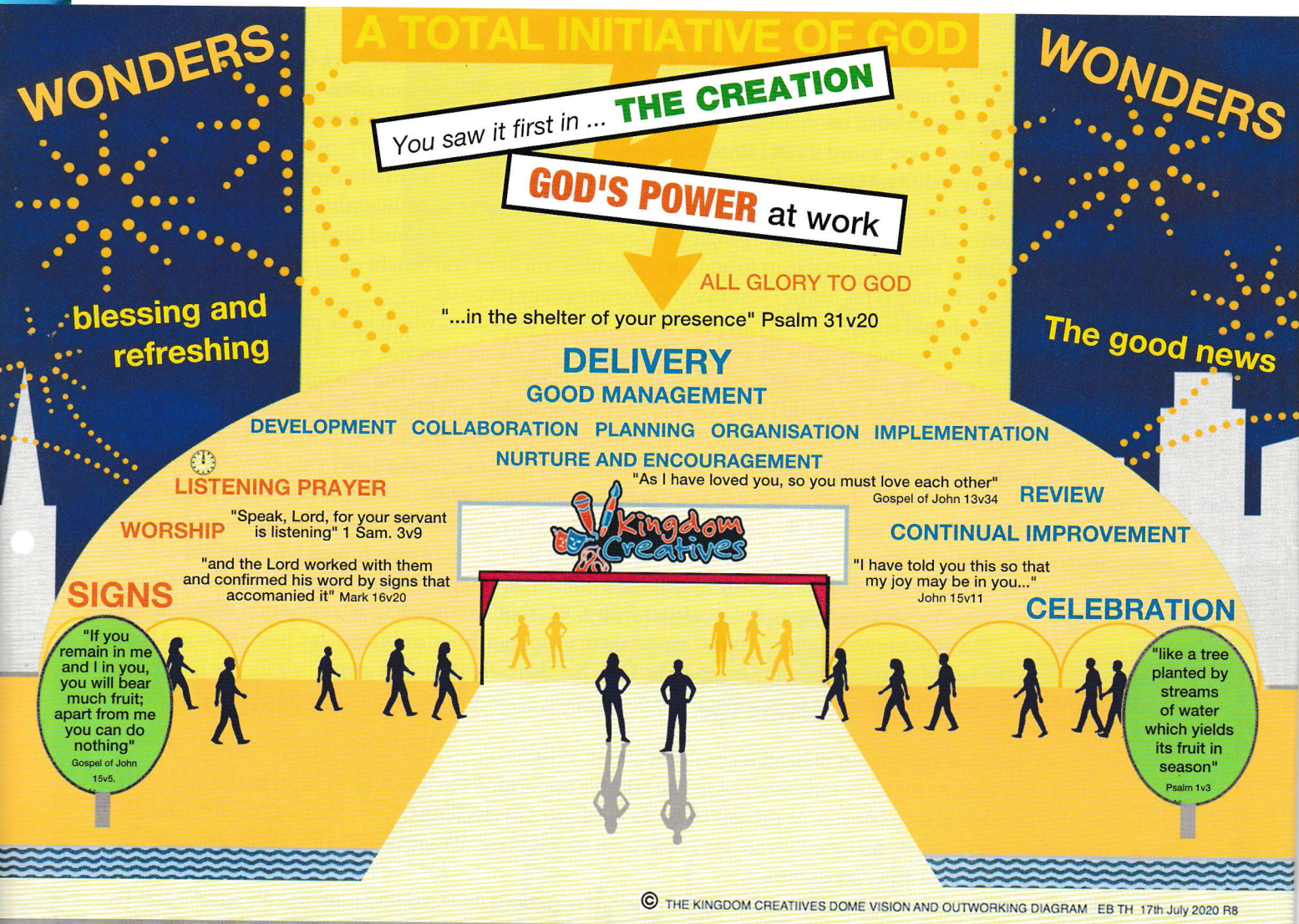


A heavenly dome over the arts

The relationship between creativity and worship is an enormous subject – so where can we begin? Erica Bebb and Tom Harper give some advice for a systematic approach.



Artistic talent is a gift from God and whoever discovers it in himself has a certain obligation: to know that he cannot waste this talent but must develop it. These rousing words from Pope John Paul II have served rather like an Olympic torch for creatives, male and female, around the world. Without wishing to meddle with semantics, there is surely a sense in which the Pontiff is hailing the significance of creativity, and creative expression, for which we can all take ownership. In the familiar words of Genesis 1:27 we settle on a beautiful discovery, that human beings were created in God's own image. We are a reflection of the Creator's delight in bringing 'some thing out of no thing'. Creativity is in our DNA. When we

create, we expand, individually and corporately.

As we consider expansion for ourselves and those we serve, we are delighted to present aspects of one Bristol arts ministry, 'Kingdom Creatives' affectionately known as 'Kic'. This is an arts Fresh Expression of church, a Christ Church Clifton initiative, amalgamated with the Bristol Arts Sphere also serving the Bristol Diocese. Since the pandemic 'Kic' has been gathering artists via Zoom to connect, grow and influence. During these unprecedented times we realised we needed a map against which we can audit, and anyone interested could identify with who we are, how we operate and what we do. God gave the provision to Tom Harper while he was

praying – the vision of the 'Dome'. For 'Kic', church happens around the project; to use an analogy, creatives get on and off the gospel train depending on the destination or project of their choice. The 'Dome' has proved valuable to leaders in demonstrating how some Christian artists naturally operate, and consequently provides a tool for mobilisation and discipleship.

Before we continue, a glance backwards into history might be useful. In 397 the Third Council of Carthage spoke of reconciliation for stage players (*histriones*)¹ who had seen the error of their ways. Lawrence Hull Stookey explains how, in the early centuries, certain groups were automatically excluded from baptism: these included actors, and circus performers. Culture



Light Pollution
 Film - Protecting Starlit Skies
 (Kic lead for films)

Domestic Violence
Human Trafficking

Mama's Kitchen
 Conservation and grow your own

Art Exhibition (Beauty in Ashes)
 Ecology and Climate Change

Diocesan Chaplain
 Christ Church Bristol

Roger Allen Enabler of Mission and Unity
 Churches together in Greater Bristol

Kingdom Creatives
 WhatsApp Prayer Group

Shropshire Retreat

Roger Bolton
 Musician and composer
 The Collect Programme

Book - The Creative Year
 the view from here
 (Eleanor) Jane Lee

Springs
 Dance Company

Kic interfaith support
 Mina Kupfermann
 4m x 3m Artwork
 Addressing antisemitism
 in the UK

Arts Festival Victoria Park Baptist Church
Bristol Healing Sphere Dr Clare Fleming

Therapeutic Art for the Homeless
 With Genesis Bath and Inhope Bristol

Emma Mould
 Concert

Parkour and Theatre
 Philip Goldney Acts Network
 (Kic input to development)

and circumstance has changed, yet, ministers today testify to an invisibility that some artists still experience.² May we continue to commend this community, so depleted by the pandemic, to each other, and, for the dynamic contributions that they bring to our churches.

For the Church, what might be the unique selling point for the arts? It could be that for an organisation that revolves around a story, the arts always speak of our shared human narrative. As we experience the art form we identify in our own lives, we resonate within the emotions, we invariably 'feel' a response.

'Philosophers have tended to neglect ... the importance of the process of experiencing art, during which the subject who experiences an art work goes through a particular kind of transformation.'³

In October 2019 we collaborated with artists of various genres for the Bristol Press Red Conference as we highlighted the global injustice of violence and abuse against women. For weeks afterwards, especially men, were expressing the depth of change in their thinking resulting from the performances by Anja Meinhardt of Justice in Motion, and the Press Red Drama *Control* written by Matthew Britton.

The 'Dome' is like a hard copy YouTube, one image flowing into the next. It's a light touch structure of 'Kic being and doing'. We invite you to walk around the Dome, reflecting on the properties, considering any value to you. We might choose to be still at the following:

- **Fruitfulness:** God exhorts us to stay close, listen and wait. The tree to the left of the dome reminds us of the potential for the Christian to bear much fruit.
- **Signs and wonders:** At 'Kic' we experience that God is first of all teaching us about the subtle signs of guidance and affirmation as we prayerfully explore the potential for a given project.

INDICATIVE THEMES PROJECTS AND COLLABORATIONS

- **Virtuoso performance:** We only do what we see our Father doing (John 5:19). We follow the conductor as we develop, deliver and review.
- **Love:** The dome represents a canopy of love; we are all experiencing some form of loss, and we seek to encourage each other creatively, mobilising our strengths to reach out with missional objectives.

This response is from an attendee of a 'Kic' therapeutic art course for clients of charities serving the vulnerable and homeless: *'Everything causes me anxiety, and I had forgotten what it's like to enjoy something instead of being panicked. I looked forward to the classes. I had a release from my mental torment and was immersed in something that gave me peace and made me feel part of the world'.*

For your perusal, we've included (above) our 'indicative themes and projects' image with examples of previous 'Kic' activities. Perhaps a project sparks an interest for your ministry, how might you transition this thought to a reality?

We give the last word to the Right Reverend Dr Lee Rayfield, Bishop of Swindon, whose support of our work has blessed everyone involved:

'Creativity is a tremendous gift of God with the capacity to open possibilities, alter attitudes and change behaviours'.

We pray for new creative horizons for you. If we can serve in any way please contact us:

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Tom Harper MBE is a 'Kingdom Creatives' Steering Group member. He was formerly a Director for Constructing Excellence and co-leader (with his wife Jenny) of the True Vine Prayer Fellowship.

References

- ¹ Colledge, C (2018) From a talk at a 'Kic' gathering at former Colston Hall, Bristol.
- ² Hull Stookey, L (1982) *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church*, Abingdon Press.
- ³ Cho Sunwoo Thesis/Dissertation 2012: Cognitive Transformation as a Value of Art: A Study of the Cognitive Value of Art.