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Blood, Fire & Hope

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Blood, Fire & Hope

Introduction to the material

There are two ways in which this material can be used:

- 1 As a simple light party for regular church families and a few of their friends to avoid Hallowe'en and learn about the Reformation.
- 2 As an evangelistic tool to reach unchurched families with the good news of the gospel, through the stories of the English Reformers.



How you run the party will depend on what you are wanting to do. If your primary aim is to do the second of the two options, you may want to safely and carefully buy into some of the more medieval elements that attract children at Hallowe'en. This would need to be done reverently rather than letting it become silly, but try to make your building dark and have some flickering candles around (electronic ones can be bought if real ones are not safe). You could even play a soundtrack of fire crackling in the background to really get the mood going. The rationale is that non-churched families will come to a party on Hallowe'en with certain expectations and therefore, while we might not agree with some of those expectations, we give them what they are expecting as far as we are able.

Running the party

- Welcome and introduction
- Altogether game
- Discovery Tables – set up tables for each Reformer you wish to use. There are a number of ways this can be done: if you have confident actors to play the parts and suitable costumes, it would be really effective to have the Reformers tell their own story from the sheets provided. Alternatively, set the tables up with low level lighting and other decorations, laminate the relevant sheets and let the families read about each of the characters. The families then do a craft together while chatting about the implications of what they have heard.
- Altogether game and concluding talk

Alternatively, if the Discovery Tables will not work in your setting then have the characters introduce themselves up front and then the families go to tables to do crafts. This would allow for a shorter party and would allow one 'actor' to play each part with just a simple costume change.

Ideas for decorating your space

- Candles (real or electric)
- Cobwebs – pretend ones are available very cheaply
- Piles of firewood stacked up and decorated with red and yellow crepe paper
- Fire soundtrack playing on loop
- Lights with red filters or bulbs

Teaching point of the characters

- **John Rogers** – helped produce the Bible
[For Rogers character you will need a large leather-bound Bible]
- **John Hooper** – talking about Jesus
- **Rowland Taylor** – peace with God in the face of death
- **John Philpot** – resurrection hope
- **Bishop Latimer** – spreading the light of the gospel
- **John Bradford** – the preacher

Each of these characters were burnt to death for believing the gospel. How much you wish to emphasise this will vary depending on your situation and you may wish to choose your characters based both on the message and on the 'gore' level of their death.

Crafts

Each Discovery Table will have a time for craft. You will need the following for each table:

- **John Rogers** – Matchbox Bible
 - Matchboxes
 - Black squares of felt a little larger than the matchbox to be a cover
 - Red strips of felt to be the edges of the paper
 - Gold pens to make a cross on the cover
 - Glue
- **John Hooper** – Good News Bands
 - Elastic thread
 - Green, black, red, white and yellow beads
- **Rowland Taylor** – Cross Craft
 - Card crosses with a hole punched at the top
 - Various decorations, pens and paints
- **John Philpot** – Resurrection Men
 - Pipe cleaners to be made into human bodies
 - Strips of white cloth to wrap around the bodies
- **Bishop Latimer** – Candle Craft
 - Candles – approx. 15cm high with a thick enough diameter to decorate
 - Candle pens to decorate
- **John Bradford** – Megaphone
 - Cardboard cups
 - Strips of paper for the handle
 - Items to decorate: glue, pens, paints
 - Scissors to make a hole in the base

In addition to these crafts you may wish to give each child a box to put their crafts in. They could decorate this box with self-adhesive squares of paper at the beginning of the evening.

Food

Food is a great way of getting to know families and encouraging them to get to know you. Why not cook hot dogs and give them away free during the party or afterwards. This way parents do not need to worry about cooking tea and tend to be grateful enough to want to stay and chat.

Further reading

- *Five English Reformers* (JC Ryle, Banner of Truth) – this is a very readable and cheap biographical account of Hooper, Taylor, Latimer, Bradford and Ridley. He also includes Rogers and Philpot.
- *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* – this is a classic text of the Reformation and is available from many different publishers very cheaply (and free in ebook version).

Introductory talk

Welcome boys and girls, mums and dads. It's lovely to have you with us tonight. We're going to travel back 500 years to a very frightening time in England. It was a very dark time, like it is dark in here tonight.

And when it's dark it can be very frightening. Have you ever been afraid of the dark? We are afraid because we cannot see; we cannot know what is out there. We need light **[light a candle]**. When we have light we can see where we are going. We know who it is standing in front of us. Hello ... **[insert name of child you know]**.

Did you know that Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world'? That means he shows us what God is like. It also means he is all good and not frightening at all.

But light can also be dangerous. This candle could set light to something and start a fire which is hot and can burn us.

We're going to meet some amazing people this evening. And each of them had two things in common. Firstly, they spread the light of Jesus. They helped other people to know Jesus and how they can be friends with God through him.

But secondly, they also died by fire. They were put on a fire until they were dead and it must have been horrible and painful. This happened to them because they were telling people about Jesus and how to be friends with God through him.

[Explain discovery tables then introduce game]

Introductory games

- **Lighthouse** – One child stands on a higher point in the building (eg a box) and holds a torch. The other children need to creep up and touch the box or chair. The first child needs to catch them in the torchlight and name them. If they do, the child needs to return to the back of the room. The parents could be served tea during this game.
- **Musical lights** – either using spotlights or 60cm circles of yellow paper, the children need to land in the light when the music stops. Any child who is not in a circle is out. Gradually reduce the number of circles. How did they feel to be out of the light? The parents could be served tea during this game.
- **Caught** – each child is a 'light'. One leader is the darkness and tries to catch each child. Once a child is caught they need to go to the 'fire' in the middle of the room. The parents could be served tea during this game.
- **Snuff it out** – have circles of card. On one side is a picture of a lit candle and on the other side is a picture of a wick. The children have to turn all the cards to lit candles and the adults need to snuff them out. They have to turn a different one each time so that they cannot hover by the same candle. (Family game)

Concluding talk

Were you amazed by these people? I was. All of them were so sure that when they died they were going to be with Jesus. How can they be so sure?

[Recap at this point through the characters you have looked at, getting the families to tell you what they have learnt.]

They were sure because they knew that Jesus had died for all the things they had done wrong. They were sure because Jesus had risen from the dead, and so those who trust him will rise from death as well. They were sure that they had peace with God and full forgiveness. Do you have that?

This is the message of light in a dark world – this is the candle in the darkness. This is what Jesus meant when he said, 'I am the Light of the world.'

Let's learn from these great men who stood for what was right in the face of danger and death; who stood for light in a dark world.

[Pray.]

Concluding games

- **Pass the flame** – give each family a candle. The group then needs to pass the flame from candle to candle around the circle in the quickest possible time. [Family game]
- **Pass the candle** – cut out a picture of the candle on card. The group then sit in a circle and have to pass the candle around the circle either from forehead to forehead (with Vaseline or something sticky) or between the knees. (Family game)
- **Light quiz** – prepare a headband with a picture of a lit candle on for each family group. Prepare some questions based on the Reformers you have chosen. When a family knows the answer then the 'candle' needs to stand up to answer.
- **Reformer pairs** – have the names or pictures of each Reformer on A4 card with a duplicate. The families then play pairs, either individually or as a big group. When they find a pair they need to tell the others about him. They then need to finish by saying who they found most interesting and why. (Family game)

John Rogers (1507~1555)

My name is John Rogers and, although I was born in Birmingham, I became a minister of a church in London. I looked after the people of my church well and loved them dearly. But the time came for me to move to Antwerp in Belgium, so my wife and my ten children left by boat and crossed the English Channel. It was in Antwerp that I met a man called William Tyndale, who had put the whole of the Bible in English so that I could read it; so that the people of my church in London could read it. It was so beautiful that I wanted everyone to read it and I helped bring it back to England.

When Mary became Queen she did not like people reading the Bible for themselves and did not like all the work I had done. So at first I was put in prison in my own house, but then I was sent to Newgate prison and was surrounded by thieves and murderers. In prison I was not allowed to see any of my family, which I found very sad.

But in 1555 I heard that I was to be burnt at Smithfield. I was woken in a hurry and barely had time to dress properly. They had prepared a fire for me. By this stage my wife had given birth to our eleventh child, still a baby. They came to watch me die but I was barely allowed to stop as I passed them. I walked through the streets of the people I had preached for and loved many years earlier and they came out to watch me die.

As I was led out I was asked whether I had changed my mind about anything that I believed. I replied, 'That which I have preached I will seal with my blood!' In other words, no, never. They called me a heretic, which is a word meaning I believe terrible things. Although they said that they would never pray for me, I told them that I would pray for them. And when they led me out I sang Psalm 51:

'Have mercy on me, O God,
According to your unfailing love;
According to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin.'

I was the first to die this way and I went quickly, but still the crowds cheered my death.

John Rogers continued

To chat about

- Why was John Rogers prepared to die?
- Do you find the Bible as wonderful as he did?

Craft – Matchbox Bibles

- Take one of the matchboxes on the table and one piece of black felt and a strip of red felt. Attach the black felt with glue so that it overlaps slightly on three sides (so it looks like a book).
- Then glue the red felt strip on the three open sides to be the edge of the pages.
- Decorate the 'front cover' with a cross using the gold pen.

John Hooper (1495~1555)

My name is John Hooper and I was Bishop of Gloucester until I had to flee when Edward became King. I fled to Switzerland where I met some very interesting and important men. But I had to return to England even though it was dangerous. When I came back I carried on telling people about Jesus and many people came to hear me tell of how wonderful his forgiveness is. These were things that people had not heard before.

But the people in power hated these things I was saying. Eventually they put me in Newgate prison. Every day my enemies would come into prison and try to get me to change my mind about Jesus, but I would not change!

They decided I was to be killed in Gloucester so we travelled overnight there. The morning of my death, a crowd of 7,000 people were lining the streets to watch. When I arrived at the fire they allowed me to pray. I prayed for half an hour, loudly asking God to forgive those who were going to kill me.

They put me on the fire and set light to it. But it just scorched my feet!

They lit the fire again and the bottom half of my body burnt but not the top half. It was agony and I cried out, 'For God's love, good people, give me more fire!'

They lit the fire a third time and more successfully this time. I cried out, 'Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me! Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me! Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' My mouth turned black and my tongue swelled up and I banged my chest with my arm until it fell off. And then I died. And then I went to glory to be with Jesus forever!

John Hooper continued

To chat about

- Would you have gone out with the crowd to watch? Why/Why not?
- Why do you think John Hooper did not stop talking about Jesus even though it was dangerous?

Craft – Good news bands

Take a piece of elastic each, long enough to go round your wrist. Then attach the coloured beads as follows: Green, black, red, white, yellow. Then see if you can explain the good news to each other. The colours represent the following:

- Green – God made the world
- Black – sin came into the world, everyone disobeyed God
- Red – Jesus died instead of us, dealing with our sin
- White – we are now clean before God
- Yellow – we have a golden future with God forever

Rowland Taylor (1510~1555)

My name is Rowland Taylor and I was a vicar in Suffolk, telling people how wonderful it was to have free forgiveness through the death of Jesus. I kept telling people how, when Jesus died, he paid for all our sins, all the things we have done wrong and we are given peace with God.

But my church did not like this message and they threw me out. My friends told me to run away across the sea but I could do no such thing. So I was thrown in prison and my jailors were told to treat me roughly.

They then took me to the stake to burn me and, as they chained me there, someone threw a piece of firewood at my head and I began to bleed. A local lady came and prayed with me. They tried to stop her and drag her away but she insisted and we knelt together and prayed to our heavenly Father.

As they lit the fire I cried out, 'Merciful Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, receive my soul into Thy hands.' Then I stood, peacefully, not making a noise as the flames caused me intense pain. Eventually, because I was dying so slowly, one of the guards took pity on me and hit me over the head so that I died.

But in death, as in life, I knew that only Jesus brings me peace with God. I could be at peace as I died because I knew that Jesus died for me to forgive me all that I had done wrong.

To chat about

- How could Rowland Taylor be so at peace at his death?
- Do you think you have this peace?

Craft – Cross craft

- Take one of the card crosses on the table and decorate it with the items available.
- Then cut a length of ribbon and put it through the hole at the top of the cross and tie it in a loop.

John Philpott (1516~1555)

My name is John Philpott and I was born into a Knight's family in 1516. But I became a scholar, someone who studies, and Archdeacon of Winchester. I loved the good news about how Jesus had risen from the dead and because of that I was treated very badly.

Thirteen times I was called before Bishops to be examined because they did not like what I believed. They questioned me for long hours and it was exhausting but I never gave in; I never said the things they wanted me to say. I never denied what I believed.

Then one night I was having supper in Newgate when I received a message that I was going to be killed the next day. My answer came straight away, 'I am ready: God grant me strength and a joyful resurrection.' It was because of Jesus rising from the dead that I could answer this way.

The next morning the Sheriffs called for me. The road was foul and muddy and they had to carry me up to the stake. I prayed, repeated some of the Psalms and died quietly.

I died quietly and unafraid because I believed that Jesus had risen from the dead; he had defeated death and is alive again. He brings life to all those who trust in him. Therefore, I have nothing to fear from death itself; I was not afraid of dying because of life beyond it.

To chat about

- Why was John Philpott not afraid?
- What are you most afraid of? Why?

Craft – Resurrection man

- Take some of the pipe cleaners on the table and shape them into person.
- Then take some of the white cloth on the table and wrap it around your person so it looks like Jesus' grave clothes.

Bishop Hugh Latimer (1487~1555)

My name is Bishop Hugh Latimer and I was born in 1487 in Leicester. I did not discover the good news about Jesus until I was thirty years old. In fact, until I was thirty, I used to hate and attack those who loved the good news about Jesus. It was a brave friend of mine called Bilney, who told me all about Jesus and how I was mistaken.

It then became my aim to let everyone know this great news; to light a candle that would spread the light of Jesus through all England. This meant that I was only a Bishop for four years. I was forced to be silent and go into retirement and then was put in prison in the Tower of London. Edward VI released me from prison after some time and, by this stage, I was an old man. Yet, just six years later, Queen Mary came to the throne and she issued a warrant for my arrest and I was back in the tower of London aged 68. For two long years I never gave up and my faith never failed me.

In October 1555, I was taken to Oxford to be burnt with my good friend Nicholas Ridley. We were tied, back-to-back, to the stake and the fire was lit. I cried out to encourage my friend, 'Be of good heart, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.' And together we died.

And sure enough, our deaths inspired many others to trust the Lord Jesus and to live for Him; many others would carry the light of Jesus from our candle and that light did spread through all England.

To chat about

- What do you think Bishop Latimer meant by, 'we shall this day light such a candle'?
- Do you find this true story inspiring, encouraging, strange or something else? Why?

Craft – Candle craft

- Take one of the candles and decorate it with the candle pens provided. You may want to draw Bishop Latimer on the candle.

John Bradford (1510~1555)

My name is John Bradford. I was born near Manchester and became a servant of the knight, Sir John Harrington. But God wanted me to do a much greater job: to be a preacher of the good news of Jesus! I wanted everyone to know how Jesus was crucified and died for them.

One time a man, Bishop Bonner, was speaking and the crowd were so angry with what he was saying that they became an angry mob. I was standing behind the Bishop and stood forward to speak instead of him. The crowd quietened down as I spoke to them and they left calmly and went home.

Yet, within three days of this, Queen Mary sent me to the Tower of London. Even under arrest I carried on preaching twice a day; I was so desperate that all might hear the good news of Jesus. They said of me, 'Reading, preaching and praying is all he does.' I barely ate, I did not have time to, and I slept no more than four hours a night.

Then came the night that I was to die. They took me out in the middle of the night and yet there were crowds of people waiting for me. They all said their goodbyes, many were crying and praying for me. Yet I had to wait until morning to be brought to the fire. When the time came I fell to ground and prayed before standing and walking to the fire in which I died.

To chat about

- Why do you think John Bradford did not stop preaching even though it was dangerous?
- What impresses you most about John Bradford?

Craft – Cup megaphone

- Take one of the cups on the table and decorate it with the items available.
- Take one of the strips of paper and attach it as a handle to your megaphone.
- Then, with an adult's help, take a pair of scissors and make a small hole in the bottom of the cup for a mouthpiece.