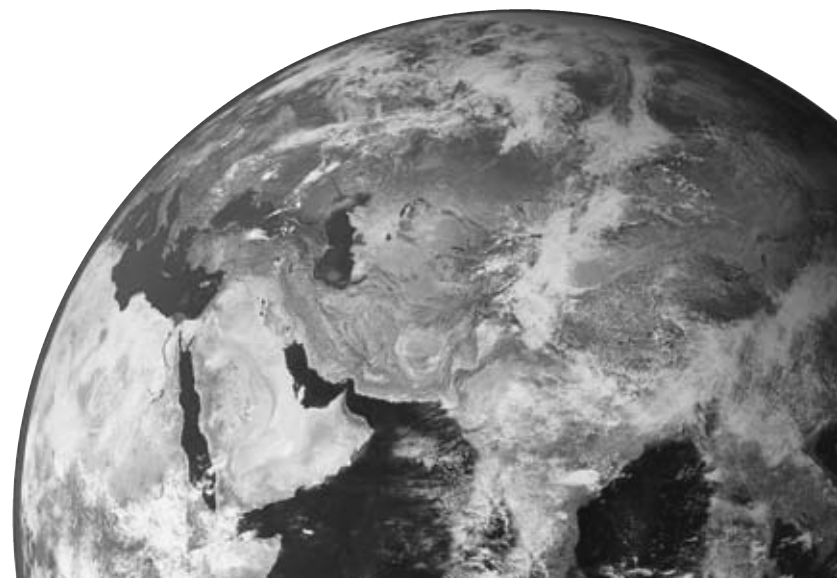


MISSION:  
~~IM~~POSSIBLE

# WEEK FOUR

God at work in the world





The Diocese of Toronto seeks to become shaped for mission and faithful to God's call to serve all in a post-Christendom context. This Mission Possible course has been provided as a resource to parishes to help people begin to think about who God is, what is the mission of God and how does church need to be shaped to respond to that call.

I strongly commend the program to you as it has been developed by Jenny and Stephen, both of whom know what it means to serve in inherited churches that seek to be shaped for mission. My hope is that this course will begin a fruitful and lasting conversation on what it means to be missional in your own context.

Yours faithfully,

The Most Reverend Colin R. Johnson  
Archbishop of Toronto  
Metropolitan of Ontario



Diocese of Toronto  
Anglican Church of Canada



Produced with the assistance of the  
**General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada**  
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## This week's homework....

Select a group(s) you see regularly.

Determine where they each individually fit on the wheel:

- Office co-workers
- Rotary members
- Running club
- Book club
- Parent organization
- Facebook friends.



## Closing prayer

Loving God, we thank you for your never failing love for us and for all that you have made. In you we live and move and have our being. Equip us to serve all those who are far from you and do not know of your love and mercy. We pray for those who have been hurt by our Christian communities, and ask that by your Holy Spirit, all people will be brought to wholeness of mind, body and spirit. We ask this in the name of the risen Lord, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

## Next week....

We are going to look at how we are called to participate in God's mission in the world. What might that begin to practically look like in our local churches?

***God's mission awaits if you choose to accept it.***

## A Note for Leaders....

Week four...the home stretch

This week's goal is to make a link between how Paul saw God at work in the world and then responded and how we are called to do the same. We will focus this week on Paul's famous encounter with the Athenians. Then we will look at some rough statistical analysis about our Canadian context, which we hope will encourage participants to see that there really is nothing new under the sun! God was at work then, and is at work now. Paul responded then and we can respond now.

## Recap

What is the *missio Dei*? \_\_\_\_\_

*Leader:* God's mission is to bring humanity and creation back into right relationship with God.

What are the 3 Rs? \_\_\_\_\_

*Leader:* Restoration, recovery, redemption.

We added a 4th R last week...what was it? \_\_\_\_\_

*Leader:* Resurrection.

What happened when Mary saw? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Leader:* She believed, experienced, testified.

## Homework!

You were asked to “see” where God is at work in people’s lives, to be a “divine detective.” What did you discover?



### Leader’s Note

Hopefully there will be stories about how the participants listened differently to their friends and co-workers and “saw” with new eyes what God might be doing in their lives.

<b>Who are our Athenians?</b>	<i>The Fringe</i>	<i>Open de-churched</i>	<i>The Non-churched</i>	<i>Closed de-churched</i>
<b>Cultural Context</b>	Christendom	Lingering Christendom	Post Christendom	
<b>How we could start to connect</b>	Engaging worship	Process evangelism (Alpha, baptism prep)	Community (connecting with theirs and the quality of ours)	

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<b>Cultural Context</b>	Christendom	Lingering Christendom	Post Christendom	Opposed to Christian faith
<b>How we could start to connect</b>	Engaging worship	Process evangelism (Alpha, baptism prep)	Community (connecting with theirs and the quality of ours)	Begin with our repentance

## Discuss

Can you think of people in your life who would find themselves in these categories?

Do you know the circumstances that took place that made that the case?

Were you ever in one of these places yourself? If so, what has drawn you closer into the community of faith that you are now in?

<b>Who are our Athenians?</b>	<i>The Fringe</i>	<i>Open de-churched</i>	<i>The Non-churched</i>	<i>Closed de-churched</i>
<b>Cultural Context</b>	Christendom			
<b>How we could start to connect</b>	Engaging worship			

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<b>Cultural Context</b>	Christendom	Lingering Christendom		
<b>How we could start to connect</b>	Engaging worship	Process evangelism (Alpha, baptism prep)		

### Leader's Note

This next passage is long and we would urge you not to cut it: resist the temptation. Here Paul addresses the Athenians on the Aeropagus. Paul has done his divine detective work: he has carefully observed what is going on in their lives, where God's fingerprints are (vv. 22–23). The Athenians, like all human beings were searching spiritually (v. 21) and because of their anxiety about forgiveness, covered their bases with a shrine to an unknown God just in case they missed something. Paul sees that and speaks into their contemporary situation. He then clearly tells them about the *missio Dei*, that God wishes to bring them back into right relationship (v. 30). The Athenians know something is wrong with this world and in their own lives, and so Paul offers God's plan of redemption, restoration and recovery.

***We are now going to spend some time with Paul. He was adept at seeing what people were really searching for and what God was doing in their lives.***

### Acts 17:16–32

<sup>16</sup>While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. <sup>17</sup>So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. <sup>18</sup>Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, “What does this babblers want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.” (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) <sup>19</sup>So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? <sup>20</sup>It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.” <sup>21</sup>Now all the Athenians and

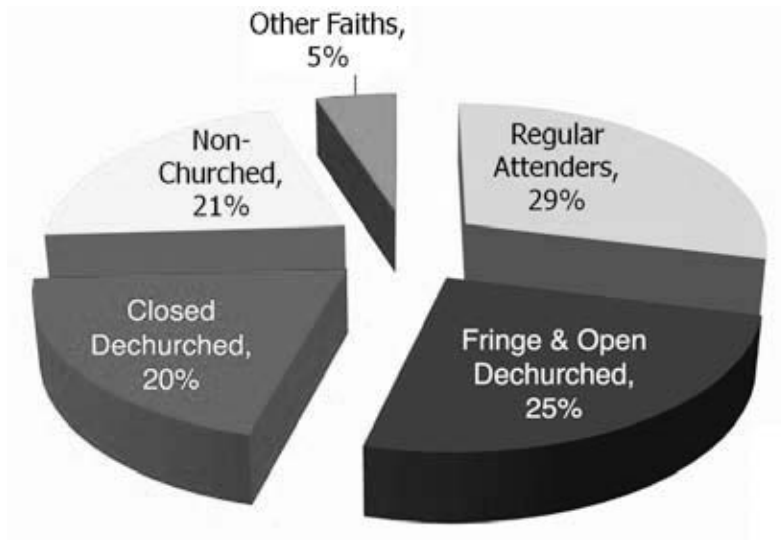
the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new. <sup>22</sup>Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. <sup>23</sup>For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, <sup>25</sup>nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. <sup>26</sup>From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, <sup>27</sup>so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. <sup>28</sup>For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we too are his offspring.’ <sup>29</sup>Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. <sup>30</sup>While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup>because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” <sup>32</sup>When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, “We will hear you again about this.” <sup>33</sup>At that point Paul left them. <sup>34</sup>But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

***We are now going to look more closely at the people in our own culture. We are doing this because we believe that God is at work in their lives and we want to serve them.***

**Leader’s Note**  
It is our suggestion that you work through the graph in its entirety before you open up to questions and discussions. Simply describe the people in the different categories and afterwards, if there is time, you can open it up to discussion. We have given you some questions to use if you wish.

<b>Who are our Athenians?</b>	<i>The Fringe</i>	<i>Open de-churched</i>	<i>The Non-churched</i>	<i>Closed de-churched</i>
<b>Cultural Context</b>				
<b>How we could start to connect</b>				

## Who are our Athenians?



Please note that this is **approximate** data taken from 2001 and represents **all** of Canada. So the exact percentages may be different in your context.

## What in the world is Paul doing?!

*(Break up into small groups if your numbers warrant and answer these questions.)*

### Discuss

Where is Paul?

(v. 19)

What is he observing?

(v. 16)

Where is he seeing God in what he is observing?

(vv. 23–24)

What is his audience really asking?

What is Paul teaching?

How did he approach each group?

(vv. 17–18)

We live in a time similar to that of Paul; our society is full of spiritual seekers, people of other faiths, the mildly curious, the disinterested and the antagonistic.

## Leader's Notes

Let's now transition from Paul and the Athenians to our own contemporary Canadian culture. Who are our Athenians, our spiritual seekers? Our contemporary post-Christian culture is not all that different from the Greek culture that Paul found himself in all those years ago. What can we learn from Paul about how to respond to God's work in the lives of those who are spiritually searching?

*As we look at "our Athenians," please do note that the statistics are approximate and obviously will differ depending on your precise context. People will also move between categories in the course of their lives. These categories are meant to simply get the conversation started about the people in our lives, not meant as a way to "label" someone.*

What these terms mean so you sound smart(er).

**Fringe:** these are people who come to the church a handful of times a year, Christmas, Easter, etc. They tend to associate themselves with your church. An effective way to draw them closer into the community of faith is through effective worship services. So that on the few times that they do come, they will have, maybe for the first time, an encounter with the living God. This may be because the sermon is relevant to their lives (maybe for the first time), they receive a warm welcome (maybe for the first time) or that the music and liturgy was uplifting (maybe for the first time) — you get the picture.

**Open de-churched:** these people do not attend church. They grew up with a church connection, probably went to Sunday school, were confirmed, but at some point in time became disconnected from the church (often when they left home). So in that sense they are now de-churched because they do not attend church. But they are open to an effective invitation to return. A classic example is the young couple who have their first baby. The new grandmother,

who attends church, asks that the baby be baptised, and the open de-churched couple says, "Okay, Mum, we'll do it." So to serve and connect with these people through process evangelism has been helpful. When the open de-churched come to the church (often for sacraments), there needs to be some way for them to learn more about Christian faith and what it means to follow Jesus — that may be effective baptism and marriage preparation and adult catechesis, the Alpha course or Christianity 101.

**Non-churched:** these are people who have never had an experience of church. They did not grow up in the church and know very little, or nothing at all, about Christian faith. They are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population and now the largest segment of the British population. These people will not walk through our church doors on a Sunday. They will not come at Christmas and they will not seek baptism for their children or wish to be married in our buildings. So they cannot be served through more effective worship or process evangelism. They can be connected with through community. We must go and be present in their communities, wherever they may be... in gyms, coffee shops, running clubs, schools and places of work. And we can connect with them by the quality of our community, by the service that they see or hear of that our Christian communities do in our local neighbourhoods.

**Closed de-churched:** like the open de-churched, these people grew up in the church. But at some point in time they were hurt by the Christian community. In the most severe cases they suffered emotional, physical or sexual abuse at the hands of a leader. At the other end of the spectrum they were simply bored out of their minds going to church all those years and now no longer see any relevance that the Christian faith has to their daily lives. They are not open to an invitation to return to church. To serve these people, the place to begin with is with acknowledging the damage that has been done and by repenting of our role in it. This is of course only the beginning.