



Introduction

All communities need individuals who will encourage and bring out the best in everybody. This is as true of a nation as it is of a class in a school. The young Church in Jerusalem was growing fast in the years after Pentecost. They practised a form of caring for each other that meant that they used to pool their resources, so that everyone had a fair share. Joseph from Cyprus became a Christian and he sold land to be able to contribute to the needs of others in the Church. He was nicknamed 'the encourager' - this is what his name 'Barnabas' means - and later he went on to become a leading figure in the missionary work of the Church.

Preparation

The key issues to be addressed in this session are:

- Seeing how one person can make a difference
- Discovering that we each have a part to play in changing things for the better
- Exploring how we all have special gifts and opportunities to serve others

A key Bible verse for this session is:

Acts 11:23 *When Barnabas arrived and saw what God had been kind enough to do for them, he was very glad. So he begged them to remain faithful to God with all their hearts.'*

Development

1. Here is a way into the theme of this story:

- *Speak up*
This activity involves hiding an object somewhere in the room. Do this while one person is out of the room. When he or she is back, he/she can choose one helper, who must try and tell him/her where to look while the others attempt to drown out what the helper is saying by making as much noise as possible. How long will it be before he/she can find the object
- *Secret signs*
Devise a series of secret signs, which are then cut into two. Put up a picture of the signs on the wall so everyone can see what they are. Each half of each sign is now put on the back of the children randomly. The aim is for the children to find the other half of the sign they have on their back but to do so *in silence!*

The first task therefore is to find out what sign they have on their backs. To do this, they should pair up with other children and, using sign language, discover what their sign looks like.

Once they have discovered what their sign is, they should then start looking around for the other half by checking on the chart on the wall and looking at the signs on the backs of the other children.

This game can only be won by co-operation and encouragement.

2. Here is a way of working with the Bible story

- Work on this story from Acts 4:32-37 as a presentation in mime.

Start up with just one or two children in the centre of a circle. They should mime talking to and encouraging the others. Gradually more and more people come over and join them in the centre and also talk to and encourage the others. Eventually everyone is gathered together as a central group.

Each person should now take out of his or her pocket, or from an imaginary bag, different amounts of money. This needs talking through beforehand of course. Use different amounts of copper coins. Some people have a lot and some have a little.

The group should now form a circle and everyone should bring their money and place it in the middle. Two or three people move to the centre and divide up all the coins equally among the total number of children present. It is redistributed so that each child has a fair share.

Sit down in your circle and talk through this story. Talk about what has happened and ask whether the children think it was easy for the first Christians to do this? How do the people with different amounts of money feel? Why do they think they decided to do this? What do they think outsiders felt about what was happening?

- Work with this story as a piece of drama

Use the drama technique known as *conscience alley*.

Tell the story from Acts 4:32-37 briefly in a modern version of the Bible.

Now, arrange the children in two long lines opposite each other. Set up the key question facing Joseph from Cyprus, who, played by a child, walks slowly down between the lines.

Here is the situation: Barnabas is a relatively rich man, so why should he give up some of his money to help these people from a different country?

Each side of the alley should try and persuade him what to do. One side gives him good reasons to give so much money away and the other side tries to convince him to hang on to his wealth!

They might say things like:

- 'as a new Christian, this is a way of saying thank-you to the Jerusalem church, which has told you about Jesus.'
- ' they might just waste your gift and use it unwisely...'
- ' This is what Jesus asks of his followers. He said to leave everything and follow him' etc...

3. Here are some discussion starters, once the class has explored the Bible story

- The first Christians were very excited about their faith. In what ways did they normally spend

their time? (see Acts 2: 42)

- Why did they decide to share all the wealth and property they had?
- What do you think outsiders thought about this?
4 Why do you think Joseph gave half of the proceeds of selling his land in Cyprus?
- Do you think this sort of thing happens in the Church today? If it does/did, what effect might it have/does it have?
- Why do you think Joseph's gift was particularly remembered and why was he called 'the encourager'?
- For what reasons do people give to charities today?

4. Here is an idea to present this story as a class assembly

Use the following exercise to introduce the idea that everybody can make a difference and needs to play their part.

Using a child's jigsaw that has large pieces, hand out one piece each to a group of children invited to be on stage with you. Do not show them the box from which the pieces come, so that they have no clue as to the picture that the pieces make.

Ask them each to describe the piece of the jigsaw they have. Ask them if they can guess what the eventual picture will look like, just by looking at their individual piece? The more information they share, the better the chance there is of guessing what that final picture will look like, but with only limited pieces on display it is still difficult. Stress the idea that every piece of the jigsaw is important. Each piece has to play its part, if they - and us - are to get the whole picture.

Now draw attention to each individual jigsaw piece, which will have some sides reaching out with a connecting link or links to another and some sides with a space(s) ready to receive a linking piece. This too is like each of us. We each have something to give and something to receive. It is only when we bring our particular piece to other people's pieces that we can make something special together.

5. Here are some ideas for working out what this story means for people today. This can be linked to a Circle Time session and explores PSHE issues.

Talk through the following situations with your group and discuss what sort of reactions they would have to each one.

- A new boy/girl has joined your class. She seems to be a bit of an outsider and does not fit in easily with everyone else. It would be so simple just to ignore her and carry on with the friendship groups you have already established. Some of your friends are urging you to do just that and not to bother with the newcomer. Some other friends are suggesting that you try and include her in your games and conversations. What do you think you should do for the best? What risks do you run if you decide to befriend the stranger? Wouldn't it be better just to keep things as they were?
- It is time for your class to decide on their annual charity focus. There are two main contenders for money this year. One charity looks after local children who have disabilities, enabling them

to get out once in a while for a special outing. Some of the parents of the children in your class are part of this work. The other charity is about helping medical work in Africa. For only a very small amount of money special eye operations can be carried out which will help children and adults to see for the first time in their lives. It is unlikely however but you will ever be able to meet the people you are able to help for his charity, whereas the other charity is only a mile away.

What is the best use of your money?

Some of a class might argue that would be better to spend the money nearer home. Others may feel that more good can be done with a small amount in a place like Africa. What direction should your care go?

- The teacher has asked the class to think of a way, in which everyone can work together on a grand project. It must be something however that everyone does something for. It is not to be left just to those with certain talents. Someone has suggested putting on an entertainment for the residents of a local nursing home. Can you work together to plan what you will do so that everyone has a part to play?
- Here are some ideas for extension material
- Investigate via the web the work of a particular Christian charity. How is the money raised? Who are the donors? What do you think influences what they give?
- Collect together a number of pictures from the magazines of two or three aid agencies, which work with refugees. Create a display around the classroom and ask the children to walk around and look at these pictures. Ask them to imagine being without a home, family or security. What would be the children's hopes, if they were to become refugees far away from their own country?

Write some short prayers or reflections from the point of view of a refugee. What would they miss about home and what new hopes and fears for the future in a new place would they have?

- Find out more about what happened to Barnabas the encourager (see Acts 10 and 13). Several modern-day Christian organisations use the name of this early believer in Jesus. Can you find out about any of these?