



INSPIRATIONS

Resource for women's ministry

'encourage one another
and build each other up,
just as in fact you are doing.'

(1 Thessalonians 5:11)

WOMEN GROWING TOGETHER

Sidebyside



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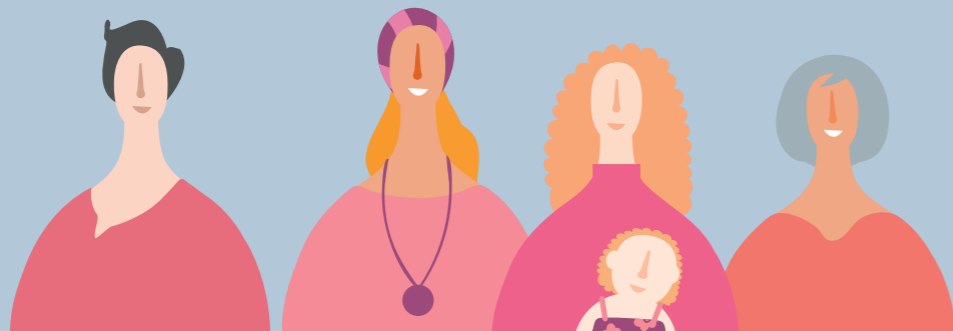
PowerPoint presentations and study guides have been created to accompany the programmes as indicated and are available to download from the Inspirations webpage www.presbyterianireland.org/inspirations



N.B. All Bible references are from the NIV unless otherwise stated.

Side by Side

Welcome to the 2020-2021 edition of *Inspirations* which has been written to develop and embed side by side, discipling relationships within our varied women's ministry contexts.



In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Paul gives the believers this instruction, '*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up.*' It is on this call to live side by side with one another that the Council for Congregational Life and Witness' Side by Side initiative is based on, and this will be threading through the work and witness of the council for the next five years.

Many of you will have been introduced to the concept of side by side relationships if you attended one of the four events held in autumn 2019. As a resource for women's ministry, we hope that the devotions, programmes and ideas contained within this issue of *Inspirations* encourages you to further explore side by side relationships in the coming year.

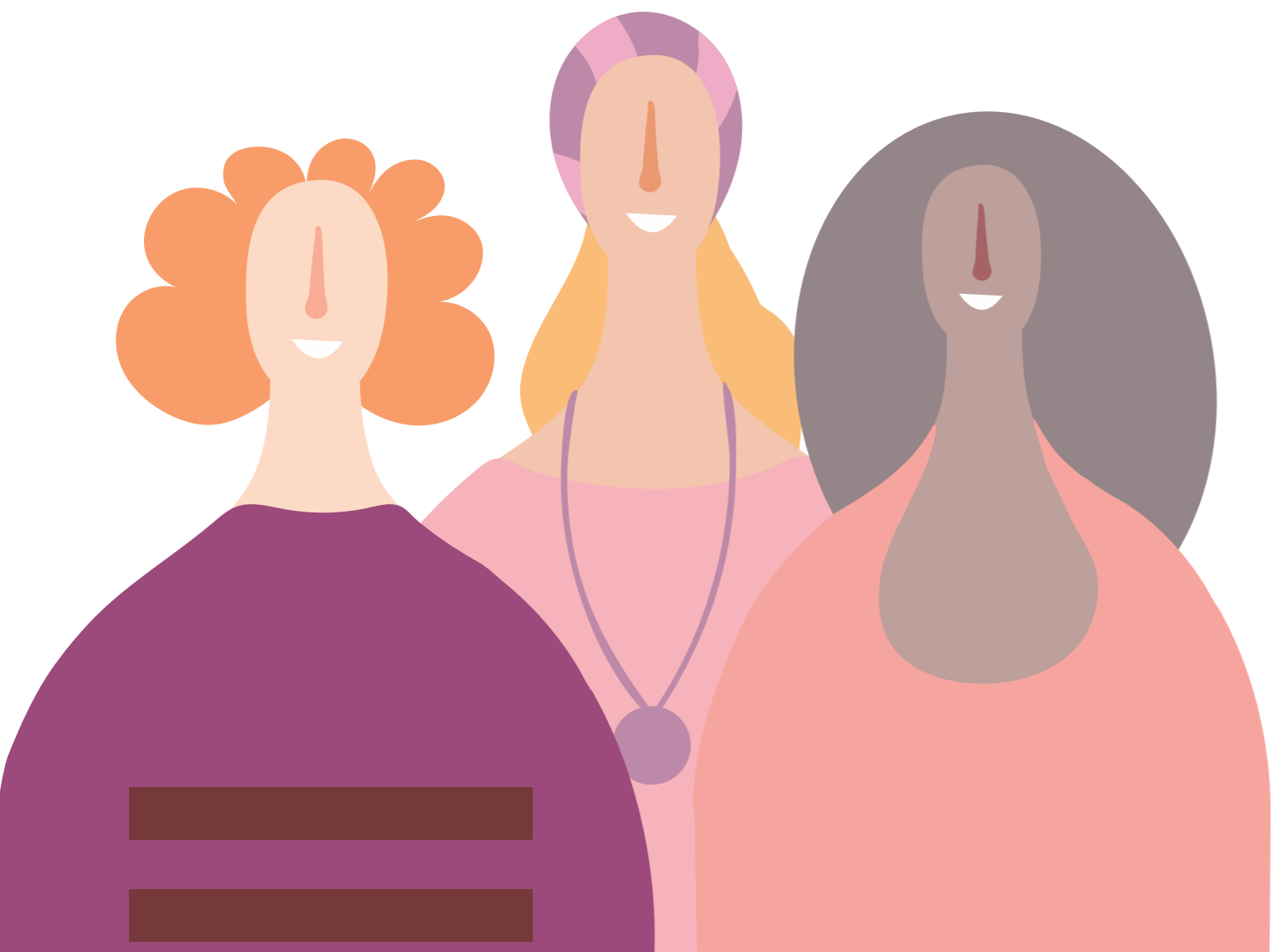
We are not supposed to walk alone in our Christian life, we are one body made up of many parts as we are reminded in 1 Corinthians 12. There are numerous examples in the Bible of men and women of God who, as they served the Lord, had people walking side by side with them. In Exodus 4, we read that when Moses felt inadequate for the task of speaking to Pharaoh, God sent him Aaron. Later, in Exodus 17, Moses sends his servant, Joshua, to fight the Amalekites while he stands with his hands held high overlooking the battle. When his arms became weary, Moses relied on Aaron and Hur to keep his arms raised until Joshua defeated the Amalekites. Working side by side in God's name can make all the difference.

This edition of *Inspirations* opens with a series of devotions exploring the biblical call to side by side relationships and how that can look in our lives today. We hope you find these useful to encourage women to grow in their understanding of their individual calling to live side by side in Jesus' name. They can also be used at the outset of an evening or event or as an epilogue, or as part of a Sunday service.

The six programmes included focus on different ways of getting alongside one another in our Christian walk. This includes benefitting from intergenerational relationships; opening our lives up to others by offering them biblical hospitality; learning how Jesus has taught us to pray side by side; and how we are called to care for others. An additional programme has been designed for use as a small group Bible study and it directs us to consider the importance of the Holy Spirit in our walk with one another and with Jesus.

You will also find a range of resources after these programmes which are designed to support your exploration of side by side relationships. These include ideas for getting side by side, a suggested reading list, Bible passages for group study, worship songs which help us explore God's call on our lives in praise, and a list of online resources which will support you in your side by side ministry.

The *Inspirations* Subgroup has prayerfully considered the contents of this women's ministry resource and it is our prayer that it will help you as you equip and enable women to walk side by side as disciples of Christ, building one another up as they serve, love and follow Him.

**AIM:**

To help focus our thoughts on the biblical basis of side by side

IDEA:

These can also be used as an epilogue.



Suggested reading:
Susan Hunt
Spiritual Mothering
Crossway 2009, 2016

Help get the Bride ready

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

Women need to draw side by side with other women to encourage and build up by word and example. A central theme of Paul's letter is the second coming of Christ and our theme verse comes at the end of a lengthy section where Paul teaches specifically about the coming of the Lord. The return of the Bridegroom is certain, and the Bride needs to be ready.

In her book entitled 'Spiritual Mothering', Susan Hunt writes, 'Jesus is redeeming his people. Jesus is purifying his Bride. The outcome is not our responsibility. But we are to make disciples. We are to help get the Bride ready.'

If you have ever been mother of the bride, you know what you must do: help get the bride ready. This is an amazing privilege as well as a tremendous responsibility. It starts long before the day of the wedding and includes hours of planning, talking, shopping, lunch dates, appointments, baking, decorating, praying, reading, advising, arranging, decision-making and cheque-writing!

You may not have experienced this but every one of us has the amazing privilege and the tremendous responsibility to get the Bride ready. The Bride is the church of Jesus Christ and women have a particular responsibility for each other. It's not just up to ministers and elders. Every single one of us has a role to play as we seek to encourage and build up the Bride of Christ.

How are we doing at this? If our conversations with one another were recorded, how long would we need to listen before we heard sentiments like these:

"You are such an encouragement to me."

"You have been such a blessing to my children."

"You are such a prayer warrior and it really inspires me because often I struggle with prayer."

"Your teaching has really helped open God's Word to me."

We may think these thoughts but that is not enough. Simply thinking these thoughts will not encourage the other person's heart. Simply thinking these thoughts will not promote a culture of grace. Simply thinking these thoughts will not develop a loving community. We need to open our mouths and share the gospel in the communities that we are part of.

Side by side

...standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

Philippians 1:27b (ESV)

In his very practical book, *Side by Side*, Edward Welch writes, 'Life is too hard to manage single-handedly.' This is a thoroughly biblical idea. Encouragement to walk alongside one another in wisdom and love is found throughout Scripture. There are almost 60 'one another' commands in the New Testament. God is clearly telling us that he wants his church to be one-anothering one another.

It is hoped that our *Side by Side* theme this year will encourage us to draw alongside one another to develop deep and lasting relationships. Women's ministry in our local churches is far more than the programmes and events that we plan throughout the year. It is the relationships that are initiated, nurtured and developed as women walk side by side through life.

The New Testament imagery of the church as the body of Christ shows us that we are all needed, and we all need each other: '*...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*' Romans 12:5 (ESV)

Every member is needed, and every member is in need. Do you realise this? This is God's vision for community, and it flows from the three-in-one community that is enjoyed by our Triune God. The relationship in the Trinity is one of mutual glorification. The Father glorifies the Son, the Son glorifies the Father and the Spirit glorifies the Son.

In *Closer than a Sister*, Christina Fox writes, '*...their relationship is one of self-giving love, each One delighting in, adoring, honouring and treasuring the Other.*' We are called to reflect the Triune God by being in community, loving and treasuring one another.

So, what does this look like? We need Christian friends who will pray for us; weep with us; mourn with us; rebuke us graciously; help us keep our eyes fixed on him; warn us when we are playing with sin; help us identify idols; encourage us when we are down; bear with us and forgive us; speak truth to us; be kind and compassionate to us; be hospitable to us; spur us on to love and good deeds; and keep pointing us towards Jesus.

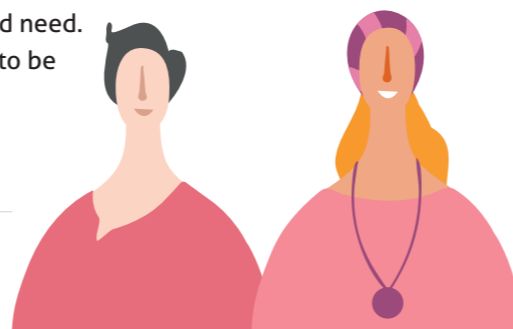
This kind of side by side friendship takes time to cultivate. It is intentional, two-way and as such brings tremendous blessing. J.I. Packer describes this kind of friendships as, '*...an expression of both love and humility. It springs from a desire to bring benefit to others, coupled with a sense of personal weakness and need. It has a double motive - the wish to help, and to be helped; to edify, and to be edified.*'¹

Who are you side by side with? Go and be a blessing to each other.



Suggested reading:
Ed Welch
Side by Side
Crossway 2015

¹J. I. Packer *God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes* Baker Book House, 1981



Brave enough to bear/bare?

Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2 (ESV)

The drift of culture seems to be towards individualism and self-absorption; looking out for number one. The church of Jesus Christ is called to stand in contrast to this. We should want to be a community of people who love God and love each other. Following Paul's command to, '*Bear one another's burdens...*', is one way we can show our love for God and each other.

This 'one another' command follows a section of teaching about life in the Spirit. Paul is saying that, instead of becoming '*...conceited, provoking one another, envying one another...*' Galatians 5:26 (ESV) a life lived by the Spirit will lead to a community of humility, love and mutual support in which we bear one another's burdens.

Imagine someone carrying a heavy physical load. They are stumbling under the pressure. You need to get very close to help. As you draw alongside to help, you see their relief as the stress and pressure begins to drain from their face and you feel the strain on your own body as you bear part of the weight for them. This is a picture of what it's like to bear one another's burdens.

We are fallen people, living in a fallen world. Consequently, we all have burdens to bear from time to time. What might these burdens be? Well, in the previous verse, Galatians 6:1, Paul has written about how we are to restore a brother or sister caught in sin. So it follows that various burdens can be directly related to battling sin and dealing with feelings of shame and guilt when we fail. But there are many other burdens we are to help people bear. For example: the burden of illness as we watch over a loved one; the burden of suffering from mental health issues; the burden of navigating broken relationships.

In all this burden-bearing, let us keep our eyes fixed on the one who bore our greatest burden: our Lord Jesus Christ. '*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*' Hebrews 12:2

Jesus bore the horrific burden of the cross for the joy of redeeming us. As we seek to bear one another's burdens, we must keep in mind that Jesus is our perfect example and our continual source of strength and wisdom. Gently, graciously, we point one another to Christ and his gospel as our source of strength, hope, forgiveness and satisfaction in all of life.

Are we brave enough to 'bear one another's burdens'? Are we willing to take the time, make the sacrifices, feel the pain? It takes effort to build relationships where we can bear another person's burdens.

And, are we brave enough to bare our hearts? So often the burdens we carry are not visible to the human eye. We can walk about carrying burdens no-one knows anything about. So how can anyone help us? Are we willing to open up to a wise, godly friend to ask for help and support? Bravery is required as we take off our masks, bare our souls and reach out for help. But this is God's plan for his people. We don't grow very well alone – we need one another.

Fight Club

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another.

James 5:16 (ESV)

Living side by side with women is about sharing our faith and sharing our lives – our successes and obedience as well as our failures and disobedience. It calls us to become more and more transparent and authentic as we seek to take off the masks and be real with one another about our struggles. Side by side living is messy and imperfect yet transformative and honest.

In James 5:16, we find two 'one another' commands that are inextricably linked. We are probably more comfortable with the second one – to pray for one another. The first command - to confess our sins to one another - may seem alien to many of us. Perhaps we feel uncomfortable and think, "I only need to confess my sin to God." So, what does James mean when he calls us to confess our sins to one another and what are the spiritual benefits?

Every Christian is in a fight. Our enemy is within. We are called to wage war against our sin. God has placed us in a body of believers because he knows we need help in this fight. The gospel redeems all people, so our fight for holiness should be a community project. We all need to have one or two godly, loving, trusted Christian women in our lives with whom we can be vulnerable and honest about our struggle with sin and who will then pray specifically for us as we battle for holiness.

Sadly, embarrassment, fear of rejection and pride can all keep us from such honesty in our relationships. Yet the beautiful irony is that, instead of fear, embarrassment and rejection, such godly relationships bring blessing, strength and freedom. In his very helpful book, *Gospel Centred Discipleship*, Jonathan Dodson aptly describes such relationships as 'Fight Clubs'. It may not sound very feminine but as we read our Bible we discover many images of fighting, battling, putting to death and warring against our sin. Dodson's idea of 'Fight Clubs' simply means that we meet with one or two other women to help us fight the sin in our lives and believe the gospel of grace. This is what James 5:16 could look like in practice as we meet regularly with one or two trusted, godly women and together confess our sin, fight against it, pray for each other, continually point one another towards our Saviour.

In her excellent book, *Real*, Catherine Parks helpfully writes: 'God calls us to be a community of honesty and grace. We know other people don't have the power to forgive our sins against God – that role is His alone. But what another believer can do is remind us of the forgiveness we receive in Christ.'

The gospel makes such relationships possible. When our confidence is in Christ, when we know we are accepted and loved because of him, we will not be afraid to honestly address the sin in our lives, knowing that we will find forgiveness and grace in Jesus.



Suggested reading:

Catherine Parks
Real The Good Book Company 2018

Jonathan Dodson
Gospel Centred Discipleship
Crossway 2012



Suggested reading:

Rosaria Butterfield
The Gospel comes with a House Key
Crossway 2018.

Open heart, open home

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

1 Peter 4:9 (ESV)

The gospel is a story of radical hospitality. The birth, death, resurrection, ascension and return of Christ show us that our God has gone to tremendous lengths to search us out, welcome us and make us his people.

Once we were separated from Christ; alienated, strangers, with no hope and without God. But Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross so that, though we were far off, we might be brought near by the blood of Christ.

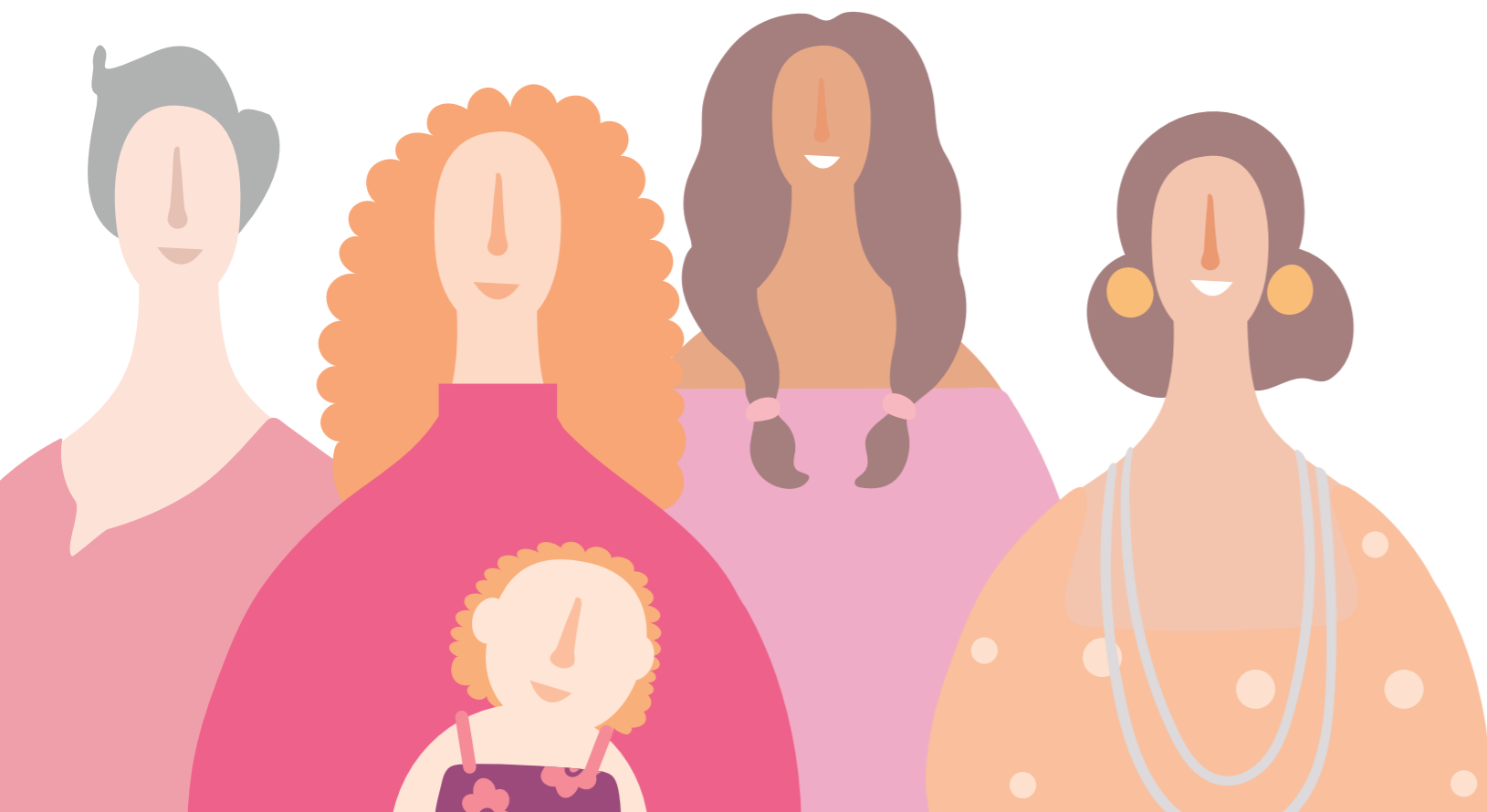
This is wonderful, radical, transformative hospitality and we stand amazed that such grace has been extended to us. Now, as image bearers of our God, we are called to the ministry of hospitality. We are called to have a heart that seeks to search out people who are far off, on the fringes, disconnected and lovingly bring them close. In *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, Rosaria Butterfield writes about the many blessings of extending hospitality as strangers become neighbours and then become family of God. As we extend hospitality to others, we should pray that God will draw them closer to his heart.

Whilst most verses in the Bible that mention hospitality are speaking of hospitality to strangers, our 'one another' verse is referring to hospitality within the body of Christ. In 1 Peter 4, Paul teaches that, as we wait for Christ to return, we, as believers, are to be praying, loving, offering hospitality and serving.

The very word 'hospitality' can strike fear into the hearts of some women, causing them to break out in a cold sweat. This is because we mix up hospitality with entertaining but they are poles apart. Entertaining is concerned with the external, seeking to impress guests while keeping them at arm's length. Entertaining wants to create a beautiful setting with gourmet food and an unflappable, immaculate host. Hospitality is about humbly serving our friends, opening up our hearts and our homes as they come and find love and a safe haven.

Some say they are too busy for hospitality. We might be too busy for entertaining, but we are not too busy for hospitality. We all need to eat. Boil a few more potatoes. Throw another cup or two of rice in the saucepan. Don't complicate it. Pray that God will help us to learn how to weave the ministry of hospitality into our lives until it becomes the norm rather than the exception. We may have to make adjustments to our schedule, maybe even be inconvenienced from time to time, but, if we seek to live our lives conscious of the radical hospitality God has extended to us, our ministry of hospitality to others will simply flow out of a humble, thankful heart. Keeping in mind God's radical hospitality towards us is also the key to offering hospitality, as Paul says, without grumbling.



**AIM:**

That women will understand that relationships across generations are biblical.

OUTCOME:

That women will be enthused and equipped to intentionally build intergenerational relationships.

PRESENTATION:

PowerPoint slides and a group discussion handout are available to download for this programme.

LEADER'S NOTE:

You can introduce getting side by side intergenerationally using the talk show sketch and/or discussion questions that follow, then develop the topic with a biblically-based group study. Within the script below there is a series of biblical paraphrases which are referred to in more detail in the Resource Section on page 41.

Side by side intergenerationally

Key verse: 'Older women... are to teach what is good.' Titus 2:3 (ESV)

Side by Side talk show

Leader's note: *Present this in the form of a television talk show or panel discussion. Position the presenter in the middle with two panellists on each side, either behind one long table or on chairs in a semicircle. This sketch can be used to lead into a time of discussion in small groups with the aim of sharing and developing ideas for the group to put into practice.*

Presenter: Hello and welcome to this evening's edition of 'Side by Side'. Tonight, we are going to be discussing the missing generation in our churches and particularly in our women's ministries. So, *(looking at the panellists)* what exactly is the problem?

Panellist 1: Well, they just won't come to anything we organise. We get meetings announced and we always say everyone is welcome but none of the younger women ever come.

Panellist 4: We even give out invitations on a Sunday and still none of them come.

Panellist 2: *I am* a younger woman! And a few of us do attend women's events in our congregation when we can.

Panellist 3: I don't want to sound like we have it all sorted, but we actually have quite a few younger women who attend regularly. It's not like they're a separate group though. They are part of our group just the same as anybody of any age who turns up at anything we organise.

Presenter: Do we really need something that suits all women though? Surely people need different things at different stages of life. Should they not be doing separate things?

Panellist 4: Well, we would love to see women mixing more because it's something we see in the Bible. We just don't know how to make it happen.

Presenter: Let's take a few ideas on that. What is there in Scripture that makes you feel that getting older and younger women together is something to aim for?

Panellist 4: To start with there are all the instructions about parents and children, about one generation teaching the next about God and his ways, and the mess God's people got into when that didn't happen. It's not just about families, though that is the main way it happens. It's about each generation passing on wisdom and teaching to the next.

EXTRA NOTE:

In the Bible, the writers knew that all ages and genders and people from all walks of life were present when the church gathered. It was an innovation in those days for women to be taught but Jesus taught Mary (Luke 10:39) and there were other women who followed him and heard him teach – both those in the huge crowds and those who were close enough to Jesus to provide for his and his disciples' needs (Luke 8:3). In his letter to the Ephesians (which would have been read to the gathered church), Paul addresses husbands, wives, children and slaves. In Acts (20:7-12) we read about Eutychus, a young man (the word can refer to a man up to age 40, you might be glad to know) who Paul raised to life after falling to his death having fallen asleep during one of Paul's sermons.

Panellist 1: And where is the next generation of leaders going to come from if we don't have them with us now so that they can be trained up for the job – like Moses did for Joshua?

Panellist 2: Then you have women like Naomi who instructed her daughter-in-law Ruth.

Panellist 1: Jesus himself taught his followers and then sent them out to teach others.

Panellist 3: And Paul followed Jesus' example. He looked on Timothy and Titus as his sons in the faith and when he left them in charge of churches, he wrote to them to help them develop and mature. *(Slight pause)* There's actually an interesting instruction Paul gave to Titus about teaching women.

Presenter: Now, we don't want to get side-tracked into a discussion about obeying husbands and doing housework...

Panellist 3: That's exactly right! We don't! Especially because it seems that Satan uses those things that we don't like to keep us away from this passage, but it contains a very vital principle that is relevant to what we are discussing and it is for all women, not just those who are married. Titus is instructed to teach the older women, but it was then up to the older women to apply the teaching to the younger women. There were probably younger women there when Titus was teaching, but the practical application of that teaching to their lives would be best done by older women who had experience of living it out. *(See extra note left)*

Presenter: Let's assume then that we should be getting older and younger women together so this can happen. What are the barriers that are preventing it?

Panellist 2: We really want to learn from older women. We'd love to hear their wisdom and experiences. But we worry that older women wouldn't want to be bothered with us. And it feels really cheeky to go up to somebody and just start asking questions.

Panellist 4: Look, I wouldn't want anybody to think that I'm a know-it-all! What do I know about things the young ones have to deal with? It's a different world nowadays.

Panellist 1: Well, it's not so much that I don't want to come across as a know-it-all. I'm just very aware that I really didn't get everything right when I was younger.

Panellist 2: Maybe we've got the wrong impression. Sometimes us younger ones think you never had any struggles or made any mistakes.

Panellist 4: Maybe we need to be more honest... but that does mean we have to get talking first. You can't just jump in and start talking about your failings. Sure, they'd have no confidence in you at all if you did that!

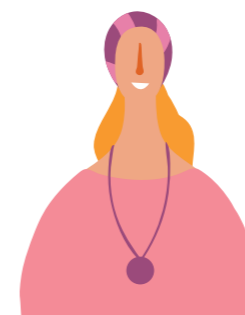
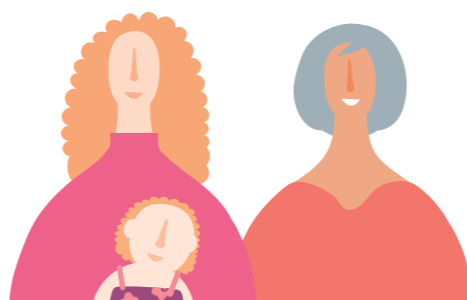
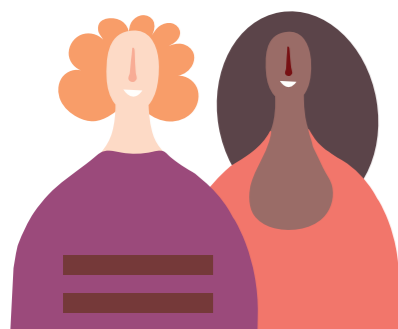
Panellist 3: Getting to know people is where you start. It's not a quick fix or a one-off conversation. It's a long-term thing. Getting different age-groups together is a good first step... but we have to remember not to stop there. We need to know what we are aiming for and do whatever it takes to achieve it.

Presenter: Well, that's all we have time for tonight, but maybe you can continue the conversation. What is your aim? And what is the first step you will take to work towards it?

Leader's note: *The following group discussion questions can be used instead of the talk show and are available to download from the Inspirations webpage. Distribute a paper copy to each group or show them on PowerPoint. To form random groups, you could use the 'Starburst Supper' idea from Ideas for Getting Side by Side on page 35. Have a brief time of feedback before moving on to the second set of questions.*

Group discussion questions to introduce the topic

1. What is the age-profile of your group?
 - a. How many fall into each of these age ranges: 20-39; 40-59; 60-79; 80+
 - b. Are all age-groups represented?
2. What are the benefits of being part of this group?
3. What do you do individually, and as a group, to encourage other women to join with you? Do you have any new thoughts or ideas about how to open up the group to them?
4. Imagine you have never been to this group before. What would you like people to do in order to make you feel welcome and to help you understand what is going to happen in the group?
5. Why do you think it is important for people of different ages to mix?
6. If people tend to associate with women from their own generation, what could you do to encourage them to mix with others?
7. Can you think of any passages in the Bible that suggest the importance of intergenerational relationships?



Questions for biblically-based discussion leading to suggestions for action

Leader's note: Use the following to lead in to discussion from the talk show, or to move on after feedback from the previous questions, and distribute the questions provided or show them on PowerPoint.

Read: Titus 2:1-5

1. How were the older women to learn and what was Titus instructed to teach them?
2. How much value do we put on learning from the people God has gifted as teachers in the church?
3. Think of a time when you put into practice something you had learned from God's Word. Take time to share this experience with others in your group.
4. How can we create opportunities for relationships to develop between different generations which will provide opportunities for the kind of teaching and training Paul suggested?

Leader's note: After a time of discussion, ask each group to share one idea for building intergenerational relationships. Make a list of all your ideas and decide on the next step your group could take to build relationships across generations to share with the whole group after your discussion time. You could delegate the responsibility to each discussion group to prepare the activity or event. In doing so, you would be providing an opportunity for women of different generations to work together.



AIM:

To show that all God's people should care especially for one another but also for those still outside his Kingdom; to suggest ways in which this can become a reality.

OUTCOME:

That each woman will intentionally come alongside at least one other person to demonstrate God's love and care.

REQUIREMENTS:

one leader and two readers

PRESENTATION:

PowerPoint slides, group discussion handout and Caring for Each Other prompt cards are available to download for this programme.

Each *Caring for Each Other* prompt card (a selection are available to download from the *Inspirations* webpage) offers a thought and question relating to caring for others. The recipient of the card prayerfully asks God that question and then looks out for opportunities and situations that arise where they can follow through with the action suggested on the card. It's a simple idea to help us all look out for how we can join God in caring for each other side by side.

Caring for each other side by side

Introduction

Leader: Think of how many body parts you have. Think of the intricacies of your design. Think of how one body part can help another, making up for deficiencies and providing what is lacking. Think of how all the parts work together, keeping you alive and in working order. Just as God designed our physical bodies with different parts to work together, he is building the church, which is the body of Christ, and he has a variety of work for every one of his people to do, both in bringing the gospel to those outside the kingdom and in building one another up within it. There is no retirement age and no unemployment. Everyone has a part to play at every stage of their life on earth.

Reader one: In 1 Corinthians 12:24-26 we read, '... God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.' (ESV)

Reader two: Jesus says, in John 13:34-35, 'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' (ESV)

Leader: God's people must love and care for one another and, in doing so, they will also show others what Jesus is like. Let's ask some questions and see what else we can learn from the Bible about this loving care.

Leader's note: Options for the next section include: the questions and answers below which can be displayed on PowerPoint or card as they are read out; give out the questions and verse references to pairs or groups from a time of studying together; invite in advance one or more women to illustrate these points with a story from their own lives.

Leader: Who should we love?

Reader one: Other Christians.

Reader two: 'So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.' Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

Reader one: Our neighbour.

Reader two: 'Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' And Jesus said to him, 'You go, and do likewise.' Luke 10:36-37 (ESV)

Leader: Why should we love?

Reader one: In obedience.

Reader two: 'This is my command: Love each other.' John 15:17

Reader one: For unity.

Reader two: *'...so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity...'*
Ephesians 4:12

Reader one: As unto him.

Reader two: *'It is the Lord Christ you are serving.'* Colossians 3:24

Reader one: For his glory.

Reader two: *'...so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.'*
1 Peter 4:11

Leader: How should we love?

Reader one: Deeply.

Reader two: *'...love one another deeply from the heart.'* 1 Peter 1:22

Reader one: In action.

Reader two: *'...let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.'*
1 John 3:18

Reader one: In sincerity.

Reader two: *'Love must be sincere.'* Romans 12:9

Reader one: Unselfishly.

Reader two: *'Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others.'* Philippians 2:4

Leader: What does this love look like?

Reader one: Relational.

Reader two: *'Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.'*
Romans 12:15 (ESV)

Reader one: Supportive.

Reader two: *'Bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.'*
Galatians 6:2 (ESV)

Reader one: Compassionate.

Reader two: *'If one part suffers, every part suffers with it...'* 1 Corinthians 12:26

Reader one: Patient.

Reader two: *'Love is patient, love is kind...'* 1 Corinthians 13:4

Leader: So, where do we begin? What does it look like for you and me to get alongside each other and demonstrate Christ's love as we care for one another? Returning to our earlier illustration, we're going to consider parts of the body to explore how we can get alongside others and care for them. Before we do that, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we consider these things together, we ask that you would show each one of us how we can come alongside one other person and show loving care for her. Help us all to listen to you and to be willing to follow your leading. We pray in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen.

Leader's note: *The subtitles read by the leader can be shown on PowerPoint or card at the appropriate time. There are Caring for Each Other prompt cards to accompany each section.*

Leader: Using your arms and hands.

Reader one: Take someone's hand to show your support. Put an arm around someone's shoulder to comfort them.

Reader two: Come alongside others in practical ways. What could you do over the next months to help someone? Is the Lord bringing a specific person to mind?

Leader: Using your feet.

Reader one: Invite someone from another age group for a walk. Take time to get to know each other; share your story.

Reader two: Walk to someone's door to visit them or walk across the room to start a conversation.

Reader one: Come alongside someone to journey with them through a difficult time.

Reader two: Is there someone younger going through something you have experienced? A life situation or a difficult round of treatment? Who will the Lord lead you to?

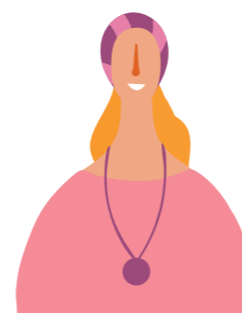
Leader: Using your mouth and ears.

Reader one: Be aware of those around you. Take the initiative. Start a conversation!

Reader two: Listen. *Really hear* what she is saying. 'I'm fine,' doesn't always mean that. Give her time to talk without interruption and give her your full attention.

Reader one: Share the gospel. Are you ready with an answer for anyone who asks you about the hope you have? How will you do it with gentleness and respect?

Reader two: Pray. Who will you pray for privately? Why not pray with her?



Reader one: Could you meet regularly with one or two others to pray? How about intentionally arranging for women of different generations to pray together?

Reader two: Encourage others. Who could you thank or compliment?

Leader: Using your mind.

Reader one: Share what you have learnt. In Titus 2 we are told that those with more experience are to train those coming behind.

Reader two: Throughout life, God teaches us many things, bringing us through experiences which can then be used to help others. What has the Lord taught you?

Leader: Using your heart.

Reader one: When Jesus looked at people, he was filled with compassion. We, too, need to have compassionate hearts. We cannot fix the situations, but we can be there to listen, to comfort, and to point others to the One who alone brings hope.

Reader two: So, ask God to give you a heart for the hurting. Is there someone who needs your compassion?

Leader: Using your eyes.

Reader one: Whether we have 20/20 vision or wear contact lenses or glasses, we often fail to see things which are right in front of us. The same thing can happen with people. Someone might be right beside us but we fail to notice her need of someone to care for her.

Reader two: Pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes to see who he wants you to come alongside to show love and care.

Leader's note: Ask each one in your group to prayerfully choose one thing that she will do from what she has heard. Take time to reflect in silence or by playing the song 'Give me your eyes' by Brandon Heath. If your church has the appropriate licence you could show the YouTube video of the song - www.youtube.com/watch?v=P5AkNqLuVgY (4:03 minutes) and can be found on the Side by Side playlist on Spotify. At this point you could use the Caring for Each Other prompt cards which are available to download from the website.

Closing prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word which makes clear how your people should relate to one another. Help us to be intentional in 'encouraging one another and building each other up' as you have told us to do. Forgive us for often being hesitant to do as you command. Help us to actively seek opportunities to care for others and, in doing so, demonstrate your love to them. Help each one of us to put into action what we have decided to do as a first step. May we always be ready to get alongside those you put in our path for their, and our, benefit and for your glory alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

AIM:

To show that biblical hospitality is a mission in which everyone can be involved.

OUTCOME:

That women would understand the importance of biblical hospitality and be challenged to open their homes and lives to others.

PRESENTATION:

PowerPoint slides and a group discussion handout are available to download for this programme.

Side by side in hospitality

Key verse: '*Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.*' Romans 12:13

Leader's note: This opening reflection to Side by Side in Hospitality can be read by a leader alongside any of the programme ideas that follow after the suggested opening prayer.

Opening reflection: In the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, we read many stories about people engaging in hospitality, including:

- Abraham, Sarah and the three visitors (Genesis 18:1-7)
- Elijah and the widow at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8-16)
- Elisha and the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:8-17)
- Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)
- Lydia (Acts 16:14-15, 40)

Particularly in the New Testament, God used homes so that believers could live side by side, discipling each other, to grow the church. In Romans 12:13 we read, '*Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.*'

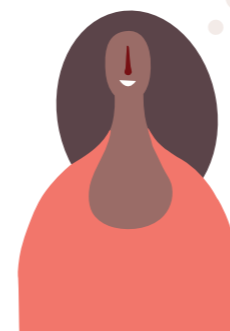
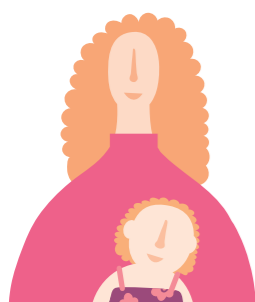
Do we consider hospitality as an exciting opportunity for mission and outreach? Often, when we think about showing hospitality and opening our homes to others, we panic about what this might mean: elaborate menus, hours spent in the kitchen, a thorough spring-clean, redecorating our 'good' room, and so on.

We also think hospitality is just about spending time with other Christians or our current circle of friends, and only inviting those into our home who are similar to us, who think the same as us and with whose company we are comfortable, rather than looking beyond to those whom God wants us to invite into our homes.

However, it is important to remember that biblical hospitality is not about entertaining or being the perfect hostess and having the cleanest house. It is simply about inviting others, both believers and non-believers, people who are like us and people who aren't like us, into our homes to share a simple meal and some conversation around a table, then using this as an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus' work in our ordinary lives.

In our culture today, hospitality is a vital form of discipleship - people are longing for deeper relationships and connections with others and opening our homes and lives gives us a unique opportunity to share the gospel with others.

N.B. This programme complements the devotional entitled *Open heart, open home.*



Let's pray together.

Opening prayer: Heavenly Father, we consider the situations in which many find themselves in our world today – lonely, isolated, disillusioned, anxious or overwhelmed. There are many in our community and neighbourhood who do not know about Jesus and are searching for somewhere they can belong and learn about your love. Your Word tells us to, '*Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.*' Help us to be prayerful and action-focused in relation to the opportunities that you have given us to be hospitable to others. Give us the courage to be intentional about seeking out those you want us to reach out to. We ask you to speak to us all about our role in practising hospitality. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Leader's note: *Here are three ideas for programmes exploring hospitality. You can choose from Idea 1, 2 or 3 depending on your group or context. You may also wish to use all three ideas to create a short series on 'Biblical Hospitality' over three consecutive meetings.*

Programme idea 1: Hospitality in our homes

In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, we read, '*...so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.*' Opening our homes and lives for God to use through hospitality doesn't happen by accident. We have to be:

1. **Intentional** about offering our homes for God to use and also about who we invite. Whilst love and care for fellow Christian believers is important, we also have to invite non-believers into our homes for the purpose of extending God's kingdom.
2. **Prayerful** about asking God to guide us.
3. **Practical** in how we open and use our homes.

Invite someone from your congregation who has experience of practising biblical hospitality. Ask the person you invite to openly and honestly share their experiences of hospitality including stories of people to whom they have opened their home. Remember that biblical hospitality is about willingly sharing your life with others, so it doesn't have to be practised solely in your home. It could be through using another resource such as a coffee shop or a local venue.

As this is about learning how everyone could be engaged in hospitality, they could share about:

- how they **intentionally** look for opportunities;
- how they **prayerfully** ask God to lead;
- how they **practically** engage in hospitality.

KEY POINT:

Often, it is much easier to walk into someone's home rather than into a church. Therefore, we should never underestimate the importance of our homes as places to share the gospel. We just need to issue the invitation and trust that God goes before us to prepare the hearts and minds of those we invite.

KEY POINT:

Hospitality is essential to the growth of the church, both to encourage believers within the church but also to reach out to those who do not yet know about Jesus.

They might also give practical suggestions around how they:

- approach new 'faces' at church and start a conversation;
- invite work colleagues or non-church friends to their home;
- set aside a specific day or evening, once a week or month, to open their home;
- join up with others to share practical arrangements;
- create a system or have a budget specifically for hospitality;
- keep it simple by having a few quick and easy meals to rely on.

They could additionally share about:

- how they speak to others naturally about the gospel, moving the conversation on to sharing the impact of Jesus in their life;
- what skills they use to engage with people about the gospel, e.g. applying it to people's real-life issues, listening well, asking questions, telling their own authentic stories;
- how they maintain and grow relationships with others.

Leader's note: *It would be helpful to share this outline with whoever you invite to speak so that they can use it as a guide when preparing what they will share with your group.*

If it is not possible to find someone who has *practised* biblical hospitality through their home, an alternative is to invite someone to share their experiences of *receiving* biblical hospitality and the impact it had on their life.

Programme idea 2: Hospitality in our churches

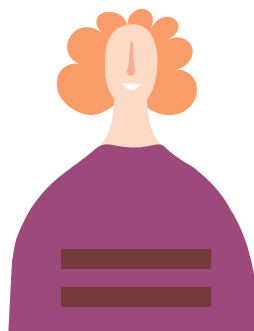
Although the first church met together as a corporate body in the temple courts, it also developed beyond the building through ordinary believers meeting together in their homes, sharing meals, fellowship and prayer together. Read Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37, which describes how the early church grew in and through the homes of ordinary people.

Leader's note: *These group discussion questions are available to download from the Inspirations webpage. Distribute a paper copy or show them on PowerPoint.*

Group discussion questions to introduce the topic

1. What types of hospitality were demonstrated in the life of the first church?
2. Are there similar types of hospitality happening in the life of your church today?
3. How is the church showing hospitality, both within the church and to those in its community who don't yet know Jesus?
4. Are there ways to actively foster and engage in hospitality both within and beyond the church?

Leader's note: *If your church has an active outreach which involves hospitality, ask someone to come along and talk to the group about this.*



Programme idea 3: Hospitality as a community and nation

Leviticus 19:34 and Hebrews 13:2 focus on welcoming strangers and foreigners. *'The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.'* Leviticus 19:34

'Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.' Hebrews 13:2

The New Testament word for 'hospitality' (the Greek word, *philoxenia*) comes from a compound of the words for 'love' and 'stranger'. Therefore, hospitality literally means *love for strangers*.

Leader's note: *Invite a speaker along from an organisation which specifically focuses on showing hospitality by welcoming and supporting refugees or those who have arrived from another country to study or work. Examples of organisations which are involved in this type of hospitality are:*

International Meeting Point - www.presbyterianireland.org/Mission/Mission-Projects/International-Meeting-Point.aspx

Embrace NI - www.embraceni.org/whoweare/

Friends International – www.friendsinternational.uk/belfast

Side by side in hospitality application

What should the group do now?

Leader: Hospitality may feel ordinary but it is far from insignificant. Through intentionality, prayer and practical action, every Christian is equipped to open their homes and their lives to show others what it is like to love and follow Jesus. No special training or equipment is required – just faith that God goes before you, working in the lives of those you engage with. What is one step that each of us can take to practise biblical hospitality?

Leader's note: *Move into a time of group discussion, asking each small group to discuss the steps they are thinking about taking. Make a list of all the ideas shared and encourage each small group to share with the whole group after the discussion time.*

Closing prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to remember your hospitality to us and how you came and saved us, how you opened the door and invited us to come into your presence. When we think of the ultimate hospitality we have received, help us also to extend hospitality to those around us. Give us the courage to invite others into our homes and into our lives, especially those we do not know well or who are different from us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

KEY POINT:

Love for strangers is one of the most valuable ways we can share hospitality. Having received God's ultimate love and hospitality, we need to ensure that we actively share that love with others.

AIM:

To encourage women to think about how they could get alongside various members of their community or church family in order to share 'Emmanuel' in a practical way.

OUTCOME:

That women will engage in an activity which reaches out to others this Christmas.

Side by side at Christmas

Key verse: *'And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.'* ¹ John 4:21

Leader's note: *Instead of a traditional Christmas programme, these are some practical suggestions for coming alongside those in need at this time of year, in order to show them the love of God.*

At Christmas time, we remember how God willingly gave us the gift of His Son, Jesus, as our Emmanuel – God with us. He is even more than just side by side with us. God is always present, sometimes walking beside us, sometimes carrying us or sometimes wrapping us in his arms of comfort. Christmas isn't always a fun or exciting time for everyone. It can be lonely, depressing or overwhelming. So, pause and think of others this year; those with empty seats at the table; those in hospital or those far away from friends and family. Is there any room at your table for an extra guest? Remembering how God delights in our generous hearts, who will you help this year? Start a new tradition side by side.

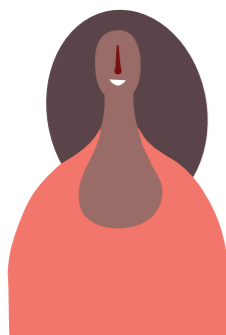
Suggestion 1: Visit a residential home, nursing home or hostel

If your church or group already has links to this type of care environment, make arrangements with the home's management to visit before Christmas. Singing carols, reading the Bible and spending time with residents can help to alleviate loneliness and remind residents that they are precious in God's sight. Your group may also want to bring goodie bags to give to the residents - remember to liaise with the management regarding the contents of these as there may be items that are not suitable for residents. Some may ask you to refrain from including sweets because of diabetes or difficulties with swallowing.

Gift ideas

- A brown paper lunch bag can be easily decorated with Christmas stickers or gift tags and filled with little gifts.
- Tissues, bed socks, shower gel, comb, puzzle book, pen, flashlight, hand warmers, coaster, teddy or soft toy, nail polish, lip balm, black socks or small packet of soft sweets.
- Twiddlemuffs are a welcome gift for homes with a high population of dementia sufferers.
- Face cloths and soap can be folded to make reindeer or snowmen. These could be made at a craft night in advance.

Leader's note: *Instructions for each of these ideas can be found on the Inspirations Pinterest page at www.pinterest.co.uk/inspirationsPW*



Suggestion 2: Food packs or hampers

Organise for your group to collect non-perishable food items that can be put into hampers or food packs to be donated to a local food bank. *Storehouse* recommends including the following items: biscuits, cereal (including variety packs), crisps, long life milk, pasta, pasta sauce, tea bags, tinned dessert, tinned fish, tinned fruit, tinned meals, tinned meat, tinned potatoes, tinned vegetables.

You may also wish to include some fun or luxury items, such as selection boxes, tins of sweets or personal hygiene products to go along with the basics.

Suggestion 3: Gifts for women in crisis

Many women in shelters or crisis accommodation suffer from low self-esteem and have little or no surplus money to spend on themselves or their children. *Both Lives Matter* highlights a range of faith-based organisations on their website that you might wish to partner with in their support of women experiencing crisis, visit www.bothlivesmatter.org/services for more information. PCI are also involved in a range of mission partnerships which you can find out more about by visiting www.presbyterianireland.org/Mission. You may also be aware of a local organisation involved in this vital area of support and could arrange to connect with them also.

Gift idea

- Fill a handbag with makeup, moisturiser, lip balm, hand cream, sanitary items, shower gel and shower puff. Add a Christmas card with words of encouragement and a prayer of hope.

Suggestion 4: Town centre/village give-away

Create an invitation to your church's carol service or Christmas outreach event and attach these to candy canes or other festive sweets. Organise a team to go into your local shopping area or town centre to use these gifts as an opportunity to invite your local community to join with you this Christmas and to engage in conversation about how Jesus is God's salvation gift to the world.

Leader's note: *Instructions for this idea can be found on the Inspirations Pinterest page at www.pinterest.co.uk/inspirationsPW*

Remember, for each suggestion, planning is key.

- Select an activity or organisation that your group feels led to after prayerful consideration.
- Consult with your minister or elder responsible for women's ministry regarding your plans.
- Delegate tasks to members of your group, such as liaising with the local nursing home or purchasing the necessary items that are to be gifted.
- Identify an evening that you will set aside to spend packing goodie bags, organising food parcels or filling handbags or goody bags together.
- Be blessed by coming together this Christmas and getting alongside those around us who are struggling and don't yet know the reality of the love of God in their lives.

Leader's note: *There are many other ways in which your group could come side by side with others at Christmas, so if these ideas aren't suitable or relevant to your group then put your heads together and think about other things you could do.*

AIM:

To help women to understand the importance of prayer and its benefits.

OUTCOME:

That women will be more intentional, comfortable and confident when praying with one another and when praying for others.

PRESENTATION:

PowerPoint slides and a group discussion handout are available to download for this programme.

**Suggested reading:**

Pete Greig's, *How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People* Hodder & Stoughton 2019, is an excellent accompaniment to this programme and includes a study guide for groups.

Side by side in prayer

Key verse: *'This, then, is how you should pray...'* Matthew 6: 9-13

Leader's note: *Select a member of the group to read the sections which lead into the discussion sessions.*

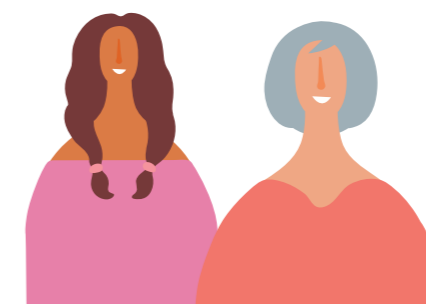
Reader: Each of us is at a different stage on our journey of faith. This means we are best placed to help others spend time in our Father's presence through prayer. Hopefully by the end of this meeting you will feel more comfortable and confident when praying with others and for others.

For a variety of reasons, we can sometimes struggle to pray in both public and private - and we are not the only ones. In Luke 11:1, as Jesus returned from praying in a 'certain place', one of his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray. We need to learn how to pray just as the disciples did.

Leaders' note: *Use the following questions for discussion in small groups or read them out with time for personal reflection. The questions are available to download or show them on PowerPoint.*

Discussion questions

- What do you find difficult about prayer? What do you find easy? Why do you think prayer can often feel hard?
- What do you mostly talk to God about?
- Do you feel like you have to act a certain way before God when you pray? Why or why not?
- Do you find it challenging to persevere in prayer? How can we be encouraged to keep going?
- How do you feel about praying with others in a small group? In a larger group?



The Lord's prayer

By looking at the prayer Jesus taught to his disciples we can develop our prayer life both individually and side by side with one another. Pete Greig suggests we look at it like this:

- P PAUSE** 'Be still and know that I am God' Psalm 46:10
- R REJOICE** 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,' Matthew 6:9
- A ASK** '...your kingdom come, your will be done...
Give us today our daily bread.' Matthew 6:10-11
- Y YIELD** 'Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'
Matthew 6:12-13

Pause

To start, sometimes we have to stop. Our prayers can sometimes become wish lists or action points rattled off before we start doing what we've just prayed for. We need to put those down and press pause. We need to wait, sit quietly and become fully present. Stillness and silence help us to prepare our minds and hearts to pray from a place of greater peace, faith and love for God.

Leader's note: *At this point you could put this into practice by listening to a reflective piece of music to help create a comfortable atmosphere; or reading a Psalm out loud, like Psalm 8, then taking a moment in silence to allow the group to ask the Holy Spirit to help them reflect on what has just been read.*

Rejoice

François Fénelon writes, "Lord, help me not to worry about the words, but address you with the language of the heart... I simply present myself to you; I open my heart to you... Teach me to pray. Amen." The Lord's prayer begins with an invitation to adore God and we have so much that we can praise God for.

Discussion questions

- Why do you think we most often associate prayer with asking God, rather than praising God?
- When are the times when prayer feels most enjoyable?
- Does seeing prayer as a relationship help change your perspective of coming to God in prayer?
- When we pray with others do we often forget to praise God? How can we encourage one another to praise God as we come together in prayer?
- Can you suggest any verses or passages from the Bible that would inspire the group's prayer of praise?

Leader's note: *At this stage you may wish to have a time of praise by singing together or by praying together in small groups.*

Ask

Prayer can mean many different things, but for most it means asking God for help. Jesus shows us this when he calls us to pray for both 'our daily bread' and for God's kingdom to come. He models here a prayer for ourselves and a prayer for others. The Bible shows us that when God's people intercede in prayer, God intervenes. Jesus affirms this in Matthew 18:19-20, when he says, 'Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'

Women meeting side by side in prayer in our congregations gives us the opportunity, not only to be involved in praying for each other and our local situation, but also to pray for those sent by PCI to bring the good news to people at home and abroad. As a sending denomination, we need to prayerfully support Irish and global mission workers and deaconesses.

How can we pray effectively for others?

- Get informed: Learn the facts of the situation you are praying for.
- Get inspired: Invite the Holy Spirit to speak into the situation you are interceding for.
- Get united: Jesus promises action if God's people agree.

Discussion questions

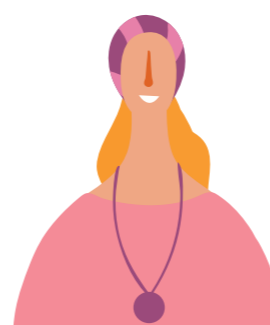
- Have you ever had the feeling that you needed to pray for something or someone?
- Is there a story you could share without breaking any confidences?

Leader's note: *Prepare information for the group to use as they come together to pray for others. At the end of this programme, you will find a list of resources which will help to inform these prayers. The prayer diaries and resources can be downloaded and printed to share with the group.*

Yield

The Lord's Prayer shows us that surrender to God's will comes through listening when he speaks to us, and by confessing our sins so that we can be reconciled to him and others. In Matthew 6:12-14 we read, 'Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.'

Leader's note: *The following two passages could be read out. Alternatively, divide into small groups and give each group one of the passages of Scripture to read and then discuss the lessons about prayer that can be learned from them.*



Throughout the Bible there are instances of women who yielded their lives to God and their prayers changed things.

1. Rhoda (Acts 12:1-17)

Peter was in prison. The church gathered to pray for his release and God miraculously answered their prayers. When Peter knocked on the door of Mary's house where they were gathered, Rhoda went to answer it. She was so overjoyed to see him, she didn't even open the door to let him in but ran back to tell the others. The group praying said, 'You're out of your mind!' But Rhoda 'kept insisting that it was so.' Do we appear surprised when God answers prayer in spite of knowing from Ephesians 3:20 that he is able, 'to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine'?

2. Hannah (1 Samuel 1:1-20)

Hannah was in despair. The first of Elkanah's two wives, she was childless and taunted by his second wife, Peninnah, that God had not given her children. She yielded her life to God in a vow, asking him to give her a son and promising to give that son back to him. God answered her prayers and gave her a son whom she called Samuel, meaning 'heard by God'. When we pray, do we ask expecting God to answer in line with his will? Like Hannah, are we willing to yield what we have asked for, if that is what God requires of us?

Closing

Leader's note: *You may wish to revisit the aims and outcomes from the start of this programme in small groups. Encourage everyone to share one thing that they've learnt and will take away to put into practice in their daily lives.*

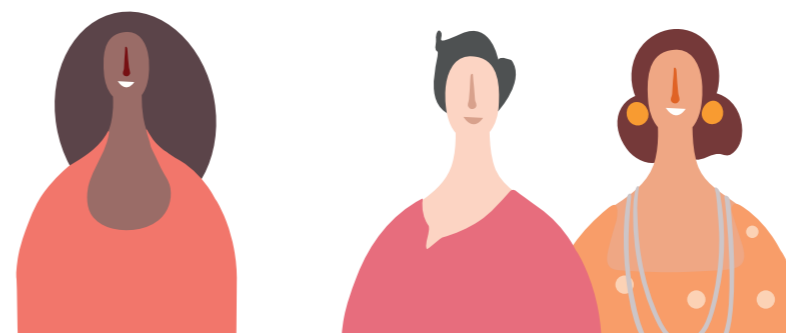
In the Lord's Prayer we call God, 'Father' because we are acknowledging that we are his. We are declaring that we have been adopted and now we are part of the family. As family, we should have the confidence to enter boldly and ask our Father whatever is on our heart. Jesus did not tell us to pray, 'my Father', rather he said, 'Our Father'. What a privilege! Jesus was, in effect, declaring that we cannot exist in isolation. We are family. Our fellow brothers and sisters are all part of the family; we cannot do without one another.

What's next?

- Think about forming prayer triplets that will meet regularly to pray for one another, openly and honestly.
- Set up a text prayer group to pass on prayer requests for your church family and friends.
- Be involved in the prayer room in your church, if there is one. If not, consider speaking to the minister about creating one.
- Consider contacting a mission worker in Ireland or overseas via email to tell them you are praying for them. When you do, it is good to say that you do not expect an immediate reply in order to alleviate pressure in the midst of a busy season.
- Take time to make blank bookmarks, each with just the name and photograph of one of PCI's global mission workers, deaconesses or Irish mission workers. Each person takes one home and has to find out one fact about the person on the bookmark and write it under the photograph before the next meeting. The bookmarks are swapped around each month and each person adds another piece of information so that by the end of the year the group will have gained knowledge about the work of a variety of PCI's mission workers.

Helpful resources for side by side prayer

- **ASK** is a series of twelve postcard-sized prayer prompts created by PCI. They unfold themes in simple, Scripture-based ways to help inspire and focus prayer. These are available to order at www.presbyterianireland.org/askprayercards
- **Let's Pray** is a weekly email and A5 booklet resource, providing prayer topics and requests for the coming week running from Sunday to Saturday. It features prayers and requests concerning all aspects of the life and work of the Church, with a major emphasis on global mission and mission in Ireland, and can be found at www.presbyterianireland.org/letspray
- Use prayer diaries from your own congregation.
- For monthly prayer bulletins from global mission workers, visit www.presbyterianireland.org/mission



AIM:

That women will grow in knowledge of the Holy Spirit, and will experience his empowering presence in their lives.

OUTCOME:

That women will consciously and intentionally walk in step with the Spirit together in every aspect of their lives.

PRESENTATION:

PowerPoint slides and a group discussion handout are available to download for this programme.

**Suggested reading:**

Francis Chan
Forgotten God
David C Cook 2009

Mike Pilavachi and
Andy Croft
*Everyday Supernatural:
Living a Spirit-Led Life
Without Being Weird*
David C Cook 2016

Side by side with the Holy Spirit

Key verse: *'And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth.'* John 14:16-17a

This study has been designed to be beneficial for use within a small group context, such as with a committee, to allow those involved to go deeper in their relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Leader's note: *Either the leader or someone within the group can read the following sections:*

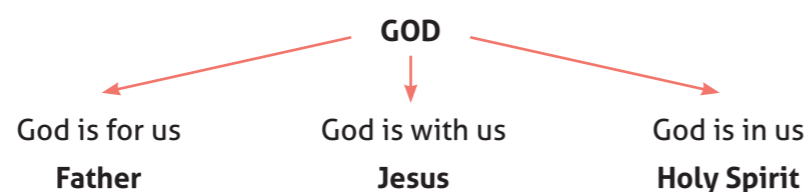
Leader: A lot of us are familiar with God's identity, David's Psalms are filled with powerful pictures of our Heavenly Father, and the gospels draw us closely to the heart of Jesus. However, the Holy Spirit is sometimes described by Luke in Acts and by Peter and Paul in the Epistles using language that is too unusual for many of us to feel comfortable with. This can lead to a lack of understanding and a lack of intimacy with the Holy Spirit.

It can, however, be helpful to remember that for the first followers of Jesus, experiencing the Holy Spirit, never mind accepting Jesus' own identity, required a massive shift in their understanding of who God is. With that in mind, this Bible study follows the first disciples and apostles as they learn about the person of the Holy Spirit from Jesus' own words, through Pentecost and into the power of the Holy Spirit moving in the early church.

Advocate – allos parakletos (Greek)

In John 14:15-27, Jesus describes how the Holy Spirit will draw alongside the disciples after he leaves them. The words he chooses to use are similar to the word used to describe a type of tug boat used in the Mediterranean at the time. Jesus uses this language to help create a picture in the minds of his disciples (and us) to help explain what the Holy Spirit will do in the lives of his followers. He will draw alongside us, help us to navigate our way through life and bring us home to our Father.

As God moves closer and closer to us, we can all experience the Holy Spirit drawing alongside and leading us into life as followers of Jesus. This diagram might help you to visualise how this relationship works.



The Feast of Pentecost, is a harvest festival that is celebrated fifty days after Passover. Luke writes in Acts 1:3 that Jesus remained with his disciples for forty days after his resurrection before he ascended into heaven. This means that his disciples have been waiting in Jerusalem for a week when they reach the day of Pentecost.

Read Acts 2:1-4

If we go back to Genesis 1:1-2, the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters, over the formless and empty earth. This 'breath' or Spirit transforms the unformed mass and chaos found 'In the beginning...' into a new creation. In Genesis 2:7, God creates Adam by breathing into him his 'breath of life'. God's Spirit brings Adam into existence and into the life he was created for.

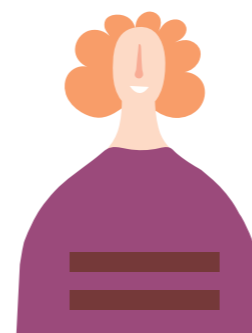
Think about those disciples in that upper room in Acts 2:1, and what we learn about them in the gospels. For now, they and the church, are unformed and slightly chaotic masses in need of transformation. Yet, they are also together in one place (just as we are as we study this passage).

Leader's note: *Time to Reflect sections are designed to create opportunities for the group to discuss their responses to the study questions and are available as a downloadable resource as well as on PowerPoint.*

Time to reflect:

1. Who is present among those 'all together in one place' and what have we learned about them from the gospels prior to this moment at Pentecost?
2. The arrival of the Holy Spirit is described in verses 2-3.
 - a) Does Luke's description remind you of other events in the Bible in which God's presence is connected to the appearance of fire?
 - b) What is important about these moments in the history of God's people and what do they tell us about God's desire for his people?
3. When the Holy Spirit comes, the believers are 'sitting', intentionally waiting and being still. What do you think is significant about this detail that Luke has deliberately included?

In this passage, the Holy Spirit comes suddenly among the believers – not after the implementation of a new ministry strategy or a particularly stirring sermon. The Holy Spirit comes when those who are gathered together are humble and expectant. Do we live with the same expectancy?



In the Old Testament, God's presence within the holy of holies in the temple, was often indicated by an overwhelming fire or consuming flames. In Ezekiel 10:18, the prophet describes the glory of God (often described as fire) departing from the temple because of the idolatry and disobedience of Israel. Restoration of God's presence is prophesied in chapters 36-37, with Ezekiel expressing a hope for the return of God's fire to the temple at a future time.

What we're reading about in Acts is the return of God's presence, not in the temple or the tent of meeting, but in an anonymous person's home. Could Ezekiel have ever imagined God's presence coming in power, in tongues of fire, and resting on ordinary people? As the Holy Spirit comes to rest on them as a gentle tongue of fire (not an overwhelming fire or a consuming flame), each believer is transformed from a chaotic mass into a mini-temple that is now filled with the power and presence of God.

As the Holy Spirit rests on these humble, expectant people, they are both animated and made whole. God's Spirit has transformed them, and the people outside of the room notice immediately!

Read Acts 2:5-13

The response of some of the 'God-fearing Jews' to the disciples' behaviour is less positive, and more problematic. These aren't unchurched yobs hurling insults, they are religious people making a 'religious' statement by dismissing the disciples as drunks. These devout people wanted God, but they also wanted order and to be in control. What they saw as chaos was actually the Holy Spirit transforming people's lives. Think of what those Jews missed because of their attitude towards the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Time to reflect:

4. **Why do you think does God chooses to send the Holy Spirit during the Feast of Pentecost?**
5. **Some of the crowd respond to the disciples by being 'utterly amazed'. Who else drew this kind of response and what does this tell you about how the Holy Spirit is transforming the believers?**

Read Acts 2:42-47

Living a life that is filled with the Holy Spirit looks different for everyone. Think of it like being a guest at a wedding. Why are you there? Is it because you love the couple being united in front of you or is it because you like the font they used on the invitations? We shouldn't allow our personal preferences to prevent us from experiencing the joy of walking in step with the Holy Spirit. Each of us experience the Spirit moving in our lives differently; what ultimately matters is that the Spirit unites us as a fellowship of believers, just as we read about in this passage.

Time to reflect:

6. **What way of life does the newly born church model to us? What are their priorities?**
7. **How can we take these priorities and embed them within our own lives?**

Look around our church, not the building, the people. Is it full of distinct people – all very different, all very unique? What unites us? What could unite us? We *can't* bring women of different ages, stages, backgrounds, experiences together and hope to recreate the early church in Acts 2. *The Spirit can.* And the Spirit will. The early church models a spirit-filled life that transformed, united and empowered normal people to live utterly amazing lives for Christ. Let's learn from them, set our step in time with the Holy Spirit's, and expect great things to happen in Jesus' name and for the kingdom of God.

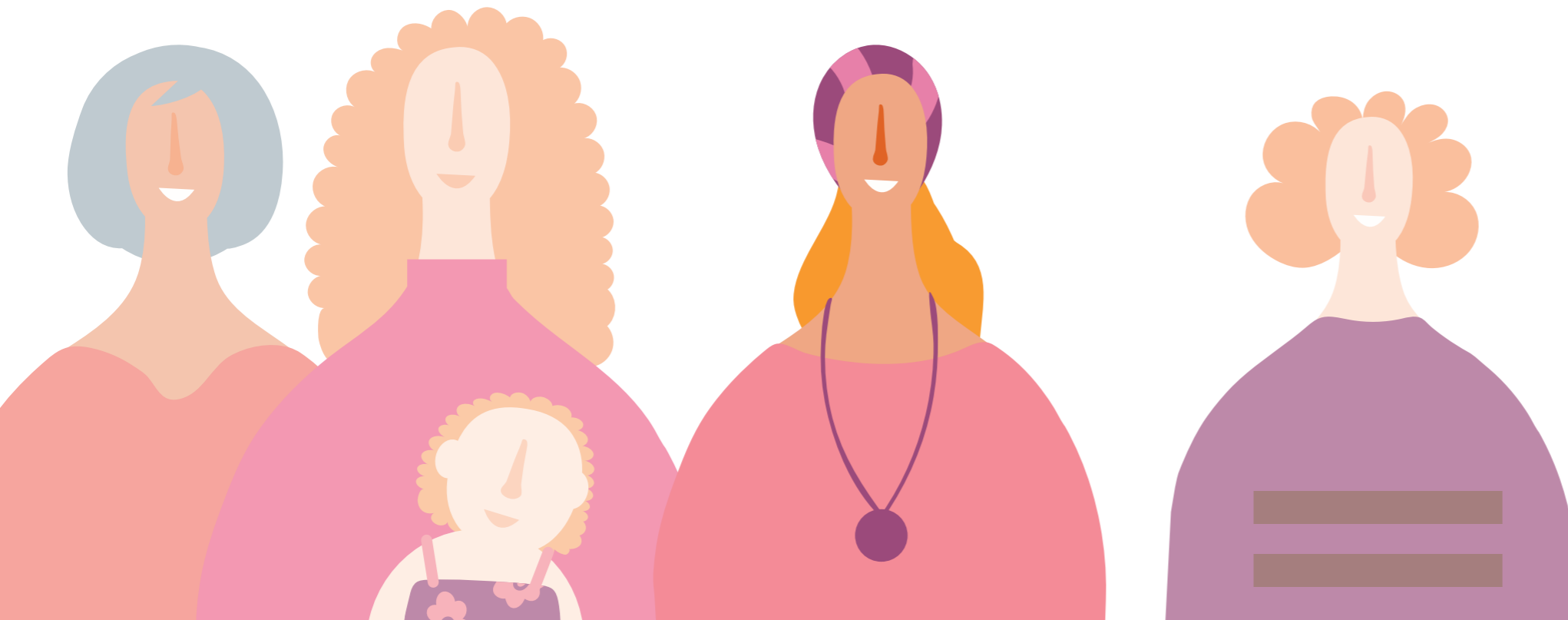
Time to reflect together

Take time to pray through what you have been studying together and how God has been speaking to you through his Word. You may want to play some music during this time of prayerful reflection. Kari Jobe's 'Holy Spirit' on her album 'Majestic' is a beautiful piece. If your church has the appropriate licence you could show the YouTube video of the song - www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPPMSfCdUng (9.55 minutes). This can also be found on the Side by Side playlist on Spotify.

Allow the following points to help shape your prayers:

- Give thanks to God for sending his Holy Spirit to draw alongside us, help us to navigate our way through life and bring us home to our Father.
- Ask him to pour out his Spirit on you afresh today, to fill you with his presence and his power.
- Be still and reflect on God's Word – ask him to speak to you through his Word and through his Holy Spirit that is at work within you.





Ideas for getting side by side

Building relationships takes time and we need to be intentional about them. Through the power of his Holy Spirit, God can use our ordinary conversations to help us grow together. We can rejoice with others in their blessings and show them compassion in their struggles. We should be willing to listen and open to sharing our own experiences. None of us have life figured out, but we can help each other grow in grace and Christlikeness, while remembering God's sovereignty, amazing love and abundant mercy.

We can learn a lot from talking to people who are older or younger or at a different stage in life than ourselves, but often it can be a challenge to get this mix of women into the same room at the same time. The following are suggestions to help bring women in your church together. As you plan your programme for the year, you can choose activities from this resource that will encourage women of all ages and stages in life to mix with and chat to each other. You can also download pre-prepared conversation cards from www.presbyterianireland.org/inspirations. Each activity section below leads on to the next because the purpose of these activities is to develop relationships that are meaningful and supportive, and to move towards deeper spiritual conversations.

1. GROUPS

These ideas are designed to help you organise women into groups at random.

- **Starburst supper**
As women arrive, offer them a Starburst sweet, explaining that all will become clear in due course. Ask them to get into groups according to the colour of their sweetie paper. *(You will need enough Starburst sweets for one each and an even distribution of colours.)*
- **Birth months**
Women organise themselves into groups based on their birth month.
- **Shoe size**
Women group together based on their shoe size.

2. GATHERING

These ideas are for practical events that create time and space to get to know one another.

- **Supper tota**
Intentionally connect women of different ages together to organise supper. Encourage them to communicate with each other when planning what to bring and to work together when setting up and serving.
- **Dinner date**
Arrange an evening of fellowship over a meal for the women of your congregation and community. This could be catered for by members of your church or you could organise to meet in a local coffee shop or restaurant.

3. GETTING TO KNOW YOU

These ideas are to help encourage deeper conversations and knowledge of one another.

- **Table talk**
Set up a room with tables in a circle, allowing women to be seated on either side. Women who have attended PW for more than 10 years could be seated in the inner circle and women who have been attending for less than 10 years are in the outer circle, or you could use a group suggestion from section 1.

Have pre-prepared questions on the table so that when the first bell rings, women on the outer circle can ask the women on the inner circle for their answers to them for three minutes. After three minutes, the bell should ring again and the roles will be reversed.

After another three minutes the bell will signal the end of the activity, or if time permits, women on the outer circle can move seats in a clockwise direction and begin the activity again with a new partner.
(You will need: tables, chairs, pre-prepared questions, a timer and a bell.)

- **Show and share**

Ask women to bring along an object of significance to them and be prepared to explain to the group why the object is meaningful to them. Depending on the size of your group, you could break into smaller groups or pairs.

Possibilities for this activity include:

- Sharing a favourite Bible verse or song and why it is special
- Briefly reviewing a helpful book that you have read

Leave time for questions and time to pray over what has been shared.

- **One-to-one**

Encourage the women in your group to intentionally look out for someone they could get alongside. It's important to do this prayerfully, seeking God's guidance to find someone to befriend, encourage, pray for, and maybe even read the Bible together.

4. GETTING IN TOUCH

These ideas are to help build and maintain communication links between women.

- **WhatsApp**

If they are willing to be partnered with another lady in the group for mutual support, ask the women present to write their names and mobile numbers on a slip of paper and put it in a 'hat'. Pull two names out until everyone has been partnered and over a coffee break, allow these pairs to meet together, exchange numbers and share with each other their points for prayer for the week ahead. Encourage everyone to send each other a message during the week to share an encouraging scripture verse, to ask how things are going or to remind them that they have been prayed for.

(You will need: small pieces of paper, pens/pencils and a 'hat'.)

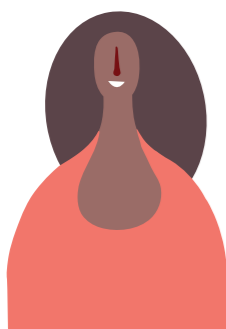
WhatsApp is a useful communication app that can be used to encourage and support one another in community. You could facilitate groups of two or three on WhatsApp in which women communicate with each other by sharing pictures, videos or praise items.

- **Follow-up**

Challenge everyone to make a conscious effort to talk to the woman they have been partnered with when they meet at church on Sunday or at another church event.

- **Encouragement cards**

Every year, Presbyterian Women produces encouragement cards as part of a series of resources connected to that year's theme. You can purchase these cards via the website or by contacting the PW office. Contact information can be found on page 47.





Suggested reading for side by side

The devotionals and several programmes within this issue of Inspirations recommend helpful books which explain, develop and explore getting side by side with others in discipling relationships. These, and others, have been listed below for your convenience:

- Nigel Beynon and Andrew Sach *Dig Deeper: Tools to Unearth the Bible's Treasure* IVP 2010
- Sarah Bradley *One2One: Real Women* The Good Book Company 2013
- Rosaria Butterfield *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* Crossway 2018
- Francis Chan *Forgotten God* David C Cook 2009
- Andrew Cornes *One2One – 24 studies for Bible Reading Partnerships* (The Good Book Company 2004)
- Jonathan Dodson *Gospel-Centred Discipleship* Crossway 2012
- Christina Fox *Closer than a Sister* Christian Focus 2017
- Dave Furman *Being There* Crossway 2016
- Pete Greig *How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People* Hodder & Stoughton 2019
- Megan Hill *Praying Together* Crossway Books 2016
- Christine Hoover *Messy Beautiful Friendship* Baker Books 2017
- Susan Hunt *Spiritual Mothering* Crossway 2009, 2016
- Catherine Parks *Real* The Good Book Company 2018
- Mike Pilavachi and Andy Croft *Everyday Supernatural: Living a Spirit-Led Life Without Being Weird* David C Cook 2016
- Ed Welch *Side by Side* Crossway 2015
- Sophie de Witt *One to One: A Discipleship Handbook* Authentic Media 2003

Here are some ways to encourage your group to read and engage with these books together:

- Ask a variety of people to read a book and review it for the group. For those inspired to read the reviewed book you could organise to place a bulk order.
- Have a bookstall (on sale or return from a Christian bookshop) at one or more group events. Plan well ahead and request multiple copies of titles that will be suggested.
- Organise a book club in which everyone reads the same book and gets together to discuss it.
- Many of the books suggested above contain study guides or have accompanying study guides and other online resources, so they would be very useful within a home-group or small group context.

Planning a service

It is a privilege to be given the opportunity to lead your church family in corporate worship, and give God the glory for all the work he is doing in and through women living for Jesus, being discipled side by side, within your congregation and community.

When it comes to planning and preparing for a service, it is important to remember to arrange to meet with your minister or elder assigned to Presbyterian Women or women's ministry well in advance of the service, to discuss your plans including the speaker and the overall content. Try to maintain continuity with your service so that it doesn't differ too greatly from a 'typical' Sunday – this will ensure that it engages as many within the congregation as possible, not just those personally involved in women's ministry. Play to your group's strengths and don't attempt anything that is too far outside of your collective comfort zone or experiences as a church.

Here is a sample outline of a service, with some suggestions for content:

Opening the service

- A word of welcome and introduction to the theme of the service – this may be a good opportunity to read the theme verse for *Side by Side*:
1 Thessalonians 5:11
- Open with a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Praise

- Included within *Inspirations* is a selection of well-known hymns and songs connected to the 2020-21 theme. Choose two or three of these for a time of praise together.

Offering

- During the collection of the offering is a good opportunity to inform the congregation about the work of *Presbyterian Women's Mission Fund* by showing the Mission Fund video and/or the promotional videos for the 2020-21 Special Home and Overseas Projects. These can be downloaded from www.presbyterianireland.org/specialprojects or www.vimeo.com/presbyterianireland.

Prayer

- This time of prayer should include thanksgiving for the offering collected, then lead into a time of intercession.
- There is a range of resources on the PCI website and *Presbyterian Women's* Facebook page to help inform prayers of intercession, including *Let's Pray*, Global Mission workers and deaconesses' prayer diaries and ASK prayer cards.



Interview/testimony

- This section allows you to draw the focus of the service towards the women in your congregation who are involved in women's ministry. An interview about their experiences of discipleship within your women's ministry group, or a testimony from someone who has come to faith or experienced their faith growing as a result of journeying side by side with another Christian, would be engaging, informative and thought-provoking for the congregation.
- As a theme, Side by Side creates the chance for women of a range of ages, from different stages of their faith and different backgrounds, to share their experience of living for Jesus together.

Bible reading

- There is a range of Bible passages, connected to the theme, listed on page 41 which would be suitable to use within the service, and would be a good starting point when organising a speaker for the service.

Talk

- It is important that the speaker is made aware of the theme so their talk connects clearly to it.
- You can contact the *Presbyterian Women* office if you would like information regarding requesting someone to speak at your service.
- A number of the group programmes from this resource are suitable for use in a church service, if you would like to involve your group throughout.
- Always remember to consult with your minister before contacting a speaker.

Closing praise and benediction

- Again, you can choose from the selection of *Side by Side* themed praise within *Inspirations* as you draw the service to a close. A song of response or reflection is suitable for this point in the service.
- Pronouncing the benediction will draw the service to a close.

Points to remember:

- Be aware of timings – this service should have the same duration as a regular Sunday service.
- Schedule time to run through any videos, PowerPoints or other technical elements before the service begins to ensure they work correctly.
- Adding in too many extras can result in not enough time for the speaker to bring their message and could lead to the service becoming a showcase for individuals rather than a celebration of God's work in our lives.
- Plan your content carefully and ensure that everyone involved is aware of their allotted time in advance of the service.

Side by side Bible passages

The following passages are suitable for study if your group wants to explore Side by Side in greater depth.

Moses and Aaron - Exodus 4:10-31. The partnership of these two men supported Moses when he felt inadequate in the face of God's calling on his life.

Moses and Joshua - Deuteronomy 31:7-8. There is an intentional mentoring relationship between the younger and older man which allows Joshua to assume Moses' leadership.

Yoked to Jesus - Matthew 11:28-30, Galatians 5:1. The soul rest that comes from being yoked to Jesus rather than yoked to the Law.

The Great Commission - Matthew 28:16-20. We are sent with his power to bring others into his kingdom and to teach his commands.

One another - John 13:34-35, Romans 5:7-8. We are called to love, serve and forgive one another as we have been loved, served and forgiven in Christ.

Ministry of the Holy Spirit - John 14:15-27, 15:26-27, Galatians 5:16-26. An exploration of the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit is essential for us being able to live out our life and witness in Jesus.

Abiding life - John 15:1-17. The way we abide in Christ is through obedience and the way Christ abides in us is through the Holy Spirit.

The body of Christ - 1 Corinthians 12-13, Ephesians 4:11-16. Alone we cannot function fully or achieve great purposes; together, in Christ, we can.



Side by side Bible verses (all NIV unless stated otherwise)

Acts 2:1-4	<i>When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.</i>
Acts 2:46	<i>Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts...</i>
1 Corinthians 3:7b-9 (NLV)	<i>God is the important One. He makes it grow. The one who plants and the one who waters are alike. Each one will receive his own reward. For we work together with God.</i>
Galatians 6:2	<i>Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.</i>
Philippians 1:27	<i>Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.</i>
1 Thessalonians 5:11	<i>Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.</i>
Titus 2:3-5	<i>Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.</i>

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

James 5:16

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

1 Peter 4:8

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.



Side by Side in Praise

The following songs will also be made available via Presbyterian Women's Spotify account

Irish Presbyterian Hymnbook

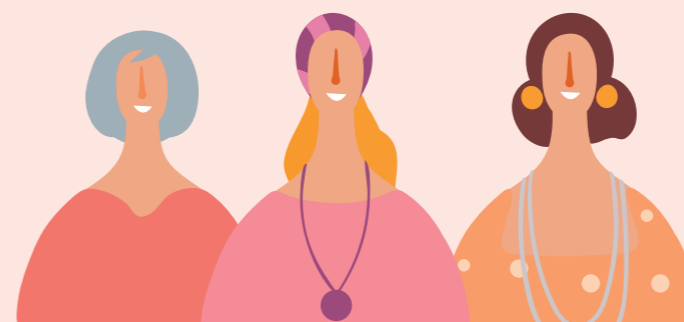
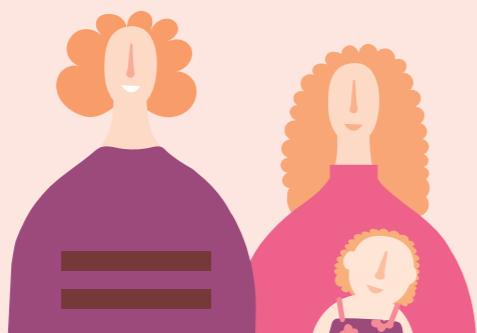
Psalm 100	All people that on earth do dwell
59	We plough the fields, and scatter
158	Father God we worship you
164	As we seek Your face
257	What a friend we have in Jesus
539	Here I am, wholly available
588	Brother, sister, let me serve you
625	Singing, we gladly worship the Lord together
643	We have heard a joyful sound
665	Come, let us join our cheerful songs

Complete Mission Praise

38	As we are gathered
54	Bind us together, Lord
387	Jesus, we celebrate Your victory
448	Lord, we long for you
743	We'll walk the land
828	Filled with compassion
1040	Come, now is the time to worship
1046	Give thanks to the Lord
1118	There must be more than this

Songs

All things together – Andrew Peterson
 Come behold the wondrous mystery – Matt Bosswell
 Come people of the risen King – Stuart Townend
 Did you feel the mountains tremble? – Martin Smith
 Endless alleluia – Cory Asbury
 Forever – Kari Jobe
 Give us clean hands – Chris Tomlin
 Hosanna (Praise is rising) – Paul Baloche
 How deep the Father's love – Stuart Townend
 How great is our God – Chris Tomlin
 How great is your love – Phil Wickham
 How he loves us – David Crowder Band
 No longer slaves – Bethel Music
 Once for all – CityAlight
 Reign in us - Starfield
 Sovereign over us – Michael W. Smith
 Spirit break out – Kim Walker-Smith
 This I believe (The Creed) – Hillsong
 Waiting here for you – Christy Nockels



Side by side online resources

You will find a wide range of helpful resources on the Side by Side webpage at www.presbyterianireland.org/sidebyside

Each of the resources is designed to unpack the vision of relational approaches to women's ministry. These include:

- **Side by Side video** - exploring the potential of a relational approach to women's ministry, getting alongside one another in twos and threes for prayer, discipleship, pastoral care, intergenerational ministry and outreach.
 - This can be downloaded from the following page: www.vimeo.com/352235921
- **Side by Side resource booklet** - this beautifully designed and engaging A5 takeaway resource costs £1.00 and can be ordered from the webpage.
- **Side by Side book list** - a free downloadable resource connected to the booklist found within Ideas for Getting Side by Side on page 10.
- **Suggested resources** - the webpage also hosts links to a variety of online resources which support the vision of living side by side as followers of Jesus. These include:
 - Pastoral conversations: downloadable Bible prompts for pastoral care
 - Proximity: relevant and challenging content for the context of relational discipleship
 - Prayer partnerships: Let's Pray | ASK prayer cards | Prayer Journey
 - The Word 121: designed to share the Bible with those who aren't yet Christians
 - Community Bible Experience: a new way to talk about the Bible with others
- **Side by Side stories** - recordings from the Side by Side events, which took place in 2019, are available to listen to on the webpage and via www.audioboom.com/channel/presbyterianireland

A range of promotional materials connected to the Side by Side artwork is available to purchase or download from www.presbyterianireland.org/pwresources

(Not to scale)



Poster

Bookmark

Postcard

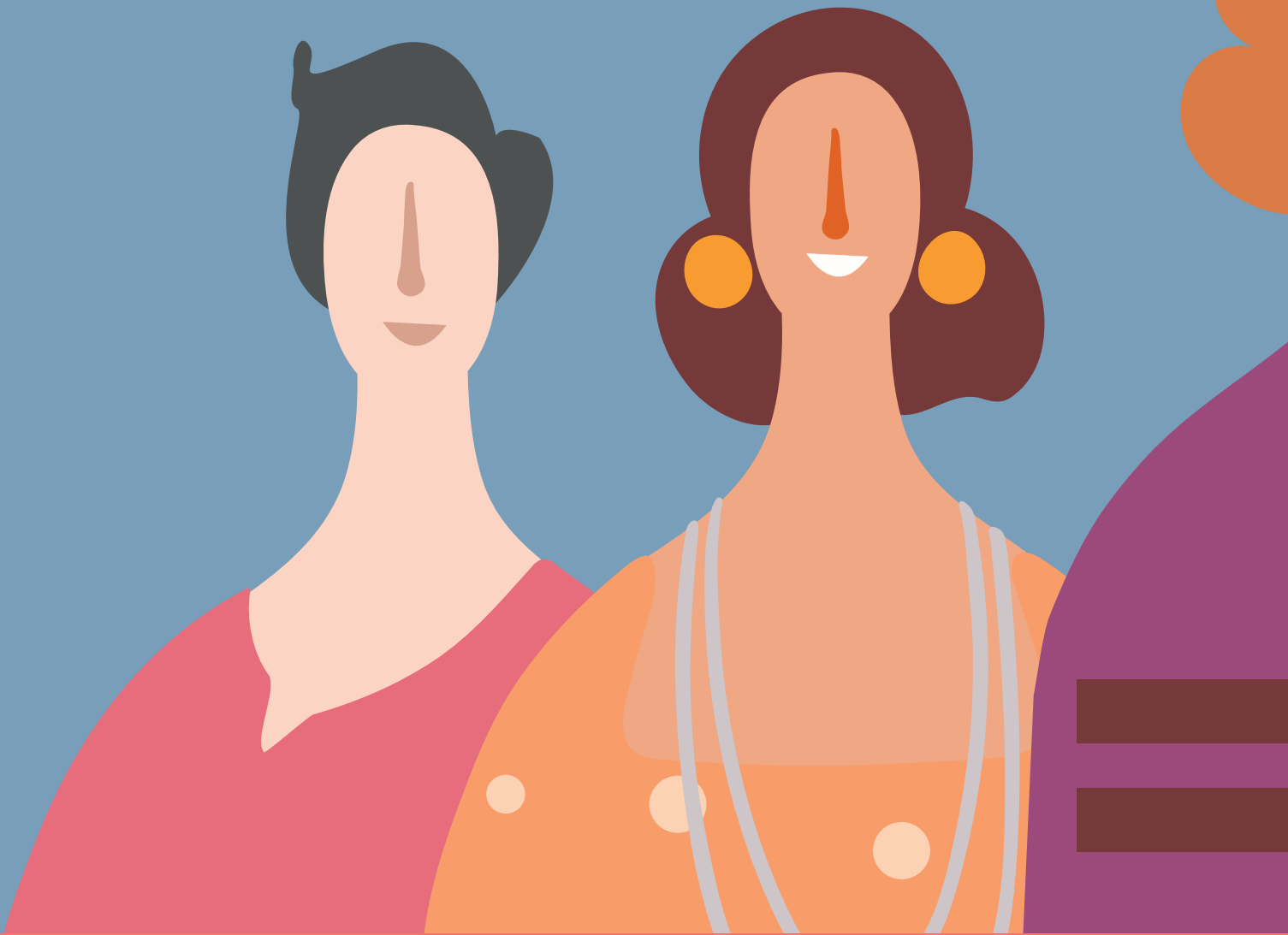
- Side by Side postcards (pack of 5) - £2.50
- Side by Side encouragement card (pack of 10) - £2.50
- Side by Side bookmark (pack of 10) - £3.00
- Side by Side poster - free

If you are holding a women's ministry event and would like to hire the Side by Side visuals, including pop-up stands and a large banner, you can contact pw@presbyterianireland.org for more information (all funds go to the PW Mission Fund).

For more information about *Presbyterian Women's Mission Fund* and the Special Home and Overseas Projects, visit www.presbyterianireland.org/pw

For craft ideas connected to the theme and beyond, why not visit our new Pinterest account at www.pinterest.co.uk/inspirationsPW

For Side by Side playlists hosted by Spotify, visit <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0Mnq05sn9HcAYbQhCsQnhP>



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Presbyterian Women

