

Agents of Grace



Agents of Grace

Introduction to studies

These resources are offered to Uniting Church congregations in Queensland for group study and/or personal reflection during Lent or at some other time during the year. The sessions link some biblical texts, passages from the Uniting Church Basis of Union and other writings, with a series of questions designed to explore the subject of Grace.

When we consider the subject of Grace it calls us to focus both on the nature of God and on our personal and corporate responsibility to be “agents of Grace”.

There are some underlying assumptions in these five sessions about how God speaks to us. *The Basis of Union* acknowledges ‘that the Church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as unique prophetic and apostolic testimony, in which it hears the Word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated’. It also refers to foundational documents and God’s continuing revelation to the church. *The Basis of Union* is itself a foundational document for the Uniting Church. We are indeed people on the way, but not without guidance.

If used in groups these sessions are designed in a way that does not necessitate a group having a leader. Group members

share in facilitating the conversation and encouraging all to participate in the discussions. This is also a reason for the suggestion that a different person speak the blessing each week. The role of ministry in the Uniting Church is a shared responsibility.

The material in this Journey Lenten Studies “lift-out” is copyright free for use in congregations and by groups.

The group process

The sessions follow a standard format but differ in content and emphasis. Each session will have:

Prayer – an opening prayer which is taken from Uniting in Worship 2, a book of prayers and resources for ministers and others leading worship. The same opening prayer is used for each session.

Read – a passage or story from the Bible usually in the Contemporary English Version translation. As this is not a “Bible study” as such, it is preferable for people to use the translation provided rather than rely on various versions. There are also short extract from The Basis of Union and quotes from other writers relating to the theme.

Reflection - a brief reflection on the theme for the week.

Talk about – some questions for group

discussion or individual reflection. The purpose is to explore the scripture, the understandings of the people of faith and the theme for the session.

So what? – one question to focus us on some practical outcomes or application of the theme in our daily lives.

Prayer – people are invited to participate in a shared prayer but please feel free to use other prayers or an open prayer time.

Blessing – the same blessing is used for each session. It is recommended that a different person offers the blessing to the group each week.

There will probably be more questions than some groups can use or have time to talk about. Feel free to pick and choose those questions which are most helpful to the group process.

The opening prayer to use each week

Come to us, God of love.

Come with your extravagant kindness and your goodness.

Come, that we may see you in the people of every race and culture;
that we may embrace you in the lonely,
the bereaved and the rejected;
that we may be an accepting and a caring church:

Come to us, God of love.

Come to us, God of unity.

Come with your forgiveness and your healing grace.

Come, that we may witness to reconciliation for a divided world;
that we may gather around Christ’s table as one people;
that we may affirm one church, one faith, one Lord:

Come to us, God of unity.

Come to us, God of hope.

Come to us with your promises,
come in your mysterious presence.
Come, that we may marvel at your faithfulness in past generations;
that we may celebrate the new things you are doing among us today;
that we may be your pilgrim people on our journey to your kingdom:
Come to us, God of hope.
Amen.

The blessing to use each week

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with us all evermore. Amen.

Week 1 - Grace Filled World

Agents of Grace

Opening prayer

Ask one person in the group to lead the prayer with group members reading together the words in bold print.

Read

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth ... From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. (John 1: 1,14,16 *New Revised Standard Version*)

In love for the world, God gave the Son to take away the world's sin. Jesus of Nazareth announced the sovereign grace of God... (*The Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3)
"And the Word became flesh." In these five short words the central mystery which John will unfold is stated with absolute simplicity. It lies wholly beyond the power of flesh and blood, of the will of man [humanity], to pass from darkness to light, to lay hold of the life of God. But what is impossible has become a fact by a movement in the opposite direction. God ... has become [hu]man and "pitched his tent" among us. (Lesslie Newbigin *The Light Has Come*)

Reflection

Does God care about us? Does God even understand us at all?

Not long ago we were looking at Christmas cards showing the baby Jesus lying in a manger. John's Gospel has no such pictures but begins Jesus' story in quite a different way. It is the story of one who was there from the beginning. This "Word" was there at the beginning of time and it was through this Word that all was created.

Later on in this brilliant passage at the beginning of John's Gospel we have the shocking statement "the Word became flesh". Shocking not least for the people of the time who first heard this, that such a divine idea and being could become flesh and blood like every other human. Humanity and God are connected in the most intimate way.

The Word-in-the-flesh is full of "grace and truth". Behind the language of this phrase are the Old Testament words describing the principle of God's faithfulness, constancy and love. God who kept covenant relationships in Old Testament times is faithful now, even before we get a chance to enter into any agreement or sign on any dotted line.

In a world where earning a living, affection, a place in society, earning a degree or a promotion are highly regarded, the idea of something done for us which we haven't earned is a difficult concept to grasp. That is

the joy and the shock of grace, God's gift. Before we even thought about or grasped the concept of God, before we could do anything, grace was there for us in Jesus Christ.

As we begin our steps towards Easter we also experience the scandalous story that this Word-in-the-flesh (like all other flesh) dies. Dies for our world, for us, for our friends, for our loved ones, for people we don't know - dies for life.

From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace - before we were even born - wonderful grace for us all. Yes, God does care and God does understand. Faithful God camps with the world.

Talk about

"Grace" can mean anything from saying a prayer before a meal to describing the undeserved generosity of God. What meanings of grace can you think of? What does grace mean to you?

What is the most grace-filled thing anyone has ever done for you? If you feel comfortable to do so, share the story with the group.

Has there ever been a time you felt God didn't care about or understand you? If you feel comfortable to do so, describe the situation and how you feel looking back on that now.

Does having Christ described as the "Word"

offer you any new insights into who Christ is? How do you think Christ is the "Word"? Talk about what it cost Jesus Christ, as the Word present from the beginning with God, to become "flesh".

So What?

Make a list of all the things we earn in life. How is grace different to this? How is God gracious to the world and what does this mean for us and others?

Prayer

God, you have given us your Word in Jesus Christ, born a helpless baby, growing as a person who got tired, hungry, thirsty, hurt and misunderstood, dying as a human in extreme pain. He didn't have to do that God.

We thank you for grace and for the gift of life.

You are with us, thank you.

Amen.

Blessing

Ask someone in the group to offer the blessing.

Week 2 - Grace Embodied

Agents of Grace

Opening prayer

Ask one person in the group to lead the prayer with group members reading together the words in bold print.

Read

Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock. Rain poured down, rivers flooded, and winds beat against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on solid rock. Anyone who hears my teachings and doesn't obey them is like a foolish person who built a house on sand. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Finally, it fell with a crash. (Matthew 7:24-27) CEV

Jesus himself, in his life and death, made the response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain. In raising him to live and reign, God confirmed and completed the witness which Jesus bore to God on earth, reasserted claim over the whole of creation, pardoned sinners, and made in Jesus a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love. To God in Christ all people are called to respond in faith. (*The Basis of Union*, Paragraph 3)

This divine calling has appeared to us personally in Jesus and has taken shape in his personal call: to be converted, to take a different course from the one that we have been on, since the kingdom of God is now near. Therefore for those who have not heard

this historical call of Jesus, there is the good news of this event given by the Christian community in the world which is itself grace and power... (Edward Schillebeeckx *Christ: The Christian Experience in the Modern World*)

Reflection

For the Christian, the ultimate source and experience of life-giving grace is Jesus Christ. Grace - in all its fullness, diversity, hope and disturbing reality - has become uniquely focused and enfleshed in this extraordinary, historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is the one in whom the grace of God is not only visible. He is the one who claims God's unique authority to lavish this grace on all who seek him.

Jesus' assumption of divine authority, including the authority to dispense God's grace, is highlighted in our bible reading. It was taught in Jesus' time that those who listen to the Torah (God's Law) and put its teachings into practice by doing good works, build on good ground. But here we have Jesus exclaiming, "Anyone who hears and obeys *my* teachings..."

God's grace is not only expressed in the teachings of Jesus, it also reverberates through his healings and exorcisms, his forgiveness of offenders, his parting with outcasts and 'sinners' and his relationships with the poor and marginalised. In all Jesus' encounters we encounter the embodiment of God's love and valuing of all people.

For the rich and respected, God's grace in Christ comes to provoke and disturb - to challenge the powerful to a freer way of living, the way of God's kingdom. For the broken, poor and powerless, Jesus embodies the grace of hope, community and self worth.

Ultimately, the grace embodied in Jesus is experienced as freedom. Freedom from: estrangement from God; the crippling power of life's destructive forces; meaningless living; the fear of death and freedom to pursue a future of hope, justice and dignity in service to God and others.

Throughout its history the Church has affirmed that it is through this grace-embodied life of Jesus, lived in full surrender to the love and will of God, even to the extremity of his unjust death on a Roman cross, that a spiritual dynamic has been released. This dynamic, experienced supremely in Christ's resurrection, and feely available through the gift of the Holy Spirit, empowers Jesus' followers to begin to embody that same grace in their lives and relationships.

Talk about

What is the best recent example of Grace that you have read or heard about? Share it with the group.

From your life experience talk about which of the teachings of Jesus you have found to be most wise and helpful.

Where do you see grace embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus? Share some

examples from scripture with the group.

What for you is unique, special or different about Jesus' authority compared with that of other religious leaders?

So What?

What were/are the consequences of living a grace embodied life:

For Jesus himself?

For yourself?

For the Christian community?

For the wider world?

Prayer

Gracious God,
The law was given through Moses;
grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
We thank you for your grace to us embodied in your Son, Jesus.

Give us the power and freedom
through your Holy Spirit
to live daily in the integrity of that grace
so that we may be true to our calling
as people who make a difference
for Jesus in this age.

Amen

Blessing

Ask someone in the group to offer the blessing.

Week 3 - Grace and Forgiveness

Agents of Grace

Opening prayer

Ask one person in the group to lead the prayer with group members reading together the words in bold print.

Read

Peter came up to the Lord and asked, "How many times should I forgive someone who does something wrong to me? Is seven times enough?" Jesus answered: Not just seven times, but seventy times seven!

This story will show you what the kingdom of heaven is like: One day a king decided to call in his officials and ask them to give an account of what they owed him. As he was doing this, one official was brought in who owed him fifty million silver coins. But he didn't have any money to pay what he owed. The king ordered him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all he owned, in order to pay the debt.

The official got down on his knees and began begging, "Have pity on me, and I will pay you every cent I owe!" The king felt sorry for him and let him go free. He even told the official that he did not have to pay back the money.

As the official was leaving, he happened to meet another official, who owed him a hundred silver coins. So he grabbed the man by the throat. He started choking him and said, "Pay me what you owe!"

The man got down on his knees and began begging, "Have pity on me, and I will pay you back." But the first official refused to have pity. Instead, he went and had the other official put in jail until he could pay what he owed.

When some other officials found out what had happened, they felt sorry for the man who had been put in jail. Then they told the king what had happened. The king called the first

official back in and said, "You're an evil man! When you begged for mercy, I said you did not have to pay back a cent. Don't you think you should show pity to someone else, as I did to you?" The king was so angry that he ordered the official to be tortured until he could pay back everything he owed. That is how my Father in heaven will treat you, if you don't forgive each of my followers with all your heart. (Matthew 18: 21-35) CEV

The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ has commanded his Church to proclaim the Gospel both in words and in the two visible acts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Christ himself acts in and through everything that the Church does in obedience to his commandment: it is Christ who by the gift of the Spirit confers the forgiveness, the fellowship, the new life and the freedom which the proclamation and actions promise; and it is Christ who awakens, purifies and advances in people the faith and hope in which alone such benefits can be accepted. (*The Basis of Union*, Paragraph 6)

The angels of God hold their breath to see which way we will choose to go. (CS Lewis)

Reflection:

Jesus' answer to Peter's question leaves us with the challenge of living out grace and forgiveness. Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer we make a commitment to God to "forgive those who sin against us", and yet offering forgiveness is often the most difficult thing to do.

Jesus story offers forgiveness as a way of life rather than a rule to obey. We experienced forgiveness and grace and may long to offer it to others, but how does a person who has been badly abused, or suffered pain, hurt and distress, forgive the abuser and the institutions that support the abuse?

Theologian Karen Lebacqz suggested that those who have been abused should love their enemies but not lose sight of the fact that they need to survive in the midst of those enemies.

This implies that forgiveness that emerges from grace aids and strengthens a person's ability to heal and empowers them to confront the originators of abuse, pain, hurt or distress. Forgiveness moves us beyond the sense of victimhood and helps us see both ourselves and those who have harmed us as recipients of the grace of God.

This is echoed in the story of Jesus' crucifixion. He understood that he was living among those who were his enemies and sought to kill him, yet he did not take the role of victim. Rather he took the role of one who demonstrates grace even in the face of death.

Jesus' admonition at the end of this story reflects the reality that if we do not recognise the interconnectedness of the victim and the abuser, we will find ourselves in torment. Those unhealed moments where forgiveness has not occurred become our own prisons.

The Basis of Union points us to the sacraments of baptism and communion which remind us that we live in grace of forgiveness. The concept of forgiveness is essential to the ability to engage in fellowship and to encounter the new life and freedom, which is promised through Christ.

Talk about

What for you is the most impressive act of forgiveness you have read or heard about? Share it with the group.

What do you find are the easiest things to forgive? What are the most difficult?

What do you find most difficult to seek forgiveness for?

People say, "I'll forgive but never forget!"

How can we hold the pain of the hurt in tension with a commitment to forgive?

So What?

If your faith community was to begin to radically express grace through forgiveness where would you start and what would make it difficult? Talk about relationships inside the community as well as relationships with those beyond the community.

Prayer

Beloved, faithful and enduring God
We confess our times of struggle and disbelief,
when we are asked to do the impossible.
We hear from you that we are forgiven
and yet we can hardly forgive ourselves,
let alone each other.

Lord, you ask us to journey with you
into places beyond rules and formulas,
and into a life that comes with the
understanding of eternal forgiveness, grace
and freedom.

We can hardly believe our ears,
as our struggles to live in such grace so often fail.

And yet Lord, we hold tentatively to the
understanding that you have given us life in
all its fullness,

and to the incredible reality that through
Christ,

our sins are always forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Blessing

Ask someone in the group to offer the blessing.

Week 4 - Grace and Difference

Agents of Grace

Opening prayer

Ask one person in the group to lead the prayer with group members reading together the words in bold print.

Read

Peter then said: Now I am certain that God treats all people alike. God is pleased with everyone who worships him and does right, no matter what nation they come from. This is the same message that God gave to the people of Israel, when he sent Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, to offer peace to them.

You surely know what happened everywhere in Judea. It all began in Galilee after John had told everyone to be baptized. God gave the Holy Spirit and power to Jesus from Nazareth. He was with Jesus, as he went around doing good and healing everyone who was under the power of the devil. We all saw what Jesus did both in Israel and in the city of Jerusalem. Jesus was put to death on a cross. But three days later, God raised him to life and let him be seen. Not everyone saw him. He was seen only by us, who ate and drank with him after he was raised from death. We were the ones God chose to tell others about him.

God told us to announce clearly to the people that Jesus is the one he has chosen to judge the living and the dead. Every one of the prophets has said that all who have faith in Jesus will have their sins forgiven in his name.

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit took control of everyone who was listening. Some Jewish followers of the Lord had come with Peter, and they were surprised that the Holy Spirit had been given to Gentiles. Now they were hearing Gentiles speaking unknown languages and praising God.

Peter said, "These Gentiles have been given

the Holy Spirit, just as we have! I am certain that no one would dare stop us from baptizing them." Peter ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and they asked him to stay on for a few days. (Acts 10: 34-48) CEV

(The Uniting Church) believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries, and to this end the Uniting Church commits itself to seek special relationships with Churches in Asia and the Pacific. The Uniting Church declares its desire to enter more deeply into the faith and mission of the Church in Australia, by working together and seeking union with other Churches. (*The Basis of Union*, Paragraph 2)

In 1985, Henri Nouwen abandoned academic life and went to live at "Daybreak" in Canada, a community for the severely disabled. "Daybreak assigned Nouwen one person to look after in particular: Adam. Adam was the weakest and most disabled person in the community...he could not speak, dress or undress himself, could not walk alone or eat without help...Yet Nouwen gradually learned that he, not Adam, was the chief beneficiary in this strange, misfitted relationship...From Adam he learned that 'what makes us human is not our mind but our heart, not our ability to think but our ability to love.'" (Philip Yancey *Soul Survivor*)

Reflection

Peter's radical declaration was made in the home of a gentile, a Roman Centurion. Prior to this event, the focus for the early Christian church had been on Jews alone. There was a great gulf between Jews and Gentiles, centuries of conflict, mistrust and hatred.

This meeting between Peter, Cornelius and

the Holy Spirit was a turning point which changed the whole course of church history. It was now clear that God's family was open to all who would join it, regardless of race, colour, language or culture.

Cornelius and his family were gathered into the Christian community, and became people of the resurrection. We do not hear of Cornelius again, yet his story remains to remind us that the faith he embraced, and into which he was baptized, is the faith we continue to affirm and declare today.

This real-life story demonstrates what Jesus meant when he said, "Love one another as I have loved you." To be true to what Jesus asks of us, we too have to identify and confront the barriers that separate us from others: fear, prejudice, judgemental and critical attitudes, an unforgiving spirit, and anger. We are called to repent and pray for God's grace to help us change our attitudes and our behaviour.

Just as Jesus took the initiative in loving us, just as Peter took the initiative in going to Cornelius, so we have to decide to take that first step that will break down the barriers separating us from others, and make reconciliation and relationship possible.

Talk about

Reflect on the personal, vocational, cultural, or theological diversity represented in the membership of your group. How could any differences you have identified potentially be sources of conflict and division?

What attitudes and behaviours have you consciously abandoned or rejected over the years because you have identified them as being contrary to the spirit and teaching of Jesus?

What do you personally find most challenging and/or helpful in the declaration Peter made in the home of Cornelius?

Henri Nouwen's relationship with Adam had a profound impact on his life. Has there been an "Adam" in your life, someone very different from yourself, whose impact on you has been just as radical and life-changing? Share this with the group.

So what?

How can the grace of God shape your community of faith's response to the difference and diversity it experiences within itself and beyond itself?

Prayer

God of love and grace,
forgive us when our fears, intolerance, or indifference create barriers between ourselves and others.

Help us to embrace a new and radical understanding of your grace and purpose.

Transform our hearts and minds today,
that we too might become willing participants in the coming of your Kingdom into the life of our world and time.

Lord, your way is the way of love.

Inspire and encourage us to love one another.
Help us to be open-hearted,
generous and hospitable, especially with those who are different from ourselves.

May your Spirit break down the barriers that separate us, and make us one in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Blessing

Ask someone in the group to offer the blessing.

Week 5 - Communities of Grace

Agents of Grace

Opening prayer

Ask one person in the group to lead the prayer with group members reading together the words in bold print.

Read

As Jesus was telling what the kingdom of heaven would be like, he said: Early one morning a man went out to hire some workers for his vineyard. After he had agreed to pay them the usual amount for a day's work, he sent them off to his vineyard.

About nine that morning, the man saw some other people standing in the market with nothing to do. He said he would pay them what was fair, if they would work in his vineyard. So they went.

At noon and again about three in the afternoon he returned to the market. And each time he made the same agreement with others who were loafing around with nothing to do.

Finally, about five in the afternoon the man went back and found some others standing there. He asked them, "Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?"

"Because no one has hired us," they answered. Then he told them to go work in his vineyard.

That evening the owner of the vineyard told the man in charge of the workers to call them in and give them their money. He also told the man to begin with the ones who were hired last. When the workers arrived, the ones who had been hired at five in the afternoon were given a full day's pay.

The workers who had been hired first thought they would be given more than the others. But when they were given the same, they began complaining to the owner of the vineyard. They said, "The ones who were hired last worked for only one hour. But you paid them the same that you did us. And we worked in the hot sun all day long!"

The owner answered one of them, "Friend, I didn't cheat you. I paid you exactly what we agreed on. Take your money now and go! What business is it of yours if I want to pay them the same that I paid you? Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Why should you be jealous, if I want to be generous?"

Jesus then said, "So it is. Everyone who is now first will be last, and everyone who is last will be first." (Matthew 20:1-16 CEV)

.... so that the congregation of Christ's people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them by faith. (*Basis of Union*, Paragraph 10)

The community of saints... is a community of men and women who have genuinely encountered the precious grace of God, and who walk worthily of the gospel by not casting that grace recklessly away. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Reflection

Like so many words in the Christian vocabulary, 'grace' has been sentimentalised, trivialised and, at worst, emptied of its specifically Jewish and Christian meanings.

For Dietrich Bonhoeffer however walking worthily of the gospel of grace meant living a life of costly discipleship and ending that life

dangling from a hangman's noose. So, even as it reassures us of God's love, the idea of grace can be quite confronting.

In the Old Testament, especially the Prophets, the idea of grace is tied up with God's freely chosen and steadfast covenant with Israel and the demand this placed upon Israel to respond to God in kind.

The idea of grace is confronting because it reminds us that, just as Israel did not invent itself, neither did or does the church. In the New Testament, even if the word "grace" does not appear on the lips of Jesus, it is used to summarise his teachings, his death, the entire drama of his mission, and the content of the apostles' preaching.

In other words, the very event which calls the church into being (the life, death and resurrection of Jesus) flows entirely from God's grace. As a community of this grace, the church has no intrinsic right to exist. As gracious communities, therefore, churches ought to be communities which are constantly surprised by their own existence. They will express that surprise in the relationships that exist amongst their members and, as Jesus points out in this Bible story, they should pause before grumbling about the other unlikely people that God calls into the community.

Detached from this sense of surprise, the church's proclamation of God's grace, whether it be through word or deed, will easily slip into legalism.

The framers of *The Basis of Union* did well to remind us that God's grace is not something self-evident: we are to be "again and again reminded" of it.

Talk about

What have been the significant 'grace tests' for your community of faith?

Which biblical images and stories have most shaped your understanding of God's grace?

How do you find yourself reacting to Jesus' story of the "Labourers in the Vineyard"?

How would you say that your community of faith has a sense of being "surprised by grace"?

So What?

What "words and deeds" would be required of your community of faith in order to clearly declare and demonstrate God's grace?

Prayer

God of grace,
you surprised Israel by calling it into a covenant with you.
You surprised the world by sending your Son to redeem it.
We are surprised that you have included even us in the church.
Help us never to recklessly cast away your grace,
but to live by it and demonstrate it to the world in word and deed.
Amen.

Blessing

Ask someone in the group to offer the blessing.

Textual notes

Unless otherwise stated, scripture quotations in these resources are from the *Contemporary English Version* copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society, used by Permission. The CEV is an American Bible Society translation and is readily available from bookshops or the Bible Society. The text is easily read by school age children, second language readers and those who prefer the more contemporary form. The CEV is not a paraphrase. It is an accurate and faithful translation of the original manuscripts.

The original text of *The Basis of Union* was the document around which the union of three older traditions, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian, came into being in 1977. While the original text was finalised in 1971, where it is quoted in these resources the 1992 edition is used. The Basis of Union was prepared at a time when the desire for gender-inclusive language was only just emerging. By the 1990s some people were finding aspects of the language of the Basis to be rather curious, and at certain points jarring and even alienating. The Assembly Standing Committee therefore approved the publication of the 1992 edition, which incorporates relatively conservative changes to the language of the Basis, while seeking to retain its meaning <http://nat.uca.org.au/basisofunion/Basis1992.htm>.

Uniting in Worship 2 is a new set of worship resources released in the Uniting Church in 2005 which gives local congregations scope to develop worship relevant to their own setting. The book and accompanying CD-ROM provide range of worship services and resource templates for congregations to use for the production of local booklets. *Uniting in Worship 2* can be ordered through the Uniting Church in Australia's publisher, MediaCom 1800 811 311 or <http://mediacom.mediacomonline.org.au>.

Agents of Grace

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5 weeks of MOVIES

Here are five movies which explore the theme of Grace that you can rent from your local video store on VHS or DVD to watch. Please note the rating and that these are not necessarily "Christian" movies.



Gospel of John

For God loved the world so much – the story of Jesus' life as told in John's Gospel. (PG13)



Pay it Forward

Sometimes the simplest idea can make the biggest difference – a young boy finds a way to make the world a better place. (M)



Dances with Wolves

Lt. John Dunbar, exiled to a remote western Civil War outpost, befriends Indians finds himself letting go of all he knew. (M)



Chocolat

A woman and her daughter open a chocolate shop in a small French village and shake up the rigid morality of the community. (MA15+)



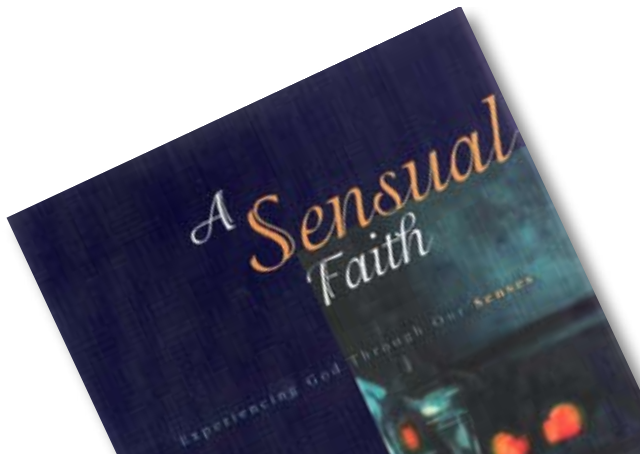
Changing Lanes

The story of what happens one day in New York when a young lawyer and a businessman share a small automobile accident and both find their lives set in new directions. (M)

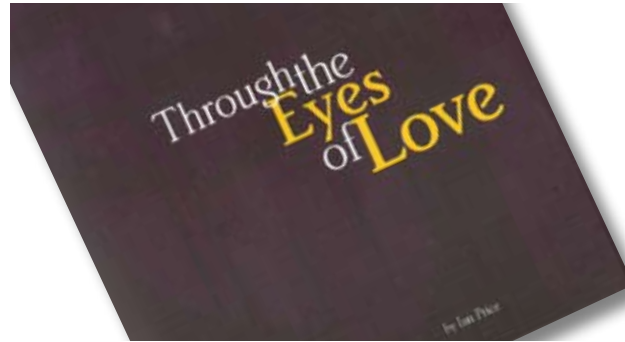
Other small group study options

If you have used these studies and would like some other resources to work through as a group why not consider these options?

God's Word, God's World, Towards the 11th Assembly, is a series of four short resources designed for use as discussion starters for small groups, congregations and faith communities who are interested in celebrating and exploring ways they can live out the mission to which God calls us. Print quality copies of the discussion sheets can also be purchased through the Assembly's publisher MediaCom (1800 811 311). The worksheets are being sold in sets of 4 (any combination) at \$3.00 per set (incl GST) and \$2.50 per set (incl GST) for purchases of 4 or more sets plus P&H. Alternatively you can download them for free from the Assembly website <http://assembly.uca.org.au>.



A Sensual Faith by Rev Dr Ian Price. This series of five studies sets out to explore the ways we experience God through our senses. Drawing on some of the great traditions of the faith, the studies lead the group through an intriguing array of experiences and group discussions



Through Eyes Of Love by Rev Dr Ian Price. Five studies that explore the person and impact of Christ on five key personalities of the New Testament - Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, Luke and Paul. Each of these sources of scripture and leadership provide unique insights into the way Jesus changes life and offers hope.



Wisdom's Way by Rev Dr Ian Price. It is said that we "have too much knowledge but too little wisdom these days". This set of five studies by Ian Price explores some of the key biblical ideas about wisdom.

Spirit of Life by Rev Dr Ian Price. These five studies seek to explore God's gift of life as a positive experience of relating personally with God. They will help the group explore life as a good gift from God; establish order in the midst of chaos; experience mercy and power through the Spirit's presence in us; and conclude with a focus on the possibility of knowing wholeness within.



All the Ian Price studies are available from MediaCom 1800 811 311 or <http://mediacom.mediacomonline.org.au> \$9.00 per book or \$8.00 for ten or more.

Looking for more options? Try Duncan Macleod's excellent *Educating Christians* website, an A to Z of resources for Christian education in Uniting Church congregations. This site includes detailed reviews of small group and Christian education resources. <http://educatingchristians.unitingchurch.org.au>.