
<http://stmaryscoxhoe.co.uk>





Puppet Ministry

What? Using a puppet in services or clubs can add another dimension to the interaction. But what if using the puppets was the ministry focus in itself?! For example, a weekly group for young people and adults to hone their puppeteering skills and reflect together on the Bible passage and/or theme they're focussing on. Together they create their sketch/song/etc and share it with the community - perhaps in a church service, the local residential home, at a local festival, in an assembly or anywhere else it would be received.

Who For? Anyone of an age to fully participate, flexible for a range of abilities with no previous experience required.

Why? Using the puppets is an equaliser – for those too shy or nervous to perform at the front, and for those who don't find reading easy, for example. The act of creating the performance engages people's creativity and allows them to reflect deeply on what it is about the Bible passage (for example) which they are trying to share with others.

Local example...

An enthusiastic puppeteering group (of both adults and young people) meet each week in the Parish centre in Chester-Le-Street.

<https://www.facebook.com/maryandcuthbert>

National website for puppets and training: <https://onewayuk.com>





Sweaty Church

What? The Sweaty Church website says: "Sweaty Church is church with a difference. It is all about families learning together through physical activities." Not every activity has to be sweat-inducing, but the overall style of the session is to be learning and worshipping in a tactile, movement-focussed way – through games, challenges, creativity, working together and supporting each other.

Who For? Anyone! Activities can be tailored to suit the abilities and needs of the participants. (Think Messy Church with less craft!) It is not a children's club.

Why? Cross-generational activities are quite rare in society, and even in church. This is a great opportunity to enable growth in relationships and chances to explore faith in a physical, tactile way.

Local example...

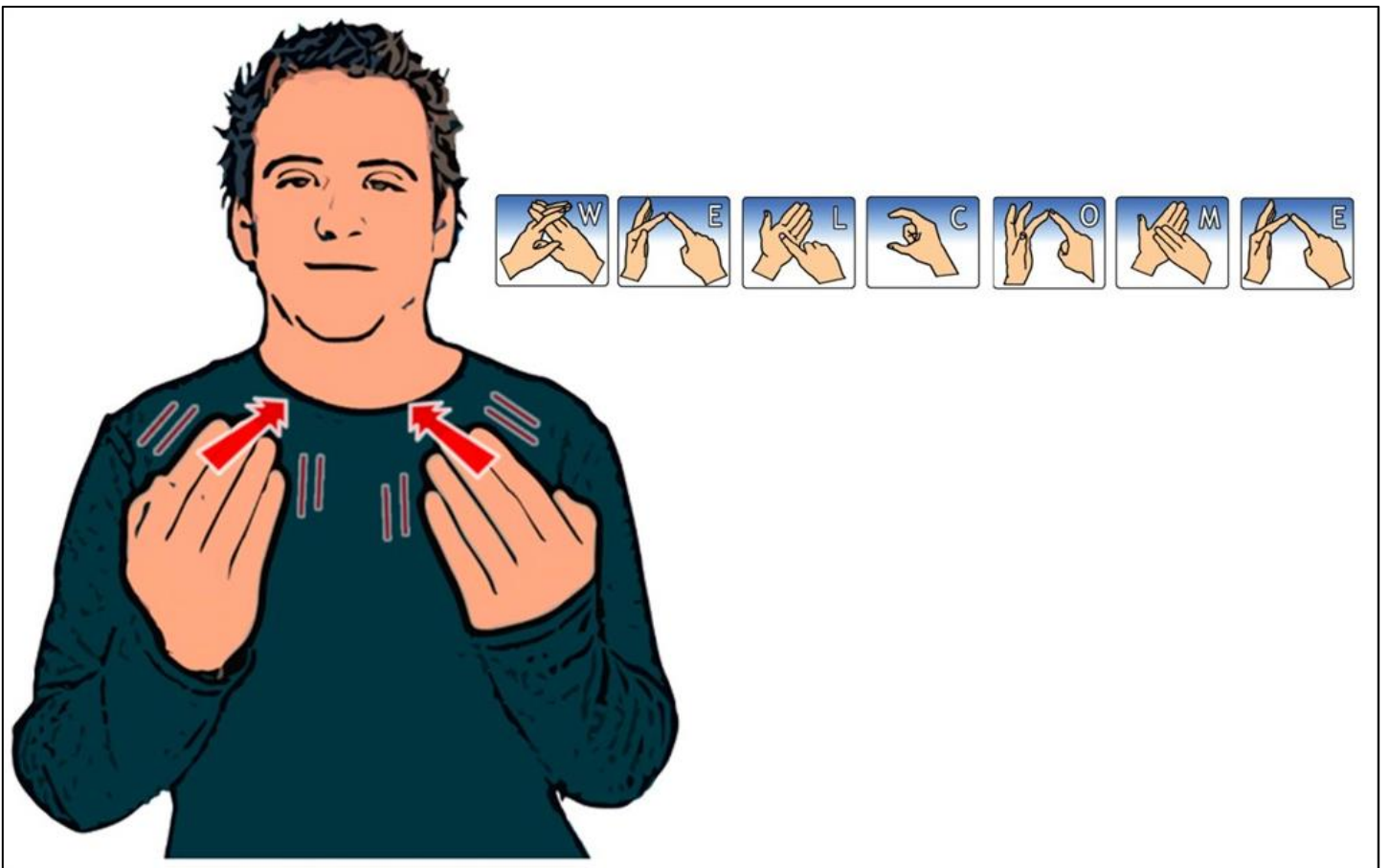
St Mary and St Cuthbert's Church in Chester-Le-Street hosts a Sweaty Church each month in the Parish Centre.

<https://www.facebook.com/maryandcuthbert>

National website:

<https://sweatychurch.wordpress.com>





Deaf Cafe

What? Using a local café, and advertising among those within the d/Deaf community, this is an informal conversational atmosphere which can be as often as the parish needs and wants. Relying on a small group of people who can sign is not sustainable in the long term so perhaps this activity could run alongside a group who are learning British Sign Language.

Who For? Anyone! Those who already sign, those who are learning to sign and those who love to drink coffee and chat!

Why? An opportunity to grow relationship and share life together with members of the d/Deaf community and their families.

Local example...

Kate Jamie is Durham Diocese Chaplain for the d/Deaf Community

Email: rev.katejamie@gmail.com

Linked to the Newton Aycliffe Deaf Fellowship, St Nic's Church in Durham host a Deaf Café each month, with two signing volunteers ensuring any deaf visitors to the café are made welcome.

<https://www.facebook.com/NorthumbriaDeafChurch>





Welcome to East Durham

THE FILLING STATION

The Filling Station

What? The Filling Station website says: "an informal gathering for worship, Bible teaching and prayer in a relaxed and welcoming setting." The worship is usually modern in style, with a testimony (someone sharing part of their life and faith journey) and teaching – often from a visiting speaker. There is also a time of prayer and, of course, tea and coffee!

Who For? Anyone. A place to enjoy more informal styles of worship on top of the regular liturgical worship found in most parish churches.

Why? An opportunity to grow relationship and share life and worship together with people from surrounding parishes.

Local example...

The East Durham Filling Station Facebook says:
"A monthly gathering of people from across East Durham for modern, lively sung worship, a talk and time for prayer ministry"

<https://www.facebook.com/TFSEastDurham>

National website:

<https://thefillingstation.org.uk>





Accessible Messy Church

What? Across the Diocese, there are many Messy Church congregations. Most of the activities already used are easily adaptable to be accessible for those with disabilities and/or additional needs. The worship celebration time can also be fully interactive - possibly using Makaton signs and symbols to explain the activities, crafts and stories – as well as using visual aids and/or touchable illustrations.

Who For? Open to anyone, with a specific focus on being a welcoming and inclusive space for families and those with additional needs.

Why? The local community and the Church family are diverse groups of people but often our congregations don't reflect this. For those with disabilities and/or additional needs, it is sometimes difficult to access worship situations.

Local example...

Rev Paul Child and St Lawrence's Church in South Shields have been accredited as a Makaton Friendly Church. The activities are adapted and accessible for anyone who attends their monthly Messy Church – which is called 'Wonderfully Made'.

<https://www.facebook.com/ChurchMadeMessy/>





Bread Church

What? A chance to make bread, and do a simple Bible study and short prayer time together while the bread cooks. When cooked, the bread is eaten by everyone, sharing a meal together as a time of fellowship. An easy addition to the reach of the session is for each person making bread to make enough to take some home and also to give a loaf away.

Who For? Open to anyone. An easy informal event to invite friends or visitors to the church to.

Why? Food and fellowship are an excellent place to share and grow in faith. Bread Church also practically provides food for others in the community.

Local example...

Once a month, Crawcrook church (Greenside Parish) run their all-age Bread Church – called 'Use Your Loaf'!

<https://www.facebook.com/GreensideParish>

National Website:

<https://www.somewhere-else.org.uk>





An Open Door To The Community

What? Many parishes are blessed with buildings in the centre of their local community. Enabling others to use these assets is a gift we can easily offer. Often this is through invitation to host a group / club / event in the church's space.

Who For? Potentially a wide range of people/groups. Churches would need to consider the activity and its suitability for being within the church's space.

Why? There may already be groups within the local community which encourage good health (mental and physical), relationship growth, and development of skills and/or creativity, among other things! The Church also wants to encourage and enable these things, whilst deepening relationships and connections with people from both within and outside the regular congregations.

Local example...

St Stephen's Church, Willington focuses on hospitality, hosting a craft fair annually in December. With stalls including a range of crafts from hobbyists and professional businesses.
<https://www.facebook.com/Ststephenswillington>





Bell Ringing

What? Perhaps your church has a set of hand bells, or a fine bell / multiple bells in the tower – either way let's get them ringing! A group which met regularly throughout the year could showcase their skills at weddings and feast days within the Church calendar, for example.

Who For? An activity for across the age ranges (depending on physical ability). An easy activity to invite friends and family to.

Why? A regular group would encourage the use of an individual's creative skills, whilst growing relationships and building community. Playing at key points in the Church calendar enables faith-related conversation and many chances to join with the church community.

Local example...

'St John's Belles' is a weekly hand bell ringing group at St John The Evangelist Church, Darlington.

<https://www.facebook.com/stjohnchurchdton>





Toddler Groups

What? A regular (usually weekly) group for children of a pre-school age and their parents/guardians/carers. Often there are a range of age-appropriate toys available, alongside a short story/song session and perhaps some simple art activity (such as paint or playdough). Refreshments are a must – for the children and adults!

Who For? Open to anyone with young children in their care. An informal event which is easy to invite friends or visitors to the church to.

Why? Often parents with young children struggle to engage with regular Sunday morning worship, but with support and relationships developed at other times (such as in a toddler group) find more confidence to attend church. The group also provides a safe space for parenting support, for friendships to grow and faith conversations to begin.

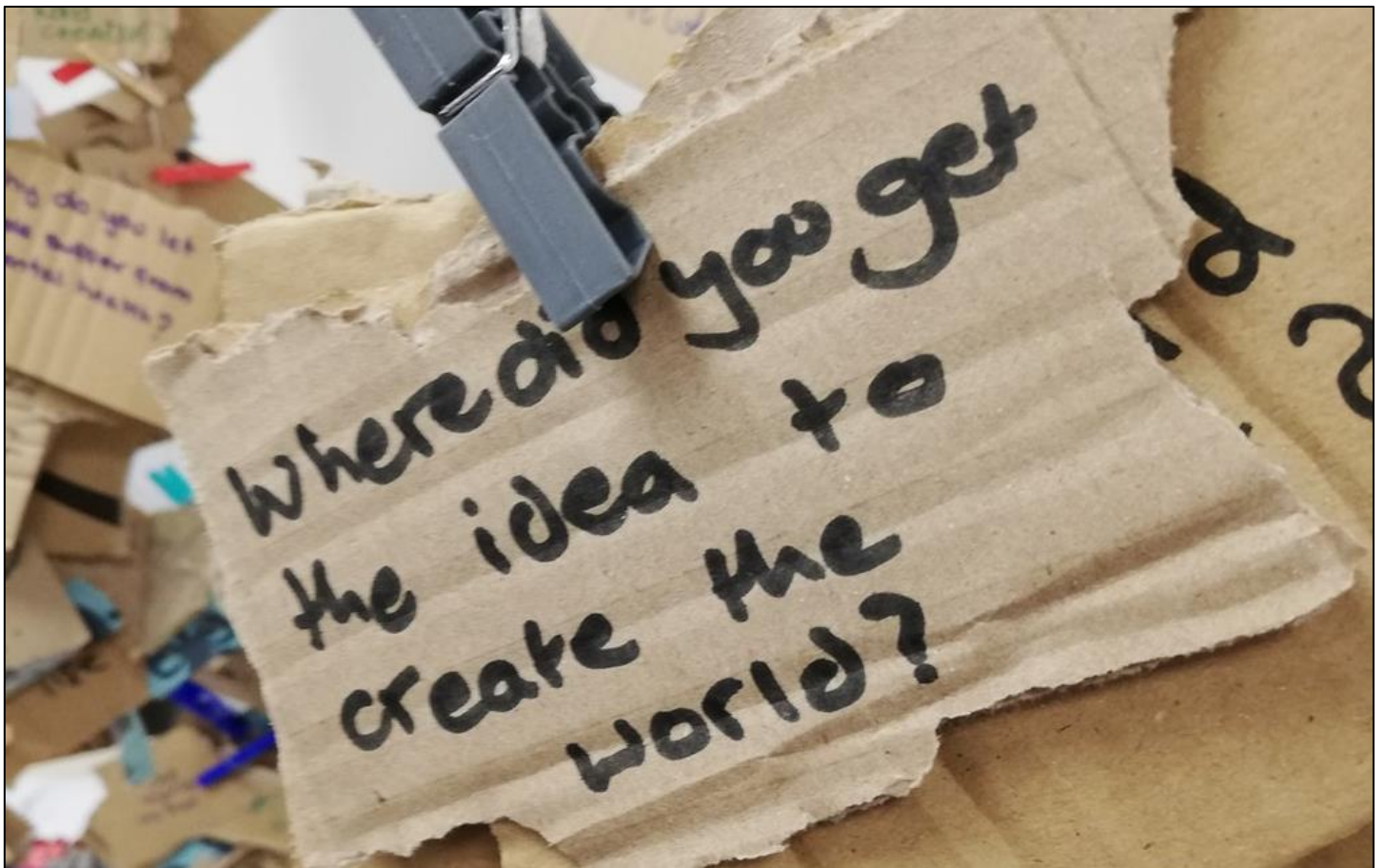
Local example...

Once a month, Cuddy's Toddler and Carer Group meets at St Cuthbert's Church, Peterlee

<https://www.facebook.com/stcuthbertpeterlee>

National Website for support of church-based toddler groups:
<https://1277.org.uk>





Space For Big Questions

What? Sessions designed to allow space for the faith questions which people carry. This is usually in the format of a short, weekly course, such as 'Alpha', 'Christianity Explored' or 'Start', or could be an event which focusses on 'hotseating' a Christian to ask them questions, for example. It is often a key part of the event to share hospitality by providing food, and sometimes a crèche (depending what time of day the sessions are).

Who For? Open to anyone. Often these courses are designed for people at the start of exploring their faith journey, but they would be beneficial to anyone!

Why? Everyone has questions! Sometimes having a designated safe time to explore them is a helpful prompt to do just that!

Local example...

Recently, churches around the Gilesgate / Belmont area in Durham ecumenically hosted an Alpha course. The host church was St Mary Magdalene, Belmont.

<https://www.stmarymagbelmont.org.uk>





Prayer Spaces In Schools

What? The organisation's website says: "Prayer Spaces in Schools enable children and young people, of all faiths and none, to explore... life questions, spirituality and faith in a safe, creative and interactive way." Classes or small groups come into the prayer space (a classroom?) for a short amount of time and are given free time to explore and pray using the activities provided. With some volunteers from local churches available to chat and help, it is not an academic exercise, or teacher-led.

Who For? Anyone of school age. (This could also be open outside school hours for a wider age range of people to use if the school has good community links)

Why? Most of the children in schools don't have a chance to stop and pray, or a wide experience of what 'prayer' could look like, creatively. This is an opportunity for them to engage with the big issues of life and faith, whilst also helping the schools provide for the spiritual needs of their pupils.

Local example...

We are blessed to have Phil Togwell in the diocese, who is a lead in the Prayer Spaces In Schools organisation and the Durham Diocese Prayer Project.

Email: phil@prayerspacesinschools.com

<https://www.facebook.com/dioceseofdurhamprayerproject>





Using Creative Gifts

What? In every congregation are people who are passionate and love to do things! What if those things became ways to engage with others? For example, asking members of the community to join in with gardening days around the churchyard, or decorating the church with flowers for festivals, or fixing clothes and items in a 'fix-it shop'?

Who For? Anyone in the community

Why? A regular group/activity session would encourage the use of an individual's creative skills, whilst growing relationships and building community. Demonstrating Christian values such as charity, generosity, care for the environment and community enables faith-related conversation.

Local example...

St Paul's Church in Ryhope link run a charity shop in the parish providing a fundraising opportunity and a place for individuals to volunteer, using a wide range of skills.

<https://www.facebook.com/BillinghamCofE/>





Knit and Natter

What? A frequent (often weekly) gathering of those who love to do craft together, perhaps in a church hall or home if this is cosier. Knitting does not have to be the only activity undertaken! Nattering over a cuppa with a biscuit is a must!

Who For? Anyone in the community. An easy activity to invite friends and family to.

Why? A regular group/activity session would encourage the use of an individual's creative skills, whilst growing relationships and building community. Displaying / selling / decorating the church at key points in the Church calendar enables faith-related conversation and many chances to join with the church community.

Local example...

A group from Christ Church, Lumley were inspired by a poster seen on a trip to Walsingham to start their own Knit and Natter group in 2018! The skills and crafts within the group range across all aspects of working with fabric and threads!

<https://sites.google.com/site/christchurchlumley/page-1>





Men Shed

What? The national Men's Shed website says: "...community spaces for men to connect, converse and create. The activities are often similar to those of garden sheds, but for groups of men to enjoy together. They help reduce loneliness and isolation, but most importantly, they're fun."

Who For? Anyone in the community. An easy activity to invite friends and family to.

Why? A regular group/activity session would encourage the use of an individual's creative skills, whilst growing relationships and building community. A safe space for conversation and support for all aspects of life as friendships develop.

Local example...

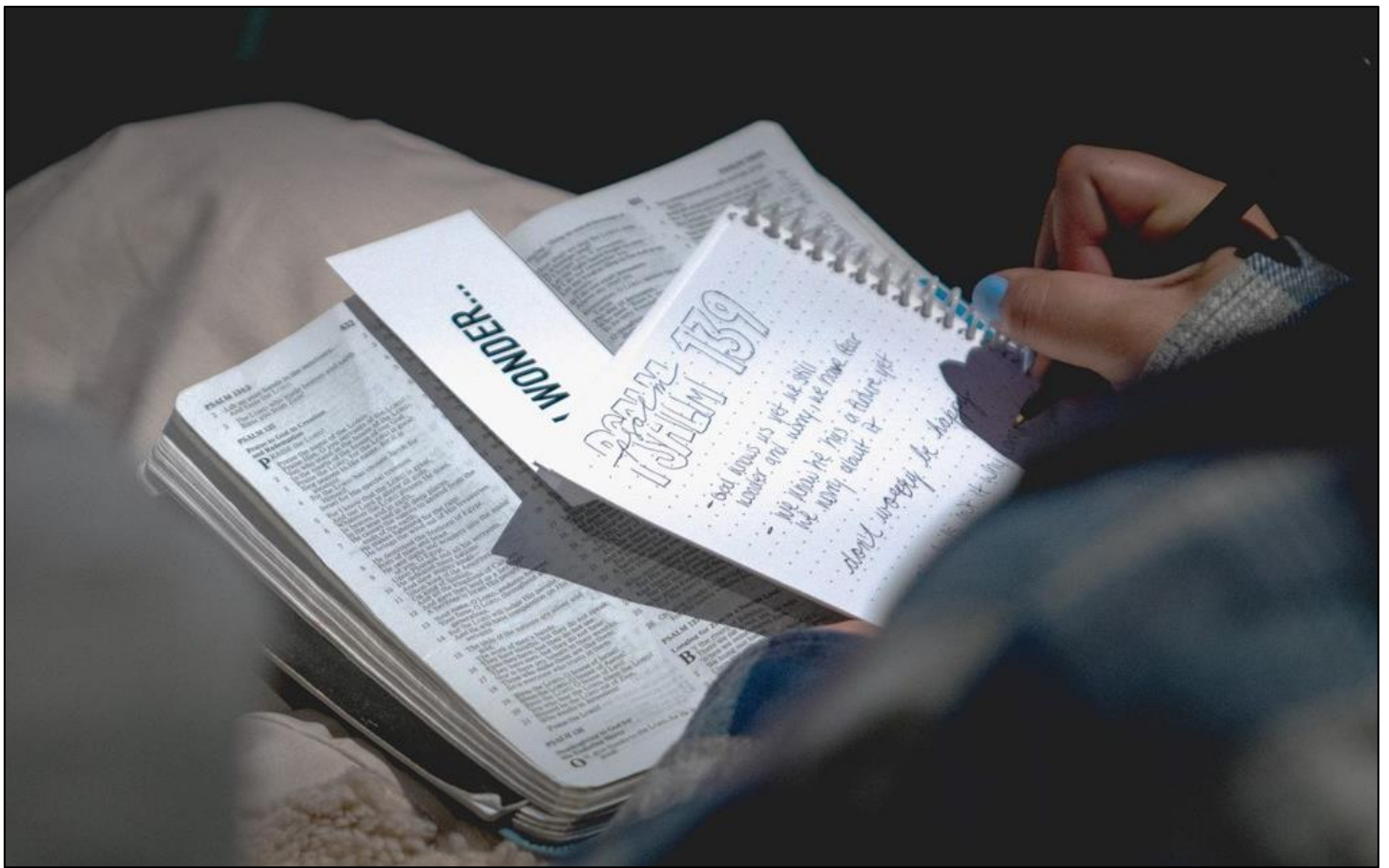
The Witton Gilbert Breathing Space website says: "Do you like nature, wildlife and looking after your local area? Do you want to get out more and make new friends? Or do you just need a breathing space?"

<http://www.breathingspace.org.uk/men-shed>

National website:

<https://menssheds.org.uk>





Bible Study For Those With ESL

What? Durham Diocese is becoming increasingly multi-national in places, with many people who want to attend church activities having English as a Second Language (ESL). These activities could be a regular Bible Study / small group, services or fellowship events led in a language which enables the community to take part. Who in your congregation and community speaks a language which, if heard speaking about the Bible, would benefit and welcome others locally?

Who For? Anyone in the community whose first language is not English.

Why? A regular group/service/activity session enables growth of relationships and builds community, creating a safe and accessible place to explore faith and engage with worship.

Local example...

Stockton Parish Church have a large Farsi-speaking community and hold services, Alpha sessions, movie nights, etc in Farsi.

<https://www.stocktonparishchurch.org.uk/farsi-services.html>





Streetlights

What? The Durham Streetlights website says: "StreetLights volunteers go out in the centre of Durham on Saturday nights to help and support people who are having some difficulties in the course of the evening. They may need help to find friends or to get home. In some cases they may require first aid or simply a friendly ear to talk to. We are there simply to help regardless of how anyone got into the situation they're in."

Who For? Volunteers can be anyone who feels called to share patience, humour, practical assistance and care with members of the community late at night / early morning.

Why? The website says it best: "We believe it's the sort of thing Jesus would do. (He was always getting told off for hanging out with people who ate and drank too much!)"

Local example...

Durham Streetlights is a joint initiative of Durham churches, working with Durham police and council. It is an initiative of Durham Christian Partnership.

<http://www.durhamstreetlights.org.uk/>





Free To Be

What? A short time for quiet reflection in the church, which could be at any time of day / night which works best for the local community. Space to 'be', perhaps to pray or read the Bible, with a few members of the church quietly ready to pray with anyone who would like to.

Who For? Anyone (of any age) in the church and community who would like to carve time out of a busy life to embrace the quiet.

Why? Busy-ness is everywhere! "Free To Be" provides a designated time to stop and listen for that "still, small voice". The open church is also a way for people to embrace their faith without needing to speak English, read liturgy or face crowds!

Local example...

St John's Church in Greenside has a time of quiet to drop in a 'just be' in the church each month. It is led by a member of the congregation so the vicar can also 'just be'. There are optional prayer inspiration activities, but lots of space to do your own thinking and praying.

<https://www.facebook.com/GreensideParish>

