

INSPIRING MUSIC in WORSHIP

Envelope Exercise: further suggestions

Assessing where we are: Envelope exercise is the Group Task for Session 4. This is another valuable opportunity to find out what people really think without putting them on the spot. Placing comments in closed envelopes enables openness and honesty with a reasonable level of anonymity, although the course facilitator may be familiar with the handwriting of some within the group.

We can only start where we are. Everyone comes with different knowledge and perspectives as well as personal preferences and prejudices. This task enables each person to share their views without interruption or reaction. The group as a whole then has opportunity to examine these views objectively and constructively.

Preparation beforehand

Create four A5 envelopes labelled with the four categories:

- *Envelope 1: Clarification of roles* Consider who is responsible for making worship happen in the planning and in delivery of services.
- *Envelope 2: Communication* Consider when and where worship is discussed, and by whom, on a week to week basis and in relation to the ongoing vision and strategy.
- *Envelope 3: Practical organisation* Consider what has to be done to make worship happen – beforehand, on the day, behind the scenes and up front.
- *Envelope 4: Participation of others* Consider how the congregation can get involved and make active contribution to worship.

Next, cut up sufficient blank slips of paper (A6 is ideal) in two contrasting colours: one colour for strengths; one colour for weaknesses. Ensure a plentiful supply, so participants can put multiple slips into each envelope if they wish.

During the session

- *Step 1* Invite people to consider prayerfully the strengths and weaknesses they perceive within each envelope category.
- *Step 2* Encourage everyone to write down their reflections honestly in a constructive manner.
- *Step 3* Allow people sufficient time to respond without feeling rushed.
- *Step 4* Collate all the results envelope by envelope, sorting the slips into strengths and weaknesses. Then try to sort further into categories or types, or particular areas of strength or weakness.

Experience has shown that the group may need to spend the whole thirty minutes on the filling of the envelopes, if they are going to do the task justice. In this case, ask one person to take the envelopes away, type up and collate the contents, and then circulate the results around the group.

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Between Session 4 and 5

Once the results have been collated and circulated, consider what you have learned. You may want to think about the following questions (see page 52):

- *Envelope 1* Where does the power lie and can it be abused?
- *Envelope 2* When does communication falter and how could it be improved?
- *Envelope 3* How can practical skills be developed and honed?
- *Envelope 4* What kind of congregational involvement could be encouraged in the future?

Spend time rejoicing in the strengths. We can easily pass over the things we are doing well. These reflections may naturally lead into prayers of thanksgiving and gratitude. That said, where might there be room for improvement or development?

Now consider the weaknesses. Do you think these are big issues or minor ones? Why? What effect are these weaknesses having on the music and worship of the church?

How might these weaknesses be addressed and remedied?

What should be tackled first? Are there some minor issues that could be resolved easily? If so, start there. A small change can often make a disproportionately significant difference.

What further action might be appropriate and when?

At times our weak spots can seem many and overwhelming. It is easy to become despondent, but remember St Paul's encouragement from 2 Corinthians 12. 9 - 10 paraphrased by Graham Kendrick in his song 'Rejoice, rejoice, Christ is in you':

Though we are weak, His grace is everything we need;
we're made of clay but this treasure is within.
He turns our weaknesses into His opportunities,
so that the glory goes to Him.

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