**Rhythm of Life - Process of Development**

**Hazelnut Community Bristol’s journey towards a shared rhythm**

There is no one way to develop a Rhythm of Life and it is important to think about what will work best in your context. This outlines the process we used at Hazelnut Community Bristol (a community-garden based eco-church in East Bristol) and some of the things we have learnt along the way. Our community includes people from a wide range of perspectives – Christians from different traditions and stages of faith, a few who come from other faith backgrounds and some who have little experience of the Christian faith, but come along because they love gardening, are concerned about the climate emergency and enjoy being part of our community. We therefore tried to come up with a rhythm of life that is accessible and uses open, non-religious language. We wanted something that people at different stages and faith-understandings could connect to and feel they wanted to participate in. Your context may be very different and the rhythm of life you put together will need to reflect the values and priorities of your context. We hope the journey we have been on will be useful in helping others to think about how you might shape their rhythm of life. Please feel free to use or adapt material (it would be great if you could credit Hazelnut Community where appropriate).

**Preparation**

We started by focusing on faith being about the whole of life, encouraging people to see everyday life as the place we encounter God and live out our calling as Christians. We talked a few times about how some people have a rhythm / rule of life to help them think about their priorities and how they live, so that people gradually became familiar with idea of a rhythm of life. This helped to develop a growing sense of understanding and openness. There is wisdom in taking time over the process and not being in too much of a rush to get a result. We also told our community about the work the diocese was doing in encouraging churches and individuals to consider adopting a Rhythm of Life. The online materials weren’t available at that time but should be a great place to direct people to get them interested.

We used a sheet called ‘Listening to your Life’ (appendix 1) to encourage people to think about their own lives, their values, what helps them live well and the challenges they face. We did this at New Year – a time when people naturally tend to reflect on life and think about change. This was helpful in getting our community to develop reflective skills, to help them to talk about how their faith is worked out in everyday life and to introduce the idea of making small changes or developing habits to intentionally shape the way we live. The sheet includes important instructions to encourage a positive, realistic and prayerful process rather than inducing guilt and stress. We intend to use something similar every January as a kind of individual stock-take of life.

**Development**

Reading around, there seem to be 3 models for developing a rhythm of life.

1. Top-down approach - leaders write the material and present to their church community. This has the advantage of being quick to do and easy to shape around the values and priorities of your church but may lack a sense of ownership and make it harder to get people to engage. It may feel that leaders are making extra demands on people’s already busy lives and produce resistance rather than involvement, so if you use this method, care will be needed in how the Rhythm of Life is introduced. You can offset some of the disadvantages if the rhythm you offer is flexible and allows for personalisation.
2. Bottom-up approach – where values, practices and wording are developed by the whole community working in small groups over several months. Examples of this can be seen in the New Monastic Handbook (Ian Mobsby & Mark Berry), in the process used by the Moot Community, London, which is described in detail. This may work well for small and fairly homogenous communities of articulate people and should encourage a high degree of ownership. It requires a considerable investment of time and energy, is likely to be a slow process and may be difficult to get a clear focus or agreement on what is important. Leaders would need to be confident, flexible and willing to go with the community’s decisions to follow this approach.
3. Hybrid approach – where material is developed as the basis for discussion and then the material is shaped and defined in the light of the community’s conversations. We chose this model as we wanted a sense of ownership but felt our community would struggle without a structure to work with. Our community is very diverse, people are at very different stages of faith and English not a first language for many. We felt this model was more manageable, making participation easier and helping us to shape something that was understood and belonged to the community. It still requires considerable time!

**Discussion Process**

Having looked at examples of rhythms of life created by other communities, we developed a draft rhythm of life, rooted in our value statement (appendix 2). If a values statement doesn’t exist, this would be worth developing before starting work on a rhythm of life, so the rhythm describes how the values are lived out.

We held discussions in six sessions (Appendix 3) as part of our regular Sunday meetings. For us, the patten of an introductory talk, discussion in small groups and feedback is something people are familiar with. We wrote prayers to use at the start and finish of our discussions and included a short passage of scripture each time. We tried to keep the pattern the same for each week and provided copies of the draft rhythm of life document and of the questions for each person. Feedback from the small group was recorded by the small group leader and shared and was later used to refine the draft rhythm of life.

**Finalising the Rhythm of Life**

All the notes from the sessions were collated and used to revise the rhythm of life (Appendix 4), along with some further one-to-one consultations with individuals. We settled on section titles, moved material about and tried hard not to make it too long and complicated. It is hard to get the balance between being comprehensive and cramming too much in. We are thinking about producing a postcard-sized summary and about translation into Cantonese to improve engagement. We are now working out how to explore each section over the coming year and will be getting the community to suggest practices that people might try for each section. We hope it will be a useful tool to encourage both individuals and us as a community to grow as we explore ‘whole life faith’ together. We are intending to develop materials to embed our rhythm of life into the pattern of our year and each Easter, to invite community members to recommit themselves to living out their faith within this rhythm of life.