

Effective Evangelism and Community Engagement



EFFECTIVE EVANGELISM AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

Matthew 9.35-38

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love mercy? and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8

The Church of England has five 'Marks of Mission'. They are:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Just as a pair of scissors has two blades by which it functions, the mission of the Church has two key elements: evangelism and loving service shown toward our communities. The first involves proclaiming the Good News that gives hope to all; the second is our role of loving service shown to our communities – by praying for and living out the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven and so transforming unjust structures of society and caring for creation in all its forms.



EVANGELISM

The words of our creeds, 'I believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic church...' remind us that that the Church is called to be apostolic. 'Apostle' means 'someone who has been sent' and occurs eighty times in the New Testament where it means a 'delegate' of Jesus Christ and a 'messenger' of the Gospel. So as Apostles we are also Evangelists – sent to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to today's world.

Just as the Father sent the Son to the world, so too the Church is 'apostolic' – sent to the world to be a delegate and messenger of and for Christ.

The Good News is both 'good' and 'news'. It is a message of hope that says, 'Christ is King (when all other kings, agents, and institutions are fallible) and that, 'Life with Jesus is better than life without Jesus.' It isn't triumphalist or unrealistic about the struggles and sufferings that are common to creation. Nor is it forceful – the ultimate picture of the Gospel is the willed powerlessness of Christ on the cross forgiving all humanity. It is vital that local churches nurture a culture in which all members of the church, the Body of Christ, recognise they are 'apostles' and equipped and encouraged to share the Gospel.

In the manual for 'Leading your Church into Growth', the Bishop's Advisor on Church Growth and Evangelism in the Diocese of Leeds, Rev. Robin Gamble, writes that evangelism is more about asking questions than it is presenting answers. Robin says that there are four questions that we can begin with to help our evangelism. We can ask those seekers and individuals we encounter in the service of our community:



1. **Who are you?** This question is asked because God knows and loves each of us...and most people are quite good at talking about themselves.
2. **Where are you with God?** If we know people (we might know friends and family, parents at our church toddler group, the person who comes regularly to the food bank, that couple who use our hall for Slimming World who you have bumped into many times, the spouse of someone who comes to church but they themselves don't, etc.) we might ask them where they are with God. Do they have faith, is it much faith or little? Have they ever given it any thought? Have they prayed a fairly hopeless prayer when they were in need? Did it help them and give them some hope?
3. **Why don't you...?** Based on how they answered the second question you can ask them, 'Why don't you...?' Why don't you come to the Alpha course that begins in a couple of months? Why don't you come out for a coffee with me, I would like to talk to you some more about this? Why don't you pop along on a Sunday – this week is our All Age service and I think you and the kids would love it. Why don't you keep coming to Food Bank anyway, you don't have to believe in God to be welcomed here.
4. **Can I pray for you?** It may not always be appropriate to ask the fourth question, but sometimes it will be. Some people may not want you to pray for them, some people may be glad of prayer, but want you to do it at another time and place, others will be happy for you to pray for them there and then.

When we ask these questions in a gentle manner and motivated by love and a desire to share the hope we have, we can then listen to the answers, and often find that Christ is already at work in the hearts of those we are speaking to. And if we're nervous about what to say or pray, relax, breathe deeply and ask God to give you courage and wisdom in that moment, and then speak kindly from your heart.

We may perceive or discern that someone is open to an invitation to a church event or activity. If so, is that a special service such as Christmas, All Souls or Mothering Sunday etc? Or maybe established church services are not what needs offering in which case an invitation to a fresh expression or new worshipping community may be more fitting. To find out more about setting up a New Worshipping Community do see the booklet for that or be in touch with the Mission Team to find out more. Of course this is not an either or invitation but a 'both and'.

SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES

‘Over the past decade, the contribution that the Church of England makes to society through its social action has increased, reflecting an increase in the demand and expectation for it. At the same time, church attendance in the country has continued to decline; by most key metrics, attendance at Church of England services fell by between 15% and 20% from 2009-2019. This is the paradox facing the Church of England in 2020: the national church of a nation which is increasingly reliant on its social action and yet less and less spiritually connected to it.’

From ‘Growing Good: Growth, Social Action and Discipleship in the Church of England’ by Hannah Rich

There has been a change in how the church serves local communities – a move away from ‘doing things to people’ to working with people. This results in long-term change rather than a ‘sticky plaster’ that covers the symptoms but doesn’t address the cause. It also encourages everyone’s and every group’s autonomy and responsibility.

Questions for churches to consider that want to grow in serving their communities might be:

- ‘We cannot do everything, but we can do something: what are the needs of our community?’
- ‘What would Jesus do and where would Jesus be found in our community?’
- ‘Who would Jesus go out to and sit and listen to? Whose hand would he reach out to?’

FOUR KEY VALUES UNDERPIN THE DIOCESAN VISION OF LIVING GOD’S LOVE:

- Imagination
- Joy
- Generosity
- Courage



Serving our communities requires all four of these values. We have to be imaginative in how, as a church community, we can engage with the community outside of the walls of the church.

Our service needs to aspire to be full of joy – a reflection of the joy that God has in being with us. It is not to be a burden or duty or endless rota of activity that weighs us down.

Our service needs to be both generous and courageous as we seek to consider the needs of those in local community and globally, and then to take action. We may be called to venture out into new places and new spheres of life, but we do so knowing God is with us and we seek his courage.

Are we generous enough to lay aside our own wants in order to put the needs of others first? Do we have the courage to prioritize the needs of others to the point of self-sacrifice as Jesus did in his ministry?

“We entreat you, brothers and sisters, as earnestly as we are able, to have charity, not only for one another, but also for those who are outside the church”

Saint Augustine, Psalm 32



GROWING THROUGH SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES

There follows a 'tick-box exercise'. This tool is designed to be something that can be a conversation starter in a PCC meeting. If you spend 15 minutes going through the questions you will be able to identify some opportunities for Christian outreach.

Why not create a 'working group' to turn these opportunities and concerns into actions that will make a difference?

Don't forget to be in touch with the Flourishing Churches team – we may have some advice and resources available that will make your mission and ministry a bit easier.



TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- The GRA:CE Project Report
<https://cuf.org.uk/what-we-do/the-grace-project>
 - Liveability & Church Urban Fund
<https://cuf.org.uk/resources/fullness-of-life-together-reimagining-christian-engagement-in-our-communities>
 - Faith in the City
<https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/books/9780715143261/faith-in-the-city>
 - Community organisers
<https://www.corganisers.org.uk/what-is-community-organising/>
 - Citizens UK
<https://www.citizensuk.org/>
 - Setting God's People Free
<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/renewal-reform/setting-gods-people-free>
- "We don't believe something by merely saying we believe it, or even when we believe that we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true."**
Dallas Willard, 'Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ'

EVANGELISM - GOING OUT	AN URGENT NEED	REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT	GOOD	EXCELLENT
Our church has regular events or occasions that allow the congregation to be encouraged to invite non-church attenders to come along to (typically there are some kind of social event, but can be regular events that connect the church with those in the wider community such as coffee mornings, toddler groups, etc.)				
Our church is clear in its invitation to those who are not regular attenders about how and when they can come to services that are conducive to guests (Christmas, Easter, regular guest services, etc.) or newcomers; maybe a Fresh Expression				
Members of the congregation are regularly encouraged to invite others to events in the church				
In our church evangelism is not just an activity for ordained or licensed ministers				
There is an opportunity in the church for members to consider how to grow in evangelism. This could be through training in the church or an invitation to training offered by the diocese or deanery.				

EVANGELISM - INVITING IN	AN URGENT NEED	REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT	GOOD	EXCELLENT
Our church makes guests at 'life events' (occasional offices such as baptisms, weddings, etc.) not only welcome, but made to feel special.				
Our church has regular 'welcome events' (meals, etc.) where those who are recently new to church can get to know others and feel a part of the church family				
Our church is keen to welcome people of all walks of life and all ages to our different gatherings. We hope to make those who are not yet Christians feel welcomed and included, and that they would easily relate to what is happening in the church.				

EVANGELISM - ENCOURAGING GROWTH	AN URGENT NEED	REQUIRES IMPROVEMENT	GOOD	EXCELLENT
In our church there are regular 'seeker courses' (Alpha, Start, Christianity Explored, Pilgrim, etc.) – at least once a year				
There is a clear process that would help those who want to grow in faith to take necessary steps on that journey (this used to be known as 'catechism' in the church and can or should involve teaching that leads to steps like baptism, reception to Holy Communion and Confirmation. How this happen will differ slightly in different traditions.)				

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

AN URGENT
NEED

REQUIRES
IMPROVEMENT

GOOD

EXCELLENT

We have current examples of how our church is regularly and frequently 'present' in our communities and visible to those who don't attend Sunday worship.

The church is clear and open about the Christian faith when working with and for others within the wider community.

Our church challenges issues of injustice and inequality in our community and the wider world.

Our church works with other faiths and community groups on local initiatives that make our community a better place to live.

Our church is actively involved with other community partners e.g., schools, parish councils, housing associations, etc.

Our church consults and learns the need of the wider community and of the world

Our church works to make the church buildings and its life environmentally sustainable.

Our church helps those in need (food, clothing, education, counselling.)

Our church challenges the congregation to think about how their discipleship is expressed through action – and we give them opportunities to serve inside and outside the church.