

ENCOUNTER - PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Principles of Encounter

The Encounter programme is for anyone who wishes to understand more fully their calling to follow Christ and to live as Christ's disciples in the world. It will help people to explore further, know themselves better, identify their gifts and explore the various possibilities of ministry and service.

Encounter programmes may vary in content and approach but will all be based on the same principles, in that they will:

- run in close proximity to the mission of the home circuit or area
- be accessible and flexible
- have the appropriate commitment of the local church and explorers
- strengthen Methodist identity within an ecumenical setting
- contain appropriate theological learning
- be affirming of a wide variety of vocations and ministries
- be a corporate experience.

Aims of Encounter

All Encounter programmes have four main aims, which are to help explorers:

- reflect on their own story and calling to see where God has called them and may be calling them now.
- reflect on what they already do as a follower of Christ and to create opportunities to experience and reflect on different forms of ministry.
- explore what it means to be Methodist.
- learn more about their faith, at a level appropriate to them.

Encounter Activities

At the heart of Encounter are local exploration groups facilitated by trained leaders. Explorers will support each other through regular meetings to share conversation, study, reflection and prayer. Encounter programmes will involve different types of activity and experiences over the life of the programme. These activities and experiences will enable Encounter to be more than just a traditional course and will allow explorers the freedom to pursue their own interests within the context of the programme.

In order to get the maximum benefit from a programme, explorers participating in an Encounter programme will commit to:

- attending and participating in the group sessions of the programme
- undertaking additional activities outside the group sessions
- arranging and reflecting on at least one practical experience of ministry of their choosing
- undertaking some structured learning relevant to their individual interests and previous learning experiences
- exploring different approaches to the disciplines of Bible reading, prayer and worship
- maintaining a reflective journal and personal learning record
- meeting regularly with their Accompanist.

Encounter Session Exploration Aims

Encounter programmes will draw on the gifts and graces of the programme facilitators and respond to the needs of the explorers and the mission of the local area. Because of this, individual Encounter programmes may differ in their precise content, but will be based on the following objectives:

Encountering the programme

- To provide an introduction to the Encounter process
- To provide an experience to enable Explorers to decide if it is right for them
- To provide an introduction to discipleship and vocation

Encountering the journey

- To share expectations concerning the Encounter journey
- To establish a way of working within the Encounter group
- To provide an introduction to learning styles, journaling, practical experiences and working with an Accompanist
- To reflect on our individual journey of faith

Encountering God

- To explore different understandings of God
- To explore the ways in which God may speak
- To introduce and explore the concept of theological reflection

Encountering self

- To deepen our understanding of self (personality, experience, skills and gifts)

- To better understand and value diversity in others
- To begin to explore how experience, skills and gifts might be used in worship and service

Encountering discipleship

- To explore what it means to be a follower of Jesus today
- To explore different spiritual practices that nurture discipleship
- To reflect critically on our choices of spiritual practices

Encountering vocation

- To deepen an understanding of vocation
- To discern the on-going nature of calling
- To provide an opportunity to reflect on our vocation

Encountering the unknown

- To review the Encounter journey so far
- To review how the Explorers are feeling at the mid-point of the Encounter programme
- To reflect on experiences of doubt, uncertainty and waiting on God

Encountering the tradition

- To explore Methodism as a developing and worldwide tradition
- To explore Methodist history, belief and practice
- To reflect on our own place and past in the Methodist community

Encountering mission

- To explore the nature of mission
- To develop an ability to reflect on social, political and ethical issues
- To reflect on mission as seeing what God is doing and joining in

Encountering ministry

- To explore the concept of the ministry of the whole people of God
- To explore varieties of ministries in and beyond the church
- To recognise the distinctiveness of lay, presbyteral and diaconal ministries

Encountering the other

- To develop an understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus in relation to other (including those of faith or of none)
- To consider how our engagement with others might affect how we express our discipleship
- To consider how our engagement with others might influence our vocation

Encountering the future

- To reflect on the Encounter journey
- To identify the important personal discoveries from the Encounter experience
- To reflect on what might be involved in the post-Encounter journey
- To celebrate both endings and new beginnings

Programme Commitment

As the Encounter programme is a mix of organised activities, such as the sessions, and personal activities chosen by individual explorers, it is impossible to be precise the time commitment required of explorers.

The minimum expectation of explorers is that they attend each session and meet with their accompanist between sessions (possibly about 9 times) for an hour at a time. This would entail the following time commitment:

- Sessions (12 including the introductory session): 30 hours
- Accompanist meetings: 10 hours

The optional work connected to the Encounter sessions would include::

- 'Anticipate' activities before each session: 5 hours
- 'Explore' and 'Reflect' activities following each session: 10 hours

In addition to the sessions explorers are encouraged to participate in one or more formal learning experiences chosen by themselves (such as short courses, reading, conferences, etc) and one or more practical experiences of ministry or service (such as shadowing a minister, attending a children's group, helping at a missional activity) connected to the interests they develop during the programme. These activities are very personal to the explorer and the time they devote to these can vary greatly, being dependent on the type of activities chosen and the level of interests of the explorer.

From the above it can be seen that participation in Encounter is likely to involve a time commitment of at least 40 and 55 hours over the year of the programme, together with the optional time devoted to formal learning and practical experiences.