

# ORGANISING THE COURSE: PRACTICALITIES

**3rd edition, 2013** (revised in the light of helpful feedback from users around Britain and across the world). Many helpful suggestions from experienced leaders of the course have been added to this revised document for Course Organisers (see explanation in Section 10 below).

## 1. The Course Organiser

- a) **Who is the Course Organiser?** It is assumed that it will normally be the **Vicar, Minister or Leader of the church**. In a large church the responsibility could be delegated, but it is important that the person has the authority and oversight to enable him/her to make strategic decisions about how **SHAPE** will affect and relate to other areas of the church's ministry. The role of Course Organiser is not the same as that of the Group Leader (see below, and also the separate document **Leading the Group: practicalities**). However, it is possible for one person to do both jobs. In fact, it can be very helpful for the Vicar/Parish Priest/Minister/Course Organiser to be a Group Leader the first time the course is run. He/she can then see how it works, adapt it further to suit the participants, and be able to recommend it later from a position of knowledge. It also makes the Individual Reviews at the end of the course more effective (see Section 8 below).
- b) **The Organiser's role** : this includes
- Deciding when and how to run **SHAPE**, in relation to the vision, priorities and other activities of the church;
  - Choosing and training the Group Leaders;
  - Organising publicity to attract participants;
  - Checking and adapting the materials to suit the local context;
  - Overseeing and supporting the Group Leaders, and ensuring that they are provided with all the necessary materials and handouts;
  - Setting up and being involved in the Individual Reviews at the end - this is invaluable for Ministers;
  - Ensuring that people continue to be guided, supported and equipped long term, as they grow in using their gifts to serve God.

## 2. Setting Up The Groups

- a) **Who would benefit from doing the course?**  
Anyone who is sufficiently committed as a Christian to want to deepen their self-understanding and know more about God's unique calling to them. Also they need to be willing to be open and honest within the confidentiality of the group. Sadly, we often explore our gifts and calling in a rather individualistic way. Within the Body of Christ, this should be a collaborative process, drawing on each other's insights and spiritual discernment. **Your SHAPE for God's Service** creates an opportunity for this to happen.

Some clergy invite particular church members who may have potential as future lay leaders or ministers but need to grow in self-awareness and confidence first. Others run the course for newcomers, to get to know them, to integrate them and make them feel they belong and have something to offer. The course also works well for people who are rather 'stuck in a rut' and need to be helped to find a fresh direction or outlet for their Christian service.

**b) New groups?**

The advantage of setting up new, short-term groups specifically to do **Your *SHAPE* for God's Service**, is that you can ensure everyone wants to do it! This is important, as it requires a commitment to regular attendance and being willing to explore personal issues honestly. If you have several fellowship/study groups, experience shows that it is not wise to force them all to do the course simultaneously – some members may feel threatened and cause problems in the group dynamics. However, **SHAPE** can be done by a regular fellowship/study/home group (as long as all the members agree). This has the advantage that members already know each other and so are likely to be more honest from the start and more able to give each other feedback about personality, gifts etc. If the course is run in this way then it needs to be seen as separate from the normal regular meetings and set up accordingly. It is best to run fortnightly instead of weekly to give space for the personal reflection activities.

**c) Several groups?**

**Your *SHAPE* for God's Service** can be used as a one-off with a small group of interested people. Alternatively, you could run several groups simultaneously. If you do this, make sure you have enough Church Leaders to do an Individual Review with each participant soon after the last group meeting. A disadvantage is that the Minister then cannot review everyone and so does not gain an overview of all the gifts in the Body of Christ.

Also be aware that large numbers of people would be doing the same Personal Reflection exercises (i.e. homework) at the same time, and the task often involves approaching family, friends or fellow church members with questions/questionnaires, to obtain feedback about ones' **SHAPE**. People might feel 'pestered'!

**d) Size of group?**

This material works best with a small group of 6-8 people plus 2 leaders. However, it can be delivered in a large group of 30 or more if the group splits up into twos or threes for the discussions. If slightly adapted, the material can be used just with 2 or 3 people. The exercises (and particularly the Personal Reflection handouts) could also be used one-to-one in a "discipling" relationship, as part of a spiritual direction process, or to help with vocational discernment. See further suggestions in the document called "Quotes and Ideas from Users" in the "Course Organiser's Information" folder.

### 3. Timing

**a) Length of sessions:**

**SHAPE** consists of 6 sessions, each of 2 hours (the material is designed to take 1 hour and 45 minutes to complete, and this allows for 15 minutes for coffee, socialising etc - either at the beginning to break down barriers as people arrive, or in the middle to give them a break). There is plenty of participation and a variety of activities and learning styles, so the time will not drag. A few lively groups who know each other well and want to discuss at length, have chosen to extend the course over more meetings.

**b) Frequency of sessions:**

It is recommended that the 6 sessions are run fortnightly rather than weekly to give space for the Personal Reflection between sessions. (Although it is possible to meet weekly, for example as a slightly extended Lent or Advent course). If the sessions are less frequent than fortnightly, it may become difficult to build up and sustain the depth of relationship and regular commitment. Do not try to combine several sessions into a day-conference or weekend, because people need time between sessions to go away and do their Personal Reflection exercises (which may involve practical activities, gaining feedback from friends or work colleagues etc). For further ideas on how to structure the course, see the document called "Quotes and Ideas from Users" in the "Course Organiser's Information" folder.

## 4. Your Wider Strategy

### a) Building up a picture of your church:

Some churches just use **SHAPE** once with a small group of interested people. However, it is much more effective if it becomes part of the church's long-term strategy in order to build up a picture of the range of gifts etc within the Body of Christ. Ideally, this would involve over time encouraging most of the congregation to do **SHAPE**. The strategy depends on the size of the congregation and how many leaders you have available.

You could run one group each year for several years.

Alternatively, you could run several groups simultaneously, encourage as many people as possible to join in, and then later run an occasional group to draw in recent church members, newly confirmed adults etc.

### a) Background teaching:

**SHAPE** does not assume much depth of theological knowledge on the part of the participant, and so the material includes some teaching on topics such as the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of God, Gifts, Vocation and Ministry. However, the input is fairly minimal so that the sessions do not become too didactic. It can be very helpful if the course is preceded or accompanied by a sermon series dealing with some of these topics. This enables non-participants to benefit too. At the end of the group sessions, perhaps one or two members could be asked to speak in a church service about the effect the course has had on them. Hopefully this might whet people's appetites to join in next time.

## 5. Choosing Group Leaders

### a) How many?

Each group should have 2 leaders. This is a good way of growing new leaders as one of them can be an *apprentice* leader, who may become the main leader the next time **SHAPE** is run. The parts of each session can be divided up between the two leaders to give variety. Whichever of them is not currently leading, is then able to listen carefully, pay attention to the dynamics and pastoral needs, and pray. However, it is possible for an experienced leader to lead the group on his/her own if necessary.

If you do not have enough suitable group leaders, it would be worth training some. See the document called "H – Resources and Reading", for some suggestions of excellent and practical training materials. Alternatively, as suggested above, the Minister could deliver the course in a large group, with members splitting up into twos or threes for the exercises and discussions.

### b) What sort of Leaders?

The Group Leaders do not need to be expert theologians, or even particularly knowledgeable about the topics. (The Leaders' Notes offer a full script for each of the short input sections).

**It is most important** that the person has experience of leading small, informal groups, and is good at encouraging discussion without needing to dominate or talk too much. The Leader needs to be pastorally gifted, discerning, willing to set an example of being open and honest, good at creating a relaxed atmosphere. The role is mainly facilitating rather than teaching.

## 6. Using The Course Materials

### a) Publicity:

Create whatever publicity is appropriate for your context. The document "**Draft content for a publicity leaflet**" in the folder called 'Course Organiser's Information', will help to provide a basis. This can be adapted and given the right style, visuals etc. to suit your context. Try to avoid referring to **SHAPE** as a 'course', since most people find this heavy and off-putting!

**b) Adapting the materials:**

The materials have been carefully prepared and work well as they are. However, the intention is that you should be able if you wish to adapt them to suit your church members, according to their culture, attitudes, theological position, their experience of small groups, and their level of education, Biblical knowledge, commitment and spiritual maturity. This may involve changing some of the input, wording and style, especially in the Leaders' Notes and Members' Notes. However, please try to retain as much as possible of the educational process, the discussion questions and the activities. They build on each other, and like a heap of spillikins (pick-up sticks), if one stick is removed then the whole heap may collapse!

**c) The Pictures:**

Simple clipart pictures are included. They are deliberately 'childlike' and mildly humorous. You may wish to change these to suit your church's culture. The pictures are copyright (QuickArt Collection 4, Copyright 2005 by Authentic Software, Kingstown Broadway, Carlisle, Cumbria. CA3 OHA). Permission has been given for them to be used in "Your *SHAPE* for God's Service," but they must not be used in any other context (unless you buy their CD). If you copy the *SHAPE* disc to pass on to someone else, you must not sell it at a profit.

**d) Members' Notes** are provided for each session. These should not be given until the end of each session. They are optional and are simply a reminder of the content of the session to help people reflect and pray more about it. Most participants find these helpful to look back on later. However, if your group members are daunted by too many words on paper then it is perfectly possible to run *SHAPE* without giving them the Members' Notes at all. The Members' Notes are in a separate folder called "O – Optional Materials".

**e) Handouts:** The participants need a copy of each of the Handouts. Every Handout has a number and a letter: the number indicates the session, and the letter distinguishes the various handouts belonging to that session, in order. Thus session 3 requires Handouts 3A and 3B.

**f) Personal Reflection exercises:** Each session also has a Handout with the letters **PR** (e.g. 3PR). After each session the participants are asked to do a Personal Reflection/homework exercise in preparation for the following session. These form the basis for building up the picture of their *SHAPE*, so it is very important that they complete them all and keep them carefully until the end of the course.

## 7. Printing the Materials

**a) How?** The documents are all designed to be printed on A4 paper, to suit all types of printers. The pictures are in colour, but look fine printed or photocopied in black and white. For the Handouts and Members' Notes for each session, if possible print or photocopy double-sided, and staple multi-page documents together. It helps if the **Personal Reflection** handouts can be on coloured paper to distinguish them from the others. Encourage participants to keep all their papers in a folder, so that they can bring them to each session. At the end, they will need to refer back to all their completed handouts, to summarise their *SHAPE*. (If you can afford it, provide them with folders).

**b) How many?** Print off a copy of the document called **List of Course Materials**. The right-hand column shows which documents need to be given to whom, so you can work out the numbers.

## 8. At the end: Individual Reviews

a) **Who should do the individual Reviews?** Ideally the Vicar/Parish Priest/Minister/Church Leader and/or a Group Leader. For a Minister, doing the Individual Reviews is probably the greatest long-term value of the course, as they are a brilliant way of getting to know members of the congregation at greater depth. As more church members do the course, the Minister is able to use the Reviews to build up a broad picture of people's gifts. This is enormously helpful in the future when seeking to discern the right people for particular roles and responsibilities. It is time-consuming but infinitely worthwhile (and encouraging!), so reserve enough time-slots in your diary well in advance.

It is important that the reviewer knows the person well (either from having led the Group, or from other pastoral contacts), and also has authority and oversight in the church, enabling him/her to discern and suggest ways in which the Member could use their gifts.

b) **The Individual Reviews after the last group session are absolutely vital.**

In the past many churches have held Stewardship campaigns, asked people to volunteer their time and talents, have made lists of the congregation's gifts and abilities etc., but have then not done very much with the information. This is very frustrating and hurtful to people, leaving them feeling undervalued and rejected. Therefore it is essential that each person who does **Your *SHAPE* for God's Service**, is given a one-to-one individual review session of at least one hour (1½ is better) at the end of the course. **Please make sure this is mentioned in the advance publicity.**

c) **We can't find roles for everyone!** The course helps people to identify their Spiritual gifts, Heart's Desire, Abilities, Personality and Experience. It does not specify particular activities or roles within which these could be used. That application is part of the task of each Individual Review Session.

The Review session should involve discussion about discipleship in church and everyday life:

- Pointing out and affirming ways in which the person's *SHAPE* is already being used in their church context;
- Suggesting one or more ways in which some aspect of the person's *SHAPE* could be appropriately used in some specific aspect of the church's ministry and mission;
- Discussing ways in which the person might use their God given *SHAPE* in the context of their job, the community, their family, friends, voluntary and leisure activities etc.

d) **Planning the Individual Reviews:** It is best to discuss and arrange the dates and times for the Individual Reviews, by about half-way through the course so that people have a definite date to look forward to. If possible, the Review should take place between 2 weeks and 4 weeks after the last group session. For more information about the content of the Review see "Handout 6PR : Preparing for my Individual Review".

e) **Data Protection issues:** Do you want to build up a file of information about the *SHAPE* of your church members? This can be very useful later when you are wondering who to ask to take on a particular role or responsibility (especially if your congregation is too large for you to remember everything about everyone!) You may want to keep the information which course members will give to their Individual Reviewer in preparation for the review meeting (ie the completed Handouts 5PR and 6PR). If so, you will need to ask them this in advance, and get them to sign giving their permission. Before printing course materials, check Handouts 5PR and 6PR at the bottom of their last page, to make sure they say what you want about all this.

## 9. Celebrating and Long term Follow-up

- a) **End with an agape or shared meal?** Many groups arrange an extra meeting at the end of the course to celebrate together. The personal sharing during the course can build up a strong sense of closeness and fellowship.
- b) **Group Reunion?** It could be useful to gather the group together again after about 6-9 months to share what has come out of **SHAPE** in terms of further insights, encouragements, development of areas of ministry and service. It can also be a helpful opportunity to pray for one another and to thank God for his work in our lives.

## 10. Changes made for this 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, revised in 2013

- a) **Research and feedback:** This 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition of 'Your *SHAPE* for God's Service' has been significantly revised since it was first created in 2006. I (the author, Amiel Osmaston) had always envisaged doing some follow-up research and revision. So during 2012, I contacted several hundred of the purchasers / leaders of the course and asked for feedback and suggestions for improving and revising the course. I am very grateful to all those who gave the time to consider my questions and reply.
- It was encouraging to discover that the course had already been run by over 600 known groups around Britain. I was also glad that in addition many people mentioned that they had passed on the materials free to other 'unknown groups'. I have heard of the materials being used and adapted around the world in places as diverse as Southern Sudan, Russia, New Zealand and USA.
- b) **This 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition** draws mainly on feedback and suggestions from British churches, so that it is particularly appropriate for that cultural context. The majority are Anglican (from a wide range of churchmanship), but many are from other denominations or are independent churches. The Diocese of Chelmsford has used 'Your *SHAPE* for God's Service' as part of its diocesan-wide strategy for developing ministry and vocations, and all parishes have been encouraged to use it. Their diocesan officers and clergy have contributed a great deal to this new 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. The course seems to have been used and valued by a wide variety of churches: small and large congregations; in rural, suburban and urban contexts; working class and middle class areas.
- c) **What changes have been made?**
- Much extra good advice from experienced leaders of the course has been added to this document for 'Course Organisers' and to the one for 'Group Leaders'.
  - Changes have been made to the content of sessions and handouts, although encouragingly most users said "Don't change the content too much – it's great as it is!"
  - Extra / alternative ideas for group exercises have been included.
  - The number of handouts has been reduced by merging and simplification.
  - The "Resources and Reading" document has been updated and extended.
  - Updated software has been used for all the documents.
  - The font has been changed to Gill Sans MT, which is easiest for dyslexics.