

SESSION ONE Congregations and New Faith communities

1. AIMS

- To think about the nature of the congregation as understood in the New Testament and in the Uniting Church today.
- To discover information about Faith Communities.
- To share reasons for the importance of New Faith Communities.

2. WELCOME TO THE PEOPLE

Welcome the people to the study sessions on New Faith Communities. You may like to use a simple team building exercise or use the sessions themselves for that purpose.

3. EXPERIENCING THE CONGREGATION

Ask the members of the group to write down ideas in response to these questions.

- *What was the best experience you ever had in any congregation of which you were a part?*
- *What was the hardest experience you ever had?*

Ask the members of the group to find a partner to work with. Suggest it would be good to choose someone they do not know really well and to discuss their responses together.

4. DESCRIBING THE CONGREGATION :

After the pairs have discussed their experiences, ask them to work on this task on the basis of their discussion:

Finish this sentence with a variety of phrases, "A congregation is:....." When the group comes back together, list some of the phrases on the board.

Then ask the people to read the definition of a congregation that is provided in the Regulations , of the Uniting Church. It is Reading 1 at the end of this session. Then ask them to discuss in the whole group:

- *What brings this formal definition alive for you?*
- *How does the formal definition compare with your list?*

5. CONGREGATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Ask the pairs to form groups of four, to read individually the material by Chris Walker in Reading 2 and then to discuss this question:

What features of the congregations of the New Testament have we taken into the congregations of which we are a part?

Ask the groups of four to share some of their points with the whole group.

6. WHAT ARE NEW FAITH COMMUNITIES?

Many of the staff involved in encouraging mission in the Uniting Church believe that it is vital that the Uniting Church is active in forming new congregations. As this matter was discussed there was a growing realisation that in many situations it would be better to form a group of people into a Faith Community first. That word is used in a technical sense because a congregation is also a community of faith. A New Faith Community could become a congregation as it developed.

The relationship between congregations and Faith Communities was set down in a Report prepared by a Sub-Committee in the New South Wales Synod. It is called the 'Report on Guidelines and Regulations for New Congregations'. Rev. Dr Dean Drayton was the Convenor and the Report is dated September 1996. Parts of that Report are included as Reading 4 at the end of this session.

Ask the people to return to their groups of four, to read the material in Reading 4 individually and then to discuss this question,

After reading the material in Reading 4, what do you understand about New Faith Communities?

When the groups of four have had sufficient time ask them to share their understandings in the whole group. Write some key points from the reports for the group to see. These points will be needed in the next session.

7. TASKS FOR NEXT SESSION

Ask the group members to read the story of Lanyon Valley. This is part of the resource for Session 2.

Also ask the group members to designate two or three people to try to make contact with a New Faith Community before the next session. They may know someone involved in such a Faith Community in another State or with another denomination. Through this contact try to find out what is good about their New Faith Community, any particular problems they are having and any suggestions they would have for your group. Especially ask them about their vision for their New Faith Community.

8. CONCLUDING WORSHIP

The leader or someone else designated concludes the session with worship. This could include prayer for your congregation.