

How to use your Transforming Presence gift box

I have used gift boxes, like the self-assembled box enclosed, in churches and church schools as an imaginative visual aid for people of all ages to engage with Transforming Presence in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them where they are.

The process set out overleaf could be used in all-age church services or school assemblies. The aim of this process is to suggest one way among many in which every member of each church and school community can reflect on the gifts they have received from God and reflect on the gifts they offer to all in their community and to God.

You are welcome to watch the video clip on the Transforming Presence website www.transformingpresence.org.uk to see how I use the box in presentations but the best and most effective way to use the box will come from you. So take time to think, to pray, to enjoy, to try and to dare.

In keeping with the new pictures used in the Transforming Presence documents which are intended to re-focus attention on the priorities of Transforming Presence, the suggested items for use in the box with the specific purpose of explaining each priority are –



Torch = 'Living the gift' = Inhabiting the World Distinctively.

Bubbles = 'Sharing the gift' = Evangelising Effectively.

Shape sorter = 'Enjoying the gift' = Serving with Accountability.

Lego bricks = 'Shaping the gift' = Re-imagining Ministry.

Do let me know how this visual aid has worked in practice so that I can help others.

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A process for all-age church services and school assemblies

1. Fill the gift box with gift tags (some are enclosed) and other small items which will be relevant to your presentation (please see 5, 6 and 7 below). Cover the box with the lid provided so that the contents are kept hidden until you reveal them.
2. Take the box to the church or school and, before you start your presentation, make sure that everyone can see it.
3. Start your presentation by asking, "What is the best gift you have ever received?" and encourage everyone to listen to the responses.
4. Then ask, "What is the best gift you have ever given?" and again encourage everyone to listen to the responses.
5. Take a few items out of the box - for example:
 - 5.1 A pencil might prompt you to talk about the gift of education. Across much of the world many children don't go to school, not because they don't want to but because school is too far to walk to, it is too expensive for parents or because the children have to work to earn a living... or
 - 5.2 A beaker might prompt you to talk about the gift of clean water. Dirty water is a killer. Every minute of every hour three or four children die for lack of clean water... or
 - 5.3 A family photo might prompt you to talk about the gift of families... or
 - 5.4 A toy house might prompt you to talk about the gift of a home... or
 - 5.5 A medicine bottle might prompt you to talk about the gift of good health... or
 - 5.6 A shoe with a stone inside it might prompt you to talk about the gift of patience or the gift of being able to imagine standing in someone else's shoes, the gifts of empathy and compassion...
6. Take out one or more of the items associated with the Transforming Presence priorities – a torch, a bubble bottle/wand, a shape sorter or Lego bricks - and it might prompt you to talk about one or more aspects of becoming a church which is a transforming presence in the community.
7. Finally take a holding cross out of the box: the gift of Jesus Christ to us.
8. Readings – Luke 11:1-13 and The Lord's Prayer:
9. Next ask, "What is the gift that you give?" and encourage everyone to listen to the responses (for example, a response might be, "I help someone to learn").*
10. Reading – Psalm 139.
11. Story – Tell "The story of the stone soup". If you are not familiar with this story, Google it. The message is simple: the little I give is valuable. You may think the skill, the time, the energy and the resources you give to God are only little but they are valuable.
12. Take some gift tags from the box and ask, "What are you going to put into the box? Write on one side of the tag, 'My gift from God: What I have received from God is... ' and on the other side of the tag write, 'My gift to God: What I am giving to God is... ' Put the gift tags into the box. Alternatively hang them on a cross.
13. Add: "You can also make your pledge on social media using the hashtag #MyGiftToGod. You can attach a picture or a video clip too. You will be able to see all the social media posts with that hashtag from across East London and Essex on the Transforming Presence website www.transformingpresence.org.uk which is maintained by Chelmsford Diocese."
14. More gift tags can easily be made if you run out.
15. You may like to keep a 'travelling box'. Let people add items to it. Show and tell what they have put into the box as you visit new places.
16. Feel free to try out the box in other church communities besides churches and church schools, such as Messy Church and youth groups.

* In a recent assembly one child confidently added to the concept of us receiving and giving gifts by stating, "And we are the gift."