



Barnabas

Running a Nurture Course

A simple guide to setting up a nurture or explorers course in your church, parish or benefice.

Why Nurture Courses

A lot of churches in our diocese have lots of contacts with people who are not yet part of our church communities. They might come to toddler groups or lunch clubs. They may come to a baptism or funeral. They may come along to one of our seasonal services like Christmas or Remembrance.

Part of us introducing people into a life of faith is about giving people opportunities to hear more about what it means to be a Christian, but also to have ways in which they can get to know other people in the church. Nurture or exploration courses are good ways in which we can do just that.

When Nurture Courses

This guide is set out with an assumption of starting a nurture course after Christmas. Christmas remains one of the times of the year when people will come along to a church service. This is a good moment to invite them to explore faith further.

Often churches will also start a nurture course in September as a follow on to summer events (holiday clubs etc).

In either case the timing of the nurture course comes from having people who you can invite (so ideally it will come after a time when you have been in touch with lots of people).

Which Nurture Course Should We Use?

There are lots of different nurture or seeker courses that have been produced. We have produced a rough guide in a separate document. As you choose which one you use here are some points to consider:

What can you host with integrity? You don't have to wholly agree with everything that is said in a nurture course but if you and the hosting team are all deeply uncomfortable with the content that will not help people come into a life of faith.

How long is the course? Some courses run up to twelve weeks. That may be too long for your context (or may not fit before Lent if you start after Christmas!)

What resources does it need to run? A number of courses have videos that run with them- but choose a course that you can run with the technology you have available.

How to Host a Nurture Course

One of the barriers to hosting nurture courses is about getting it organised. What follows is a quick guide to getting a course organised. It works on the principle that if you are starting after Christmas you don't want to be doing much on the course in the Advent season. Similarly if you are starting in September- it assumes you will want a quieter summer.

Three Months Before:

This is when you will want to decide three key things-

1 when you want to start,

2 which course you want to use,

3 where you want to hold the course.

At this stage you may already have an idea of who will be on the team to make this happen. For others, building the team will come later. You may also want to revisit your budget to set aside some funds to make this course happen.

It is also worth deciding what sort of hospitality you want to offer. Some courses assume you will serve a full meal. At the very least drinks and snacks can help, but take some time to decide what is possible for you and then work out who you might ask to help out. (This is also a great way to involve people who may not feel confident enough to lead a discussion group yet). Simple food with easy to take home leftovers works well here.

Much of what you do for hospitality will depend on where you are hosting the course. Many churches use their church or church hall- but churches sometimes choose to run the course in a more neutral space, like a café or pub. If you are planning for a benefice then consider which place might be the best location. Avoid moving around between venues if possible.

Ten Weeks Before:

When you have sorted out dates and place you can work on some publicity. Bear in mind two things: first the design, and second the ways in which you will promote the course.

It can be helpful at this stage to look at all the events and places where you can advertise the course before it begins. Then think about what kinds of media you will need to advertise in those spaces (so do you need something for your social media. Do you need fliers? Do you need a banner or several banners?)

Some nurture courses (eg Alpha) are able to design and print your publicity.

One thing to bear in mind- don't assume that people know exactly where your church is- or how to get in! Add brief instructions so that people feel safe that they know how to get to the right place.

Nine Weeks Before:

At this stage it will be helpful to have an idea of who will serve on your team.

Most nurture courses use small group discussion so you will need some people who can help discussion happen well. It can be helpful to have people on team who have experienced the course before- but that is not always possible. This year the Diocese is offering a really simple one hour online training session about how to host a discussion group on..

Don't forget about asking people to be part of the hospitality team.

Eight to Three Weeks Before:

Three things happen in this period of time: first it's the chance to get publicity out and ask people to come along. Use all of the events of the season to invite people. If you use projection in your services, add an end slide that invites people along.

Second, this is the time to train the team that you have. They may not need much- but most people need encouraging and reassuring that they can do it. They may also need sight of the course material so they are at least familiar with what you are asking them to deliver.

And the third, which really is first- pray. Not everyone in your church will be involved in delivering your nurture course, but everyone in your church can be involved in delivering your nurture course through prayer. Pray that God will prompt people to invite others, pray that people will respond to the invite. Pray for boldness, pray for good cake. Pray for decent weather. Pray about it all- you can't get it wrong or pray too much.

It may be helpful to gather the team at some point during this period. Some people find it helpful to do a 'dry run' or rehearsal of the first session to iron out any bumps.

Four Weeks to One Week Before:

You may be quite preoccupied with Christmas (or be on holiday) for part of this time. However, at some point during this period of time it becomes important to get people to commit to coming along. There is always a fine balance of the safety of knowing and the stretch of trusting that people will come along.

Keep a record of who you are expecting so you can plan

hospitality.

You may also want to do a dry run of the first session if you

On The Day:

Be there early. Make time to pray with the team. Be ready. Enjoy!

During and After the Course

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| After the First Session | If there were folks who said they would come along and then didn't appear it may be a good plan to gently check in with them and remind them that its not too late to join in. |
| About half way through the course | By this stage you might be getting an idea of what participants might want or need after the nurture course. It's really important that people know that they are welcome to come along to any of your church activities. Some churches arrange that someone who has been leading on the course can arrange to accompany people to church. Please don't assume that people will just come along. They may need to be explicitly invited. |
| By the End of the Course | By the time the course comes to the end it is important to ensure that you know what you are able to offer afterwards. |