

SPILLING THE BEANS

On a resource for leaders of worship

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Spilling the beans on the good news of Jesus, so to speak, in a largely apathetic society is no easy task. It is however a basic purpose of our churches and of their mission in our communities. Finding a way to communicate the good news of the gospel, through the vehicle of the story of faith, and through a multiplicity of ways to engage with that story, is the very foundation for lectionary-based material utilised by over 500 churches in Scotland and across the world – ‘Spill the Beans’.

‘Spill the Beans’ is a Scottish lectionary-based resource, written and produced by a number of Church of Scotland and other clergy, Iona Worship Group members, and other ministry professionals on a quarterly basis. The strength of the material is the large and diverse group of contributors who produce it. They are people involved in ministry in a variety of ways and bring their expertise and gifts to weave together a resource from which an ever growing number of congregations benefit.

‘Spill the Beans’ has now been in production for over five years, during which it has followed the Revised Common Lectionary and more recently the Narrative Lectionary¹. A not-for-profit enterprise and supremely collaborative effort, ‘Spill the Beans’ aims to provide churches with a comprehensive resource for engaging with the text of scripture week by week. The fact that in its five years it has grown a user group numbering 530 churches regularly, from a contact group of over 1800, not only in Scotland but across the world, says a great deal of the quality and the breadth of the resources offered in the material.

Just as the aim of the material is to help churches explore the lectionary readings and with them the story of faith, the writers of Spill the Beans recognise that the gospel comes in many forms, shapes, colours and sizes – rather like Jelly Beans themselves. They have created a resource that pays tribute to that variety within the church, both in the format and content of the materials they produce.

The ethos of the Spill the Beans material begins and ends focussed on the story, and each week offers many and various ways for worshippers to engage in age appropriate ways with the lectionary texts. Usually the focus on any given Sunday is on one text in particular (e.g. the gospel, the Epistle etc.) and the material tends to be themed across a season. This grateful recipient of the material has never found the theme in any way forced, but rather always helpful in framing a theme over a season of the year.

As a minister who has over the years purchased and utilised different lectionary based resources such as 'Roots' (produced by the Methodist Church) and 'Seasons of the Spirit' (predominately North American), I have found Spill the Beans to be the most culturally attuned to Scottish church life and society by far. While the material is in no way culturally restrictive, it does 'get' the Scottish and UK context.

Each week the material begins with notes on the scripture readings, followed by a recasting/retelling of the story. There follows a variety of prayers, litanies, dramatic readings, sketches and prayers, poems or reflective prose – all of them a resource to be selected from, and used judiciously by worship leaders who know the particular culture of their congregation, and who can make a fair judgement of which materials may work and which will likely not. Those constructing a diet of worship are offered suggestions for Praise items from CH4 and other hymnals – indeed sometimes hymns written by the contributors themselves.

One of the great strengths of 'Spill the Beans' is that the story or text for the week runs through everything like a thread. Crafts and games for children of different ages are offered week by week, always tying into the theme of the week. Sunday Clubs and Junior Churches find this integrated approach to the curriculum very helpful, together with the numerous suggestions for activities for toddlers through to older children. Each week also contains age appropriate discussion material for youth groups which encourages them to engage and explore the text and theme for the week.

The resource undoubtedly lends itself wholeheartedly to All Age worship, with its mix of liturgy, symbolic actions and visual aids. Many of us with the responsibility to craft a service of worship week by week, struggle with getting the balance right between new or old, and interactive or reflective.

I find creating an all age worship service that is both challenging for the cerebrally minded and yet appealing to youngsters one of the most difficult tasks in ministry. While 'Spill the Beans' doesn't solve that conundrum altogether, it does nonetheless provide a good fund of resources and ideas to draw from.

Readers who are as yet unaware of 'Spill the Beans' should visit their webpage www.spillbeans.org.uk where they will be able to download some sample material for free. A quarterly subscription costs a mere £12, and once downloaded, the material is free for distribution to worship leaders, Sunday school teachers, musicians and youth leaders in the congregation. Funds raised by the subscription are invested in new material for the future, and in the images provided and included in the materials, which are of a high quality production value.

(Endnotes)

- 1 This resource comes from Luther Seminary, St Paul, Minnesota which explains - "The Narrative Lectionary (NL) is a four-year cycle of readings for use in congregational worship and preaching. The goal is to preach annually through the biblical narrative in order to center the lives of believers in God's story. Each week two texts are assigned - a preaching text and an accompanying text."