

We are Family

The Bible talks about Christians as members of the same family. But sometimes it's hard to feel that way, especially about people we've never met in countries we've never heard of. Use this outline to help a youth group or older Sunday school class think about what it means to be part of the wider Church.

"Your brother has been arrested!"

Drama

Begin by holding up a large piece of card with the phrase above written on it. Ask: can you imagine what would happen if you opened the front door one tea-time to find a police officer saying your teenage brother had been arrested? What would your family do? How would you feel? Get groups of about five (e.g. parents, child, police officer, neighbour) to prepare and act out a short drama showing what would happen.

Probably the parents would have to go to the police station along with anyone who could be a witness. They may ask a friend to come and look after the other children while they are gone. There might be urgent discussion of what to do, and perhaps crying and shouting. Certainly all the usual things they were going to do would be put on hold while everyone dealt with this crisis.

Family business

Bible

Read Mark 3:31-34. Jesus talks about his followers as being his family. Look at the following verses about the first Christians. In what ways did they act like a family?

John 19: 26-27. (John took Mary into his home, taking responsibility for her as if she were his mother.)

Acts 2: 44-46. (The believers shared what they had, helped each other, ate together in each other's houses.)

Colossians 4: 7-15. (Scattered congregations - who mostly had never met each other - knew about each other, cared about each other and sometimes helped each other, in v8 by visiting, in v12 by praying)

Discuss: In what way are other Christians like a family to us?

Some of the children and young people in your



'Your brother has been arrested!' This brother in Christ was one of over a thousand Christians arrested in the Egyptian village of El-Kashh in 1998 and later released.

church might be close friends. They might call older people in the church who are family friends 'uncle' and 'auntie'. Young people at college away from home find a new 'family' in a church or Christian Union. For young people - and older ones - whose families aren't Christians, it might be easier to talk about their problems with friends who share their beliefs.

Distant Relatives

Find out who in the group has the relative who lives furthest away.

Just as we have relations living in different places, maybe a cousin who lives on the other side of the world whom we have never met, so we have Christian family in other places. Some

of them live in countries where Christians are few in number and have a lot of problems, such as poverty or persecution. When they see how Christians in countries like ours have comfortable lives and thriving churches, they sometimes feel like a neglected child that nobody in their family cares for. How can we make them feel part of the Christian family?

Be Informed

In the first episode of a British TV comedy series called *The Vicar of Dibley*, the chairman of the Church Council is on the telephone to the Bishop's office: 'Can I speak to the Bishop? He's where?..... What's he doing there, they're all Muslims aren't they? Really! Twenty-five

million Christians? Well fair enough, more than here.'

The first thing is to be informed about the existence and the lives of Christians in places like Egypt or Indonesia. This magazine is a good starting point.

Be Moved

It is one thing to know about Christians in other places, it is another to care about them. But just as Jesus' first response at the grave of Lazarus was not to act but to be moved with compassion and then to weep, so we should feel for those who are suffering. Using our imaginations can help. The first activity, for example, helped us to think about what it would be like for us to have our brother arrested, and this can help us to empathise and pray for Christians who are harassed by the police because of their faith.

Be Responsible

In the scenario of a teenage boy being arrested, one of his parents would have to go to the police station, whatever else they were supposed to be doing that evening, because they are responsible for their children. The words of Jesus we looked at showed that Christians have similar responsibility for each other. So knowing and caring about our Christian family in other parts of the world leads to helping them in times of crisis, especially when they have nobody else to turn to. Many of the tragic stories in this magazine have a happy ending because Christians all over the world take seriously this responsibility.

End by praying for some of the people whose needs are described in this magazine, perhaps allowing time to think quietly about them first. ●

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