



Mary's Moments

A story of
a group of urban mums,
their lives and
how they connect with the Bible.

(a journey from relationship to discipleship)



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Introduction

This document is an account of a group called Mary's Moments that was formed in 2008 as part of the Unlock project in Liverpool. The purpose of forming the group was to draw people from the 'fringes' of church into an activity that would enable them to engage with the Bible in a relaxed, person centered way.

Many churches have a range of activities that develop friendships with or meet the needs of the local community. However in work with adults, many struggle to integrate appropriate ways of engaging with the Bible into their community outreach projects. There is often a sense of fear that introducing anything that may suggest 'Bible bashing', could threaten the hard won relationships and stop people attending the outreach groups. This method is one way of bridging the gap from relationship to discipleship.

It is our hope that in writing an account of this group it will perhaps help you to learn from our experiences and explore if a similar approach will work in your context.

Therefore we have included;

- background to the formation of the group,
- an account of the history of the group,
- interviews with group members,
- an explanation of the methodology used during group sessions,
- examples of the sessions used with Mary's Moments,
- a planning frame that acts as a template for planning your own sessions and
- a summary of our learning from this group (successes & failures),
- the working agreement between Unlock and the Volunteer Group Facilitator and
- an observation from Rev Kelvin Bolton the vicar at Christ Church Walton Breck.

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Background Information

Christ Church Walton Breck is an evangelical urban parish in north Liverpool. The church was built in

the 1980s to replace St Cuthbert's, St Saviours and St Simon & St Jude. The church runs a number of midweek activities, Boys Brigade, Rainbows, Brownies, Guides, a number of house groups, parent and toddler group and a free lunch for community members on Thursdays. Worship services take place at 11.00 am and 6.30 pm on Sundays with Morning Prayer Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. Most years a course such as 'Alpha' or 'Start' is run for congregation members interested in being confirmed, usually with a separate version for young people. The church is directly opposite the 'Kop end' of Anfield Stadium and provides tea and shelter for police on match days.

Unlock's Liverpool project started in 2008 and Sonya Doragh the project worker was a member of Christ Church Walton Breck. At the beginning of the project the first step was to identify groups of people that were not part of the congregation, would not call themselves 'Christian', but that would be interested in belonging to a group that informally discussed their own life experiences and how they connect with the stories, characters and themes from the Bible. As a result of consultation with the congregation and church leaders of Christ Church and Holy Trinity, the parent and toddlers group was identified as a good starting point.

History of Mary's Moments

June 2008

Unlocking Unlock – a series of meetings with congregation members and church leaders in the Anfield area to identify suitable groups to target for the work of Unlock Liverpool. One of the groups mentioned at all three meetings were the parents of the Toddler Group at Christ Church Walton Breck.

July & August 2008

One to one conversations with church leaders and Toddler Group leaders to explore the possibility of working with some of the parents. There was concern that group members would feel that what had been open & unconditional would become 'churchy'. On this basis it was agreed that the Unlock worker would visit the Toddler's Group for half a term, get to know the group members and then work out if it would be possible to form an Unlock Group with some of them. This was on the condition that the Unlock Group would not meet during the Toddlers group, in order to avoid any divisions or feeling of pressure on other Toddler parents. If at any time the leaders felt that the Unlock worker was compromising their relationships with the parents then the visits would stop.

September 2008

Weekly visits to the Toddler Group. The Unlock worker was open from the start that her purpose in attending was to explore whether anyone was interested in being part of a group that would talk about their own experiences and then look for ways that they might connect with what God has to say in the Bible. However no direct invitations were offered to start with; the worker initially deflected the subject of conversations towards the individual's children and circumstances, to create a stronger connection from which to offer the eventual invitation.

October 2008

The Unlock worker invited all the Toddler Group parents to join a group that would, 'talk about their own lives and see if the Bible had anything to offer that might help

them think about the issues they are dealing with.' A core group of Mums stayed after Toddler Group that week to discuss when to meet. A number of those involved in running the toddler group were also asked if they would be willing to stay behind as co-facilitators.

The group consisted of a group of Mums that all live close to the church and have attended the Toddler Group for years with their children. One of the group was a child minder that had been coming to Toddler Group, with the children she looks after, for 8 years. Most of the group had children to collect from school at the end of morning nursery which allowed time to make some hot drinks and clear away the toys from the Toddler Group. We set up a table for the adults and low tables for the children. When the rest of the group returned we would eat our lunches and start our discussion. The young children would eat and then sleep, the older ones would eat and play, this meant that our time was full of interruptions but just the kind that a group of mums comes to expect!

November 2008

As agreed a group started to meet fortnightly, staying for lunch after the Toddler Group with the Unlock worker facilitating the group. On two occasions leaders from the toddler group stayed to help, one insisted on staying in the kitchen to serve tea and coffee and didn't sit with the group, which helped as the Unlock worker was able to stay with the group throughout the session. The other did sit with the group and was a valuable contributor to the session however didn't continue to come due to being over committed to other activities and feeling that someone nearer the age of the group would have more to offer.

June 2009

The Unlock worker identified a group member, Jo, with the skills to take over the facilitation of the group and a growing faith. A working agreement was written between Unlock and Jo to support her to take on facilitation of the group, in order for it to be sustainable beyond the Unlock worker's two year post.

July & August 2009

During the summer break the group didn't meet but the Unlock worker met with Jo to train and prepare her for starting to facilitate sessions in the autumn.

September 2009

Jo took an active role in facilitating sessions that were co-written and facilitated by the Unlock worker.

October 2009

Jo wrote and facilitated her own sessions with the Unlock worker present for support or sometimes childcare. Jo's first session included a reflective activity picking up on the idea of making time for ourselves which, during the session, became referred to as having a 'Mary Moment'. As the group had not been named, this was picked up on and became the name of the group. The session is included in these materials.

Jan 2010

Jo became sole facilitator and the Unlock worker no longer attends the group's meetings, although Jo is able to access support and advice as necessary.

March 2010

Mary's Moments continues to meet on a fortnightly basis with the support and encouragement of Christ Church Walton Breck.

Interviews With Group Members

Jo Harris (not ever gone to church as an adult)

What made you come to the group in first place?

My other friends go to it.

What made you keep going?

It was interesting.

Do you feel differently about God as a result?

Yeah. Before group didn't think there was a God but now I think there is.

What are you going to do about it?

Start coming to church, maybe not this one though. And continue in the group.

Would you join a different group?

No I like this one but I wouldn't mind if there was a different small group where we're allowed to be ourselves, say what we think and not get 'told'.

How does it feel having one of the girls lead the group?

Great! Cos she's just as mad as we are and we want Sonya as well cos she's madder!

Anything else you want to say about group?

Feed us chocolate!

Jo Morris (congregation member)

What made you come to the group in first place?

Couldn't do evenings & other church groups in evening but this was convenient cos of having young children and being able to bring them. I would've gone to a house group if there had been one in the day.

What made you keep going?

It was relaxed, not like school!

Do you feel differently about God as a result?

Yes. Like my opinions aren't daft or strange, they are actually worthwhile.

What are you going to do about it?

I've got confirmed and taken over the group.

Would you join a different group?

Yes, joined an Alpha course.

How does it feel facilitating the group?

I don't feel as though I lead it, I steer it but the group leads itself.

Anything else you want to say about group?

Because I know the girls I've been able to do it but I don't think I could start a group with people I don't know.

Dawn Mountain (church as a child but not in adulthood)

What made you come to the group in first place?

Cos I knew the other girls from play group went and I got invited so came along – the group had already been meeting a while.

What made you keep going?

Enjoyed it, being together and being able to talk, relaxed atmosphere.

Do you feel differently about God as a result?

Actually yeah, I was brought up a strict Roman Catholic not allowed to question anything and the group helped me see that you don't have to be forced. God isn't just about what you have to do; he's not a bully in my head any more!

What are you going to do about it?

I was coming to church but it is bit of a hike, Heather (6) wants to come every week.

We might go to Holy Trinity which is nearer but I think I get stuff out of the group that I don't out of church.

Would you join a different group?

Yes – if there's childcare!

How does it feel having one of the girls lead the group?

Comfortable – it's nice!

Anything else you want to say about group?

The relaxed atmosphere is really important.

Nadine Worrall (church goer)

What made you come to the group in first place?

To learn more about the Bible cos it was all going over my head in Church and there was too much to learn.

What made you keep going?

Cos I enjoy it I enjoy finding out things that I didn't know and realising actually that I knew more than I thought. And when you realise that, then you feel closer to God, it's a nice feeling.

Do you feel differently about God as a result?

Yeah! I feel like I am more looked after, like I am being watched over and that I am being communicated to cos I understand more and so I believe that He is with me and I feel more secure.

What are you going to do about it?

I did the Start course.

Would you join a different group?

Yes, if there was childcare or if I could take the kids.

How does it feel having one of the girls lead the group?

Fine!

Anything else you want to say about group?

Can't think of anything else...it really helped being with a group of people that you already know where you feel comfortable asking questions that elsewhere you might feel silly asking! I enjoyed cutting things out and making things more than the sessions that were just talking, it makes you more involved.

Dani (church goer)

What made you come to the group in first place?

Don't know – the girls, we're always together.

What made you keep going?

Friendships and for the kids friendships.

Do you feel differently about God as a result?

No.

What are you going to do about it?

n/a

Would you join a different group?

No.

How does it feel having one of the girls lead the group?

Fab. She's dead funny! We always end up talking about money or relationships.

Anything else you want to say about group?

Friendship is important, the bond between all of us!

Emma Lewis (at beginning unsure about God not church goer – as a child went to synagogue with Nan occasionally)

What made you come to the group in first place?

Don't know!

What made you keep going?

Found it interesting.

Do you feel differently about God as a result?

Yes.

What are you going to do about it?

Nothing right now! I now go to a different church occasionally with mum and take boys, I'm enrolled on the creche rota.

Would you join a different group?

No

How does it feel having one of the girls lead the group?

Fine.

Anything else you want to say about group?

No.

Kerry Dinsdale went to church occasionally as a child but not in adult hood

What made you come to the group in first place?

Emma

What made you keep going?

Getting my child used to kids. Although I only occasionally came due to baby's health and that.

Do you feel differently about God as a result?

Yeah. You can express yourself and know more what it's all about.

What are you going to do about it?

Yeah, I want to take kids to church.

Would you join a different group?

Yes.

How does it feel having one of the girls lead the group?

It was a nice surrounding and you can get on with people

Anything else you want to say about group?

It's nice to be round someone that you know and to get to know more new people.

Methodology

Unlocking Real Life Stories

We start by seeking to draw out the real life experiences of group members, the group facilitator uses prompts chosen ahead of time such as questions, pictures, video or music to stimulate stories from group members' memories.

Revealing the Down to Earth Christ

Having listened to their stories the facilitator then contributes something of God's story, usually Bible content but it could equally be church history or the facilitator's own experience of God. The key feature is that it connects with the narrative of the participant's story. This can sometimes be prepared in advance as the prompts are likely to draw stories with a certain theme or focus. However it is important for this method to be flexible. If the group members contribute stories that go in an unexpected direction, the facilitators role is to listen actively, and then find the common or most resonant themes, and draw on their Bible knowledge and faith experience to find a connection.

Releasing Life Changing Skills and Confidence

Following this the group is asked to find the connections between their stories and the part of God's story that they have heard. In other words they start to develop a skill; looking for God's presence in their experiences. Sometimes this can be reinforced by a reflective exercise of some kind, using a creative process to further the strength of the connections. This activity or additional questions also carry the challenge to take the learning from the session into their every day life; perhaps giving them the option to face a similar situation in a different way because of what they have discovered.

Unlock Learning Method

**Starting from our own stories
makes this approach open to all.**

**No previous Bible knowledge,
church experience,
or even reading,
is necessary.**

Unlocking real life stories of urban people

Start with the group telling stories from their real life experience.

Leading to more experience

What we learn now is learnt for life & changes us.

We also learn to keep reflecting!

Releasing life changing skills and confidence

Change happens as a result of linking real life experience with the Bible.

This change often leads to action among others.

Revealing Good News of the Down to Earth Christ

The real life stories are connected to and compared to similar situations in the Bible.

Leading to More Experience

As group members go through the process of sharing, connecting with Bible content and reflecting on the connections their approach to similar circumstances in the future changes. Over time people start to reflect and seek out Biblical insight into their daily decisions and experiences.

Reflective & Relational

The reflective cycle centres on the group members' experiences and the input from the facilitator responds to their stories rather than teaching them a certain point. Unlock's method is not suited to delivering a rigid set content; it is a tried and tested way of keeping a relational focus but having a structure within which to introduce a growing base of Biblical knowledge and understanding of God's work in their life.

This approach is ideal for those that are not regular church goers or familiar with the Bible, it works as a relational, gentle form of evangelism. If groups meet over a number of months or years, group members not only hear and reflect on a wide range of Bible content but they also develop a habit of reflecting on their experiences and seeking connections with the Bible. Some group members' interest in Christianity and faith grow in that time and they then compliment the reflective learning in our Unlock groups with other content led Bible study elsewhere. The Unlock method meets them where they are, and centres on them, but as they move towards more determined discipleship their Bible engagement centres more on God's story than their own.

Unlock's methodology may not sit well for any who have a strong sense of the importance of the content of Bible study, there is clearly great value in systematic teaching schemes that will present a core set of information and if that is what you are looking for you need to look elsewhere! We are not suggesting that one way is better than the other but simply offering this approach as an option which you may feel is right for your circumstances.

Sessions Used With Mary's Moments

The session outlines over the following pages are a mixture of sessions developed by Jo, Sonya and a couple that were planned together. If they seem appropriate to your context and your group please feel free to use or adapt them as you see fit. However as we have already stressed the Unlock approach is relational and person centred. You are far better placed to work out what kind of prompts and themes are close to the shared experiences of your group. These sessions might inspire you to do that, using the planning frame. There is very little content in these sessions. This is in part due to the chaotic nature of our meetings due to there always being at least five children under five eating and playing in the room with us: what took us an hour and a half might take much less time in a calmer environment. However it is also part of how this approach works; as facilitator you do not have much to say, particularly at the beginning of the session. The session is filled out and given life by the stories and observations of the group, not lots of planned content. Mary's Moments are in the main a lively, extrovert, communicative group so we have many stories and sometimes creative tangents. It has sometimes been important to ask chattier members to allow quieter members a chance to contribute, at one point even giving someone the task of making sure a quieter person was heard by the group.

Even with such a lively group, it has been important not to be afraid of the silences; sometimes after a moving story a hush falls which allows everyone to reflect and take in what has been said.

Another set of sessions used with the group called, 'Mess, Mistakes & Muddling Through' can be found on Unlock's website. <http://www.unlock-urban.org.uk/pdf/MessMistakesMuddlingThroughpoem.pdf>

Back to Normal

We ran this session just after the school term started so most of the Mum's had their older ones back in school or nursery.

Getting Everyone Talking

We started the session by listening to the Mum song – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXgoJ0f5EsQ>

Then we asked:

Does the song make you think of any particular story in your life?

How does it feel to be back to normal?

What do you miss about your normal routine when it's the holidays?

Introducing God's Story

Show respect for the Sabbath Day—it belongs to me. You have six days when you can do your work, but the seventh day of the week belongs to me, your God. No one is to work on that day—not you, your children, your oxen or donkeys or any other animal, not even those foreigners who live in your towns. And don't make your slaves do any work. This special day of rest will remind you that I reached out my mighty arm and rescued you from slavery in Egypt. Deut 5: 12-15

The Lord and his disciples were travelling along and came to a village. When they got there, a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat down in front of the Lord and was listening to what he said. Martha was worried about all that had to be done. Finally, she went to Jesus and said, "Lord, doesn't it bother you that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!"

The Lord answered, "Martha, Martha! You are worried and upset about so many things, but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is best, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10: 38-42

Instructions to act out Mary & Martha

With our group we cut out each of the instructions below and gave 3 of the girls one each. We made sure the role of Jesus went to someone confident.

Martha: Fuss and tidy – give Mary bad looks. Complain to Jesus that Mary isn't helping.

Jesus: Talk about something from the Bible or tell the people that are listening some good advice. When Martha complains tell her she's worrying about the wrong things and that Mary has chosen to do the best thing anyway.

Mary: Sit by Jesus feet and listen carefully to what he says. (Do not help Martha)

Creative Connections

Ask the group if they can see any connections, similarities or differences between their story and the Bible story you have told.

Having a Mary Moment - if you use the story of Mary & Martha

Have enough individually wrapped tea bags or coffee portions for all group members. Put stickers on them that say 'My Mary Moment' with room for participants to write their name and the day and time that they will make their drink and have 10 minutes to themselves.

It was following this session that the girls picked the name 'Mary's Moments' for the group that had previously been referred to as 'Staying for Lunch'

One Small Thing

Getting Everyone Talking

The group was asked, 'Have you ever made one small change to something in your life which has made a big difference?'

Introducing God's Story

Finally, Jesus said:

What is God's kingdom like? What story can I use to explain it? It is like what happens when a mustard seed is planted in the ground. It is the smallest seed in all the world. But once it is planted, it grows larger than any garden plant. It even puts out branches that are big enough for birds to nest in its shade. Mark 4:30-32

I can promise you this. If you had faith no larger than a mustard seed, you could tell this mountain to move from here to there. And it would. Everything would be possible for you. Matthew 17:21

Creative Connections

Ask the group if they can see any connections, similarities or differences between their story and the Bible story you have told? Has hearing the Bible story and the stories from other group members given them enough trust in God, or themselves, to believe that they can see their lives transformed for the better?

If you can, bring a pot plant and a packet of the seeds for that plant. Give each group member one of the seeds to hold. Ask them to spend a quiet moment thinking if there is one thing they want to change in their life. If it seems appropriate following your discussions you could ask if they are ready to put even a mustard seed size amount of faith in God.

All You Need Is...

This session was just before Valentines day

Getting Everyone Talking

The group were shown a valentines card and asked what real love means to them and if they feel that they know what unconditional love is?

Introducing God's Story

Some years later God decided to test Abraham, so he spoke to him.

Abraham answered, "Here I am, LORD."

The LORD said, "Go get Isaac, your only son, the one you dearly love! Take him to the land of Moriah, and I will show you a mountain where you must sacrifice him to me on the fires of an altar." So Abraham got up early the next morning and chopped wood for the fire. He put a saddle on his donkey and left with Isaac and two servants for the place where God had told him to go.

Three days later Abraham looked off in the distance and saw the place. He told his servants, "Stay here with the donkey, while my son and I go over there to worship. We will come back."

Abraham put the wood on Isaac's shoulder, but he carried the hot coals and the knife. As the two of them walked along, Isaac said, "Father, we have the coals and the wood, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?"

"My son," Abraham answered, "God will provide the lamb."

The two of them walked on, and when they reached the place that God had told him about, Abraham built an altar and placed the wood on it. Next, he tied up his son and put him on the wood. He then took the knife and got ready to kill his son. But the LORD's angel shouted from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am!" he answered.

"Don't hurt the boy or harm him in any way!" the angel said. "Now I know that you truly obey God, because you were willing to offer him your only son."

Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in the bushes. So he took the ram and sacrificed it in place of his son.

Abraham named that place "The LORD Will Provide." And even now people say, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

The LORD's angel called out from heaven a second time:

You were willing to offer the LORD your only son, and so he makes you this solemn promise,

"I will bless you and give you such a large family, that someday your descendants will be more numerous than the stars in the sky or the grains of sand along the beach. They will defeat their enemies and take over the cities where their enemies live.

You have obeyed me, and so you and your descendants will be a blessing to all nations on earth."

Abraham and Isaac went back to the servants who had come with him, and they returned to Abraham's home in Beersheba. Genesis 22:1-19

Creative Connections

The group were asked how their stories and experiences compare with Abraham's total unconditional love for God. They were also asked if they felt they loved God or anyone else enough to make great sacrifices for them.

(At this point the session moved into discussions of who wanted to kill their partner / husband and how! Using the Unlock approach often means holding lightly to the plan and remaining centred on what the group want to discuss but as a Facilitator it is also important to be willing to gently re-direct destructive conversations.)

Celebrations

Getting Everyone Talking

A gift wrapped present was placed in the middle of the table and the group were asked what is the best gift they have ever received? They were then asked if there was a gift they had been given that they were disappointed with.

Introducing God's Story

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem in Judea, during the time when Herod was king. Soon afterwards, some men who studied the stars came from the east to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews? We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard about this, he was very upset, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem. He called together all the chief priests and the teachers of the Law and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

"In the town of Bethlehem in Judea," they answered. "For this is what the prophet wrote: 'Bethlehem in the land of Judah, you are by no means the least of the leading cities of Judah; for from you will come a leader who will guide my people Israel.' "

And so they left, and on their way they saw the same star they had seen in the east. When they saw it, how happy they were, what joy was theirs! It went ahead of them

until it stopped over the place where the child was. They went into the house, and when they saw the child with his mother Mary, they knelt down and worshipped. Matthew 2:1 - 6 & 9 - 11. (for visuals to go with this story see the Unlock resource 'Cooking the Book')

Creative Connections

The group were asked after having heard one another's stories and the story about Jesus, to think about what kind of gift they would really want and why. Then to think about what they would have given to Jesus if they had the opportunity when He was a baby on earth and what they feel they can offer to God now.

Summary of My Learning from running Mary's Moments

This is not a comprehensive in depth analysis but rather some highlights of what I learnt as an unlock worker from running this particular group.

Identifying groups to work with

Running sessions at the beginning of the project, to invite congregation members and leaders to contribute ideas to identifying groups to work with, gave a sense of shared ownership to the start of this group. That helped me as a worker to feel that others were behind the initiative and increased interest in the project. After the sessions I ran to identify groups to work with, I met with the vicar to go through the suggestions, as there were too many to follow them all up. We focused on looking for those that already had some form of connection with the church or people from the church but were, in the main, not participating in worship. Many of the suggestions were either so remote from church that it would have taken a long time to gain access and trust or so close to church that most members were part of regular worship. As the project was only 2 years long I needed a head start, if you have a longer term project you might have time to build relationships with those even further from church.

Gatekeepers

Before being able to invite the girls to join a group, it was important that those in positions of authority (both formal and informal) were supportive of the initiative. It was worth taking the time to explain the project to all those involved in running the parents and toddlers group. At first they were reluctant as they were concerned anything too 'religious' would scare people off. We agreed that it was okay if I visited for a number of weeks first and made sure the group met outside of the parent and toddler group's normal meeting time. It was important that this happened, especially when one of the Dad's was a bit suspicious of my motives. When he went to ask the leaders they were able to reassure him that he didn't have to join or discuss anything he didn't want to.

Those weeks before starting the group were also very helpful in terms of identifying the informal gatekeepers. It was fairly clear that one of the girls is very much a natural leader. Gaining her trust and support was essential.

Publicity

Having gained the trust of the gatekeepers there really was no need for any other publicity. My time at the parents and toddlers group, coupled with the gatekeeper's support meant that word of mouth was the only publicity needed. Unlock's experience is that this approach works best with 5 to 12 in the group. Any more publicity would have been counter productive.

Openness

In visiting and chatting with the potential group members I never hid my intentions; always explaining, if asked, that I was aiming to invite them to join a group that would listen to each other's stories and see if they connect with the Bible.

Planning

As we met on a fortnightly basis I found that planning sessions one at a time meant I could be more responsive to the things that were already being discussed and going on in the lives of the girls at the time. Having the planning frame and the learning cycle made planning a session fairly simple.

Silence

We didn't get a lot of quiet moments in our group due to having the kids and some very chatty Scouse girls! However on a few notable occasions someone would share something and there would be a momentary hush, this also happened after the Bible passage once. These silences were very noticeable and powerful; one or more of the girls would later ask if anyone noticed how it felt when it went quiet. As a facilitator I have learnt not to be afraid of these silences.

But the Bible Bit Doesn't Fit

Occasionally in listening to the girls stories it was clear that the Bible passages I had thought of weren't going to connect. In this instance there are a number of options:

- Pause for a comfort or coffee break once the group have told their stories to give yourself thinking time
- Ask group members if they can think of something from the Bible
- Tell the group you don't know what Bible story to share and that you will finish the session together next time.
- Phone a friend!
- Use one of the online Bibles if you have the internet available or a concordance.

New Facilitator

At the beginning of the group, I thought I would be asking a different group member to take over the facilitation of the group, one of the girls who is confident, chatty, charming and has a lot of influence with the group. However, over the months we were meeting, I noticed that Jo was an attentive listener; after any interruption she could remind us who was speaking and summarise what they had said so far. She was not quick to offer her own stories but reflectively absorbed the words of others. Her listening skills are her strength. She is able to plan sessions that are very in tune with the group as she picks up subtleties of their conversations. Importantly Jo has also got a growing knowledge of the Bible. The skill in using Unlock's methodology is to be able to find a relevant passage which you can only do if you are reading the Bible yourself and have a good basic Bible knowledge.

Handing Over

It was hard to work myself out of my role in the group, I enjoyed being with them and loved sharing their lives and sharing God with them. However it has also meant that Jo has grown greatly in faith, confidence and Bible knowledge and that the group will continue once my post with Unlock finishes. It was very useful having a working agreement to keep us on track and planning to hand over from the start. Whilst Jo wanted me to be there for the first few sessions she ran, it was very important that I let her hold the group, I thank God that someone rang the church doorbell during the first session so that I wasn't there to interrupt or take over! By following the stages of the working agreement we have reached a point where Jo is running the group successfully and will continue to do so.

Working Agreement

Unlock Working Agreement August 2009 Staying for Lunch Facilitation

Staying for Lunch

Staying for Lunch is a group that meets fortnightly on Wednesdays following Christ Church Toddler's group from 11 am until 2 pm. (However as some members have to collect older children from school the session usually gets going at 12) The group has been established as part of the Unlock Liverpool project and has since November 2008 been facilitated by Sonya Doragh the Unlock Urban Discipleship Development worker for Liverpool.

Staying for Lunch uses the Unlock approach to Bible engagement, starting from sharing our own experiences. The current group members attend the session with their children, or the children they are looking after, with them. Group members bring their own food and we eat lunch together as we start our discussions.

The Unlock project in Liverpool is only funded until April 2010 and Sonya's time during the last phase of the project is intended to be focused on sharing Unlock's methodology with others around the Liverpool Diocese. With this in mind Joanne Morris, an existing group member, has agreed to become the facilitator of the Staying for Lunch group.

Hand Over Phase 1- August to 4 November 2009

Jo and Sonya will run the group jointly from when it restarts following the summer holidays. Prior to our first session on September 16 we will explore Unlock's methodology together, look at the theory behind some of the sessions we have experienced together and plan the first session.

During this phase Jo and Sonya will meet for an hour following the group session to review how it has gone and plan for the following week's session. Each week Jo's input to the content and the aspects that she is leading will increase.

Hand Over Phase 2 - 4 November 2009 to January 2010

By 4th November Jo will take over facilitation and planning of the sessions for the Wednesday lunch time group. Sonya will be available to support Jo in facilitating the group until the end of December however it will be Jo's decision whether or not Sonya attends the group sessions or if that support will take the form of weekly review and planning support.

Hand Over Phase 3 - January 2010 to April 2010

From January onwards we will have a support / supervision meeting once every half term. Before the end of the Unlock Liverpool post in April 2010 we will establish a support / supervision agreement with Christ Church in order to help Jo sustain the group's activities.

The support arrangements as detailed above are conditional on Jo & the group continuing to use the Unlock approach to Bible engagement.

Session Planning Frame

Course / Event name:

Facilitator(s):

Session Number: Session Theme:

Aims: Participants will have the opportunity to

Outcomes: Participants will be more able to

Session Content

Icebreaker

Will an ice breaker help your group get talking? Is there an icebreaker activity that relates to your theme?

Unlocking Life Experience

What prompts are you going to use to draw out stories from you group.

Think of as many as you can although when working with a group you may only need one...

Music, Film / TV clip, Other sound, Question, Object, Picture/ Cartoon, Smell, etc...

Revealing the down to earth Christ

What Bible passage(s) will you have prepared?

Remember Unlock's teaching method is learner centred - listen to the stories that people tell and be ready to use a Bible passage or account of God's work that relates to what they say.

Is there a creative way you can re-tell any of the Bible stories?
(visual, dramatic, video clip, modernised etc)

Releasing Life Changing Skills

Connect

What questions will encourage the group to connect their story & God's story?

Reflect

Is there an activity that will help the group reflect on what they have learned or help them plan to put that learning into action?

Continuing Reflective Cycles...

Is there anything that you want to do or ask at the beginning of the next session to follow up this session?

Review

Will you seek feedback from participants? If so how?

Is there anything in this session to pay attention to in your own evaluation?

Rev Kelvin Bolton's Observations

As vicar of the parish where this group ran, the only thing that I have noticed is that this type of group and the work that Unlock is trying to set up comes about by the ability of its leader. That is how well they will be able to relate to people generally on the fringe. For a church with an already established group like Toddlers here at Christ Church there needs to be good ways of introducing the leader to the group including the group's leaders. Without doubt the group here would not have started or grown without the 'style' Sonya brought to the group.

Time then needs to be set apart for simply relationship building, for without this the purpose of the group will struggle. It is therefore important that the initial leader is able to cope with this 'waiting' and has the personality that can in some ways build something out of very little. In a church where the vicar has been there for some time, he/she would perhaps need to spend time with the worker and the established group to help them integrate, or the leaders of the group would need to have confidence in the worker to do the same.

Working further away from the fringe would bring even further challenges for working through most Christain's non-Christian contacts. It might be useful to tag on to an Alpha or similar course and then continue with a group through that.

Afterword

I have loved my work with Unlock, not least because much of the time it has felt as though I have simply been getting paid for 'being me'. Working with the Mary's Moments girls has been a prime example of that – it has been a privilege and a joy to get to know Emma, Jo, Dani, Jo, Nadine, Dawn and Kerry. I suppose that is the joy of vocational work, the kind of work that is following Jesus voice and seeking to do as He asks – He knows us better than we do so calls us into the work that will bless us and give us great joy. He knows those girls really well too so I believe He sent me to them because somehow for that time we fit together. And in that mysterious way that God does things we fit together in a way that makes all aware of Him in ourselves and in each other, as though somehow He is tangibly there where we join. They have taught me and told me as much about God and His love as I have told them, our learning has been shared and mutual which has changed all of us!

One thing I have certainly learned in working with this group is not to underestimate others, myself or God. When I started my job with Unlock I was quick to question the feasibility of establishing a group with those on the fringe of church and bringing it to a point of self sustainability in less than 2 years. I was convinced that was not long enough. I'm glad I was wrong, although remain aware that this kind of work is not a quick hit but a patient process, other groups I worked with did not continue in the same way but gained a great deal from God and each other in the time we met.

In order to put this report together I interviewed the girls, as you will have read. It came as a joyful surprise to hear Jo H, Dawn & Emma saying that being part of Mary's Moments has made them feel differently about God, all of them in a positive sense. As the group is so relaxed and informal there had not been direct challenges so I was unaware of how far they felt they had moved. I was already aware that Jo and Nadine felt that the group had been a big part of them moving on in their faith.

As the group continue to meet and explore how God connects with their experiences I hope that they continue to grow closer to God and will grow in confidence to share God's love with others. I hope our journey together is an inspiration to you!