



The Church of Scotland

VIVID VISION

A vivid vision for the Church of Scotland

Participant Guide





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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to **What do you hope for the Church of Scotland? Participant Guide**. We hope that this session will enable a time of reflection and encouragement as together you imagine what God might do through your local church and your impact on your local area.

We will use a mixture of reflection and discussion times, framed around a short film, to explore and imagine together.

This Participant Guide is your companion to the reflections and discussions you will be part of during this session. There is space to write down any notes and reflections from what you see and hear.

About the Film

The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team of the Church of Scotland took time to consider the hope they have for the Church. Acknowledging fully the challenges we face now, this resource chooses to look ahead and imagine what could be. As we look to God and actively trust in the goodness of God, new growth, new ways of being, deeper faith and more effective mission could be possible. The Faith Action Programme Leadership Team offer this interpretation of what they imagined so that you might be inspired to dream your own dreams for your context.

Purpose and Format of Session

In this session we will be exploring:

Through reflection and discussion:

- Responding to the shape of the church now
- Sharing stories which demonstrate where God is at work
- Imagining a new future for your church

Through a short film:

- What God could do in your church and local area

TAKING PART IN THE SESSION

Pre-Session Preparation

Prior to the session, you will have been sent a Pre-session handout containing reflection questions to help you prepare. Take time to prayerfully reflect on the questions. Your answers to these questions will not be discussed in detail, but they will help to form the backdrop to where our session will begin.

Attending the Session

As you prepare to attend this **What do you hope for the Church of Scotland?** session, you may want to spend some time in prayer both for yourself and the group you attend with. Come with an open heart and mind to what God might reveal to you through what you hear and see. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions that will be posed and everyone's view is valued equally for what they bring to the session.

If you are meeting as a Kirk Session or as part of a Presbytery group, this session will feel different from a business meeting and allow the freedom to explore ideas for a vivid vision of what church might be.

During the session, you may wish to note down what you hear and see and pray or reflect on this after the session. Set some time aside soon after you attend the session to reflect and pray through everything that has resonated with you or challenged you.

PART 1: THE CHURCH AS IT IS NOW

Group Discussion – Where is the Church Now?

Before you join the discussion, take time to read through the questions below. You might want to briefly note what your initial response or feeling is to the questions.

Your facilitator will call the group together for discussion.

- What is your greatest sadness for your congregation?
- What is your greatest sadness for your local area?
- Would you be able to articulate any disappointment in God? What might this be?
- Looking back, do you carry any regret for things done or not done by yourself or others?

NOTES:

Bible Exploration

Having thought about some of our sadness for the church, we turn now to the book of Nehemiah - a powerful story of faith, resilience, and restoration set in the aftermath of Israel's exile. When he learns of Jerusalem's ruined walls and the despair of his people, Nehemiah, turns to God in prayer and lamentation, laying the foundation for the rebuilding of both a city and a community.

This historical moment, when God's people faced the challenge of renewal after years of displacement and decline, resonates with us today as we consider the situation of the Church of Scotland. Like Nehemiah, we too are called to mourn what has been lost, to seek God's guidance, and to take bold steps towards rebuilding and reinvigorating the church for God's glory.

Nehemiah 1

The words of Nehemiah son of Hakaliah:

In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that had survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire."

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:

"Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

"Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'

"They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man."

I was cupbearer to the king.

Nehemiah grieved for all that was lost and all that could have been. He was honest before God and allowed his heart to break in the place of prayer. He then offered himself to God for the next part of the story.

Pray

Take time now to listen to what God has revealed to you as the passage was read.

PART 2: THE CHURCH AS IT COULD BE

Listen and Share

As we listen and share, use the questions below to consider where you see God at work in or through the local church.

- Where are people growing in faith?
- Where are people coming to faith for the first time?
- Where are new opportunities showing themselves?
- How are we learning?

NOTES:

Film: A Vivid Vision of What Could Be

As you watch the film with your group, focus on what you see and hear, do not be concerned about taking notes or trying to remember everything you see and hear. There will be time for discussion and reflection after watching the film.

Group Discussion – Vivid Vision

Before you join the discussion, take time to read through the questions below. You might want to briefly note what your initial response or feeling is to the questions.

Your facilitator will call the group together for discussion.

- What did you think of what you saw and heard? How did it make you feel?
- What seemed realistic and achievable?
- What inspired or excited you?
- What made you raise your eyebrows or shake your head?
- What would you keep and what would you change?

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Group Discussion – Sharing our Hopes

As we come together to share our hopes and ideas with each other, where does your heart become excited about what you hear; what do you hear that resonates with you.

- Can you describe what you would like your church and community to look like in three years' time?
- What would the implications of pursuing this kind of vision be for your own congregation or Presbytery?
- If together you were to pursue this, what do you see as the barriers to this vision being achieved? What needs to change?

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Forming a Vivid Vision: Individual Imagining

Take time individually to begin to write your own Vivid Vision for your church. Do not worry if it is not eloquent. Write down the things that resonate most with you, you don't have to write in prose, bullet points will help you highlight the things that are most important to you. Once you have a few things written down, highlight the main 3 things you'd like to share with the wider group and transfer them onto your post-it notes. There will an opportunity to share these with the wider group.

As you think about the vision you have consider, here are some pointers for how to start:

- Take time to pause and pray before starting to write.
- Consider what excites you or what you feel passionate about e.g. children, youth, homelessness etc
- When you think about your church or the local community what pains you, where is God leading you to show compassion.
- Look again at what you wrote in the Hopes and Dreams section on page 9 – what would you want to include in a Vivid Vision?

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Forming a Vivid Vision: Sharing and Discussion

In the wider group, we'll share our individual ideas, written on post-its, and start to build a vision for our church. You may want to take notes of the themes or ideas that you hear described for reflection after the session.

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Pray

This may have been an emotional and challenging session for you or you may have found it energising as you consider where God is leading you as individuals or as a group, this time of prayer is an opportunity to give all that you have said, not said, heard, seen and discovered to God.

Your facilitator will lead you through this time of prayer. Some helpful scripture passages to reflect on are shared below.

Scripture

"In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps." Proverbs 16:9

"Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom's instruction." Proverbs 29:18

*"People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying,
"This is the way; walk in it." Isaiah 30:19-21*

*"As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him."
Matthew 4:18-22*

*"He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said,
"Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." Revelation 21:5*

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you that you make all things new.
Thank you for the church of years past.
There have been many good things along with the hard.

I pray for your Holy Spirit to lead us forward.
We ask that you will guide our decisions and turn our
hearts to deeply desire you above all else.
We ask that you will open doors to new opportunities
and help us to know what to leave in the past.

We ask for your wisdom, strength and power
to be constantly present within us.
Please make us strong and courageous for future.
Give us ability beyond what we feel able.
Let your gifts flow through us, so that you would be honoured
in the church, and others would come to know you.

Amen.

Next steps

The Vivid Vision film is available to view again on the Vivid Vision webpage on the Church of Scotland website.

As you think about all you have seen and heard during the session and consider what a Vivid Vision could look like for your church, take some time to prayerfully reflect on your responses.

There may have been time to consider some of these questions during your session, however if not, they may be helpful for you and your group to use as a helpful basis for a follow-up session:

- How can I begin to pray for this?
- How would I like to participate in the realisation of this vision?
- Who else could I like to share this vision with?
- What might I need to ask, find out or consider?
- What might my own next step be?
- How might the vision be portrayed in a way that is relevant to your community e.g. involving all ages, having a special service or week of prayer, responding creatively through art, craft, music etc

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