

# Equipping for Rural Mission Facilitator Guide

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# Equipping for Rural Mission Facilitator Guide

## Understanding your local congregation and the community you serve

*'Don't be afraid little flock. Your Father is delighted to give you the kingdom.'*  
*Luke 12:32*

## Introduction

Equipping for Rural Mission is designed to enable any rural church, however small or remote, to develop a plan for community action. It could be used...

- As part of a Mission Action Planning (MAP) process
- By a particular congregation, Fresh Expression or other group
- As part of a broader programme with a group of churches working together.

We recommend that you run the programme over a six week period. Each session requires two to four hours, and session three in particular should not be rushed. There is some homework and research between session 2 and 3 so there needs to be a gap at this point.

It has the potential to involve the whole congregation but could be initiated by a small group, with the whole congregation brought in at a later stage to finalise the plan.

Equipping for Rural Mission aims to enable your church's mission through listening, investigating, reflecting, planning and acting. The programme begins by helping you to gather information about your church or churches and their participation in the wider community. You listen, applying spiritual discernment and prayer, then carefully decide what you might do next, or change, because of what you hear or discover.

You may be hoping for specific change in your church. This toolkit aims to help your church take action towards accomplishing a vision or dream. We believe that all churches, no matter how small, should and can have a plan to develop local mission and activity.

This toolkit assumes that:

- The church exists because of God's mission in the world
- Your church is committed to that mission and to God
- You want to make mission a priority
- You are looking for help to be more deliberate in that mission and to remain honest and systematic in reviewing what you go on to do
- You will reflect on how you are doing as a church and in connection with community
- You will revisit the process to further develop your part in God's mission.

Those engaging in mission in rural communities may face significant challenges:

- Church leaders are likely to have responsibility for several churches and may not live in the community
- Responsibility for running rural churches often rests with local lay people
- Capacity available in small churches is varied: some will have financial reserves and lots

- of volunteers, but others may be less well off in terms of money or people
- New residents and their varied occupations can change the character of a place
- Expensive housing leads to dislocation of young families and older people away from their key networks of support
- Tourism may impact on the availability of property and other services which are used only during a limited season
- Poverty and inequality are as present in rural locations as in towns and cities
- Some church members may have a deep seated resistance to change
- Past success, or failure can inhibit change or development in a church.

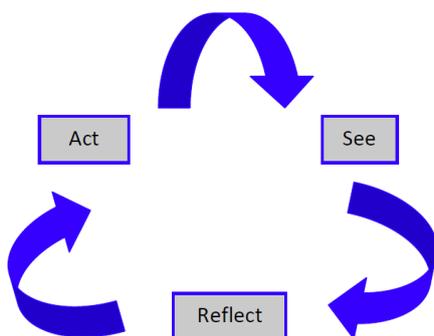
Given the practical realities of life in rural communities, here are some suggestions of how you might implement the programme in your context.

- Don't try to shoehorn Equipping for Rural Ministry into your normal church programme; invest quality time and resources in the process.
- Identify a particular individual (or even a small group) as the leader / facilitator of the process; this person does not need to be the minister. They do need to be organised, have the confidence to lead exercises and the perseverance to ensure the entire programme is completed.
- If a lay person (or people) is selected to lead the sessions your church leader should endorse this process. This includes giving the facilitator scope to plan any agreed changes and also a willingness to be led by them at certain points.
- Encourage the whole church to join in at key points so you can share the plan and implement it together.
- Agree a timetable for using the toolkit but build in some flexibility: don't go so slowly that it stagnates. Equally, don't try and tackle everything at once.
- Remember that every church, however small, has assets which include gifts, skills, time and interests of church members. These can all be utilised in your church's mission.

As you move through the programme, be open and respond to what God is doing: in your steering group, your church and your wider community.

## How the Toolkit Works

The Equipping for Rural Ministry toolkit is a cyclical process:



You **See**, looking at your church and its context.

Next you **Reflect** on what you saw and what you believe.

Finally you decide how you will **Act** in the light of your reflections.

The toolkit is a series of simple exercises to do this over four sessions for two to four hours each.

- Session 1: Appreciate your church**
- Session 2: Investigate your community context**
- Session 3: Deliberate over what you hear**
- Session 4: Make a plan**

The sessions contain exercises that encourage you to think about your church and the community it is in. By the end of the process you will have a clearer picture of your church and your community connections and context. You will have thought and prayed about this and decided where you need to make changes.

The whole course ideally takes place over six weeks but you may like to do more exercises or use more time to research and explore options. The timetable for the sessions is flexible to suit you and your planning group but Session 1 and Session 2 can be done over a couple of weeks. You might choose to do them on two consecutive weeks or days, or even in one day. Then have a gap of a couple of weeks to do any research and perhaps survey a little wider, and so the facilitator or others can prepare a presentation for Session 3. Then share what was found with the whole church, or a bigger group, in advance of meeting together in Sessions 3 and 4. Session 3 and Session 4 should be done soon after each other. It's up to you how you manage the time and the numbers.

Where churches are part of a team or church partnership there is opportunity to combine resources, share the listening exercises and discuss what you find.

Work through the checklist on the next page and agree a timetable for your programme.

### Checklist for a Church Using 'Equipping for Rural Mission'

	ACTION	CHECK
1	Read through the toolkit thoroughly to familiarise yourself with how Equipping for Rural Mission works.	
2	At a church council meeting (or your denominational equivalent) discuss and agree how to use this resource. Appoint a facilitator or small leadership group. Discuss who to approach to be participants on the course or invite expressions of interest from within the church congregation.	
3	Decide... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your venue</li> <li>• The programme start date</li> <li>• The date by which you will aim to produce your action plan</li> </ul>	
4	Launch Equipping for Rural Mission in your church(es): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline the programme and explain what you hope to achieve.</li> <li>• Outline key dates and explain how and when you would like people to be involved; make it clear they are vital to the process!</li> <li>• Distribute the booklets or the 'To get you thinking' questions.</li> </ul>	
5	Plan and prepare Sessions 1 and 2.	
6	Facilitate <b>Session 1: Appreciate your church</b>	

7	Facilitate <b>Session 2: Investigate your community context.</b>	
8	Prepare and circulate your report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with those conducting further research</li> <li>• Summarise the results and findings of Sessions 1 and 2</li> <li>• Circulate the report to wider church members</li> <li>• Remind members about Session 3</li> </ul>	
9	Plan your meeting for Session 3.	
10	Facilitate <b>Session 3: Deliberate over what you've heard and seen.</b>	
11	After Session 3 revise the summary and add new material from your discussion. Note the priorities that emerge.	
12	<b>Pray</b> individually, as a group and as a church.	
13	Facilitate <b>Session 4: Make a Plan</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alert to what God might saying, draft your action plan in consultation with key church members. Identify... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Possible actions rising from the priorities</li> <li>○ An appropriate timeframe in which to implement your actions When could the actions could be undertaken?</li> <li>○ Existing activities that might need to be stopped in order for new opportunities to develop</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
14	Continue to share and discuss your draft with stakeholders. Edit if necessary.	
15	Finalise your action plan. Share with and gain approval from your church council or equivalent or from the wider church community. Is your plan realistic in your current circumstances? Can you sustain the effort required? Edit if necessary.	
16	Decide where and when you will review your plan.	
17	Put your plan into action!	

## Advice and Suggestions for Facilitators

*Lord, help us in our weakness and inadequacy to understand the ways in which we can relate Your story to our communities in sensitive speaking, compassionate thinking and helpful action. Give us open hearts to ponder how we might help those around us understand who You are and the love You have for them. Lead us beyond angry preaching and exclusive gatherings into a demonstration of Your kingdom that is inclusive, loving and welcoming. Help us to stand up for the excluded, the forgotten and the poor. Let us be people of welcome and embrace. Amen.*

Malcolm Duncan, 'Kingdom Come: the local church as a catalyst for social change' ISBN: 978-8542-47988

- Be confident you can lead if you have been selected to do so. Some exercises may require you to lead people who normally are your leaders within the church setting.
- Encourage healthy disagreement. When this is on issues and not personal this helps people to think about what is important to them and to others.
- There are likely to be times when emotions run high; we feel strongly about things that are important to us. If you value your church you are likely to feel emotional about it.

- Build enough time into your sessions to allow a debrief after group exercises or to discuss things any issues of concern.
- If you are the *sole* leader in the process – especially if you are a lay person – try to find support for yourself. Your options might include someone from another local church, or a spiritual adviser or mentor who has the time to support you while you lead the process.
- Keep in mind the big picture of why you and the group are using the toolkit and regularly remind each other of the reasons why the church are following this process.
- Try to lead in a way that is sensitive to what is going on spiritually in your group even if it upsets your planned programme in some way.
- *Put the brakes on specific plans being made too soon after you have circulated the summary of information from Sessions 1 and 2. Give everyone time to reflect, to comment and pray. This will allow all church members to feel that they will own the plan, once made.*
- Between the start and Session 3 allow people to contribute their comments or concerns anonymously. Collect these together and let everyone know how they will be shared. Emphasise that anonymous contributions enable the groups to reflect on **what** was said not **who** might have said it.
- Enable members to comment or respond if they are unable to attend the group event in Session 3.
- Partner with other churches to provide a crèche or children’s programme for occasions when you want to encourage maximum attendance from those in your church with young families.

## Guidance for Working with Groups

- Draw up rules for the day: confidentiality; do say what you think but focus on constructive and avoid personal criticism.
- Encourage everyone to contribute and manage this actively. Hold some people back to give others opportunity to interact and reflect. Your role as leader needs to encourage less powerful personalities and/or people with no position of power to have the opportunity to comment; some of these people may be commenting publicly for the first time. This may be especially important for people from the same family or longstanding friends where one person tends to talk for all.
- If there are two of you leading group work, one person should lead the exercise overseeing the tasks and the other ‘watch the room’ to monitor how people appear to be feeling and interacting. The facilitator monitoring should interrupt where they feel an observation or question will enable people if needed or give insights directly to the task leader.
- If a participant is critical of a person rather than their view, point out that everyone has different and valid perspectives and we need to listen and reflect on all the points made.
- Encourage anyone with strong feelings to take some time to reflect on what made them upset or angry. If hurt or anger expressed relates to longstanding situations then maybe action is needed, and healing or conflict resolution may need to be your priority before allow more directly missional priorities to develop.

## Facilitating and Using the Toolkit

1. Build community within your church as well as beyond it. Encourage each another.
2. Don't let the size of your church or the age of your congregation make you defensive or feel inferior. Be the church where you are.
3. If you need help, ask for help.
4. Be realistic and manage expectations to avoid disappointment.
5. Encourage freedom for the Church to try things, for example, suggesting a pilot for a defined period.
6. Join groups as a local church which help you look outward locally. Allow your outward focus to be renewed by this contact.
7. Take up the offers made by participants or explain to them why it is not possible.
8. Get feedback about what you do and be prepared to take criticism graciously so that you can learn from your actions.
9. Power plays and old conflicts can become noticeable as you try to plan and implement changes.
10. Encourage one another to be transformed. Don't tolerate unloving behaviour. Practice forgiveness. Practice repentance.
11. Encourage prayer and prayerfulness.
12. Where something seems to be done the way it is because of 'common sense' be prepared to ask, 'why?' [Think for example of John 21:6 - 'Cast your net on the other side' Jesus words to skilled fishermen.]
13. Allow God to be mysterious and to disturb you sometimes.
14. Use the skills and interests among church members rather than feel you have to stick with traditional church activities and programmes.
15. It is hard to listen if you haven't been heard. Listening carefully to others can take longer than we expect and use energy.

## General References

**Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre** website: [www.germinate.net](http://www.germinate.net)

**Resourcing Rural Ministry: Practical Insights for Mission** Simon Martin with Caroline Hewlett, Rona Orme and Becky Payne Edited by Jill Hopkinson (BRF) ISBN 978-0857462626

**Healthy Churches' Handbook, a process for revitalizing your church** Robert Warren (CHP) ISBN 9780715142820

**Seeds in Holy Ground** – a Workbook for Rural Churches Ed. By Jill Hopkinson  
ISBN 978-0955135804

**Presence** – a workbook to help promote and sustain an effective Christian presence in villages (The Methodist Church) ISBN 978-1858522678

**Rural Visitors** – A Parish Workbook for Welcoming Visitors to the Country Church ISBN 978-095407660

## Optional pre-meeting questionnaire

The table on the next page is designed to encourage participants to ask themselves, and each other, important questions about the role of their church in its own and its wider community. We suggest you ask participants to do this ahead of Session 1 and to bring their answers with them or hand them in beforehand so you can collate them (offering anonymity). You could give out the participant workbooks in advance or just photocopy the next page.

Alternatively, you could use these questions in session 1 if time allows.

You could get a bigger picture by asking church members that are not expecting to come to the session, to complete the questionnaire. Or ask some of the questions yourself in conversation with both longstanding and newer members.

If the church has worked with trainees, interns or other workers who have left in the last couple of years, ask them for their answers and comments.

Collate and summarise the answers you receive so you can report on this in session 1. The answers should also form part of your summary report of Session 1, circulated in advance of Session 3: *deliberate over what you hear*.

Notice what the more difficult questions were and which questions produced multiple different answers. What might this tell you? Try not to directly quote people who are easily identified by their turn of phrase.

## *To get you thinking: key questions for your church*

The following questions are to ask yourself and each other about the role of your church in its own and its wider community. Be as honest as you can in your answers and if you are unsure of the answer say so. Be free to include what you think/do as an individual.

The facilitator may ask you to answer these questions before the beginning of the Equipping for Rural Mission programme and hand it in to be collated or bring it in with you to the first session.

1. What do we offer to the local community?	
2. Who benefits and how?	
3. What is the focus of our church?	
4. What informs our prayers / intercessions?	
5. What are our assets?	
6. Are these assets used by others, as well as by our church members?	
7. What are new things are we doing?	
8. We have we stopped doing? Why?	
9. Where are we growing in our church?	
10. Where are we declining in our church?	
11. Who has come to faith and how do we support them?	
12. What do we do to help new people feel welcome and to belong?	
13. What is the best supported thing that happens at our church?	
14. What might this tell us about our enthusiasms and those of local people?	

## Guidance for Leading Session Exercises

The following is designed to help you facilitate the exercises used during the sessions.

### Session 1: Appreciate Your Church

*Note: You don't have to do all the exercises. We recommend you do the warm up, exercise 2 and 5, and at least one of the other exercises.*

Appreciation involves celebrating, complementing, comprehending and also critically looking at something. Avoid this becoming too dismal. Don't let people get away with 'we are all old people' i.e. we are not worth much/we can't do much - this is *not* a godly way of thinking.

Don't allow participants to get stuck on things like "if we had a million pounds/more young people/a better building" but encourage them to focus on what they do have.

#### *Warm up*

*You will need post-it notes in three different colours, and pens. It could also be done as an open discussion.*

Using a different colour post-it for each question, ask participants to jot down their answers to the following questions:-

- **If our church was an animal** what animal would it be?
- **If our church was a vehicle** what vehicle would it be?
- If you have **another image of our church**, what is it?

Ask participants *not* to discuss with each other as they answer the questions. Be available to help anyone who is uncertain about the task. This may mean having some examples ready, e.g.

- Our church is like a group of roosting birds because we talk together regularly but we don't have much to do with others who not like us
- Our church is like a vintage car because it looks great but it's not going anywhere fast.
- Our church is like an ointment because we heal the wounds of community strife.

Invite everyone to post their thoughts on the large sheet of paper or flip-chart. Each participant in turn should add theirs, reading out **one** key thing they have written. They should also each briefly explain why they made that choice. Listen to each other in turn just allowing a repeat of what was said if people didn't hear. It is vital that the group do not challenge or criticise people's suggestions at this point. Gather and record the results and allow a short time of reflection on the responses.

This exercise may feel a bit difficult to begin with if people are bit nervous and slow to warm to it. It is designed to help participants reflect and think more freely. You may need to encourage some people to take part – they may feel vulnerable. Some answers may help to break the ice but also may be profound in what they reveal, so try not to dismiss anything even if it makes people laugh!

## *Exercise 1: Angel of the church*

You will need:

- *Images of angels - have on display a wide range of images of angels, ideally twice as many as there are people present. Search the Internet for different images and / or use Christmas cards, reproductions from art galleries, cartoons or personal drawing*
- *Large pieces of paper or a flip chart/board*
- *Notepaper, pens and pencils.*

This exercise draws on creative and intuitive skills. Make sure everyone has paper and pen to make notes.

The exercise is based on the letters in Revelation 2 and 3 from John to the Angels of Churches who were all shown that change was needed. Each message ends in the same way...

***'Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.'***

Explain that they will be asked to explore the Angel of their own Church. Their church isn't just what they are like and how they act as individual people, but **who they are as a group and how they act together**. It follows that there is also a way they could become something new together.

### ***Part 1***

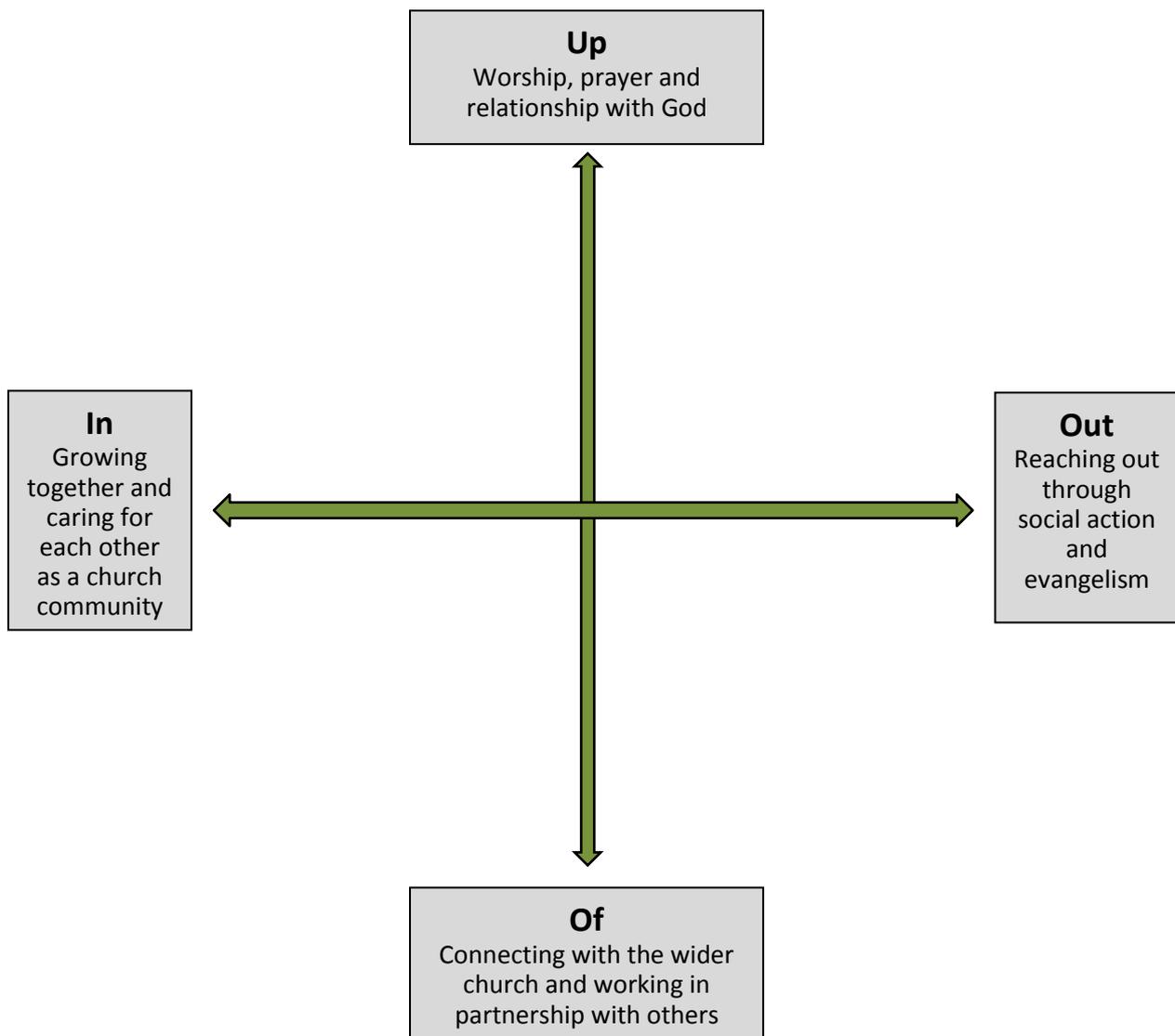
Circulate and view all the images, and invite participants to **choose the one they are individually drawn to which represents the church as they feel it is now**. Ask them to think through how this image speaks to them here and now. They then show and explain their choice. The rest of the group is not expected to agree or disagree, but simply to help get a meaning from that person. This requires patience - and good management control from the facilitator - so no-one gets words 'put into their mouth'.

### ***Part 2***

Invite participants to repeat the exercise but **this time they should choose an image that reflects their hopes, dreams and prayers for what they as a church should become ... how to be church together, but better**. Again reflect and then in turn they should be invited to share their thoughts.

Make sure you record the feedback for using in Session 3.

## Exercise 2: Your church's Axis



Ask participants to read the boxes and thinking about their church, mark on each axis a line **where they rate the church currently** for the four features described. A high value is closer to the box. Then ask them to plot with a cross or in a different colour **where their church hopes and intends to be**, and think about what might help to achieve this.

Encourage participants to *think about why* they have rated the church where they have. Why is one feature stronger and another weaker? Is there an imbalance? A high score on 'In' and low on 'Out' may mean you are just a clique? If you doing well on 'Out' but not on 'In' is there a danger of burn out? If you are low on 'Up' are you just a social club? If you are low on 'Of', could you make better use of resources be working with others?

Bring this information together and discuss what you have said as a group. Remind people that you are doing this exercise in a spirit of openness and with the desire for a healthier church. Take time to listen to each other carefully in turn, reflecting on what has been plotted and listening and recording each person's key thought(s).

Encourage positive *and* negative comments from each person reflecting on any feature or activity people refer to. Try to limit defensive reaction or argument. Don't let anyone be dismissed because they say something critical. Encourage careful rephrasing of critical comment so no church member or leader is left feeling the criticism is aimed at them personally.

Some people may find it especially hard to say anything critical about a church they have been committed to for years, without feeling disloyal. There may be people who find negative comments hard to hear and may be inclined to take them personally. Avoid letting this emotional response deflect you. Is there any consensus about where they feel they are now and why? Where would they like to be and what could be lost or added to achieve that?

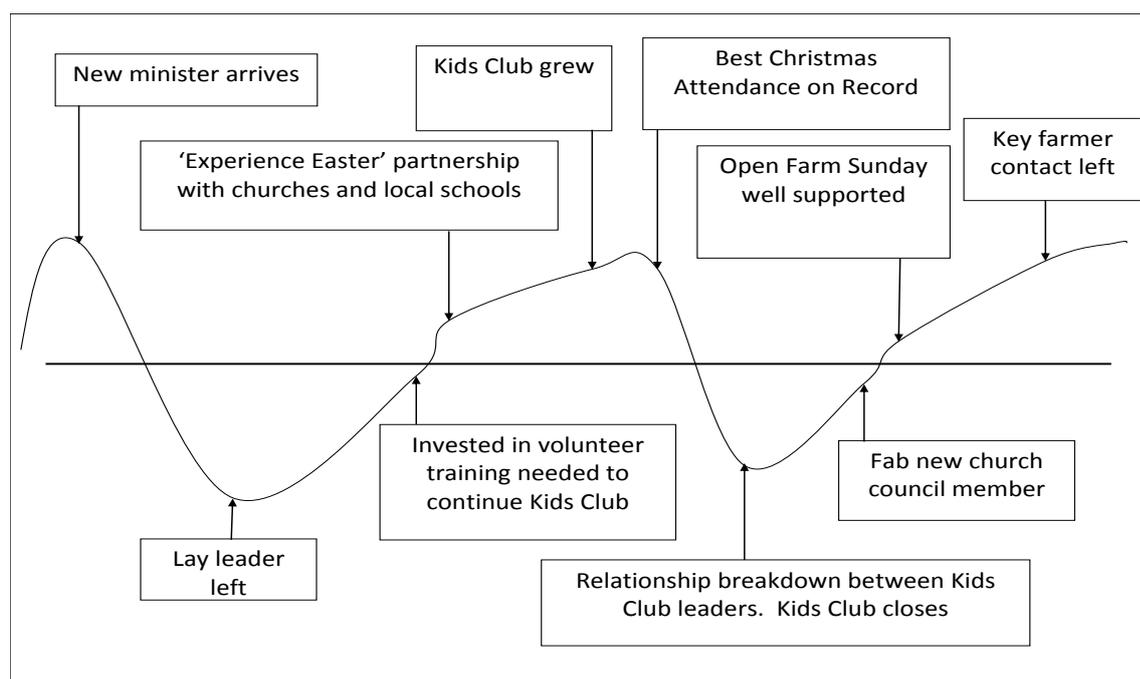
**Limitations:** This tool may bring up levels of honesty that people could find hurtful. There will be times where this may bring to the surface things people have thought but not tackled for a long time. Conversely, it participants may not manage to be critical so scores are very similar for each axis. If this is the case, ask people to look at the axis again as if under a magnifying glass to contrast them a bit more and then discuss what differences this then shows. The strengths or weaknesses highlighted may need to be reflected on later in Sessions 3 and 4.

**Advantages:** This tool can give help people who are loyal to their church a way to offer their sense of what is good and what is not so good about it. Sometimes something everyone has been thinking but no-one has had the courage to say may surface from this exercise. It can bring people together around the principle of wanting to make the church better/healthier, than it is.

### *Exercise 3: 5 Year Timeline Example & Guidance*

*You will need a whiteboard or flipchart and pens; or pens and several sheets of paper.*

Invite the group as a whole to discuss and compile a time line, to reflect their views of events, activity, good news, bad news, highlights, happenings in their church **over the last 5 years** - the highs above the line and the lows below. Example below.



If this is really difficult to do, what might this be telling us about the last 5 years? Are we trapped in nostalgia? Are they always working hard to avoid changing anything? If they are instinctively reaching back much further into the past for the high points, what does that tell you? Try to find something that has been worthy of a high point in the last 5 years. Likewise, what do recent lows tell us? Has the loss of key staff had an effect during this time period? Has a move in or out of the area of significant lay people affected their volunteer resources? Ask participants to demonstrate what effect this kind of activity has had on their church's timeline - positively and negatively.

Include different generations' perspectives, and - if you can - the perspective of people from different areas of work. Include those who study and those who are retired. In some places a shorter length of time than 5 years may work better. Be flexible in your approach.

**Secondary Exercise** - you could do a second time line focusing on 'church and community engagement'. This can be useful where churches have had an initiative which has now ended. It can be important to get people's fears and grievances discussed in the open.

Who emerge as the key local people in the area and why? If they can usefully be approached, what do they think has happened that was good or bad for area? And why?

**Limitations:** this exercise can lead to nostalgia over past glories or missed opportunities, rather than being creative in current context. It will potentially give less ordered information, and there is always the chance opinions vary strongly especially where something sits above or below the line and produces conflict. We all have selective memories, and history is always being rewritten, so handle this as best you can - perhaps taking care how you interpret it and circulate it later. If you need to, resist making one agreed line and offer alternatives from different perspectives, e.g. retired people, working age and school age. The exercise brings out individual contributors' opinions on how you have been doing as a church and how are you doing as a community.

**Advantages:** the group can hear what other people feel is important. Key local 'heroes' can be identified during this exercise as a potential resource for you in the future. Having a time to focus on the high points should help show why you could risk something new. Having time to focus on low points can be a motivator for change or a useful reality check.

#### ***Exercise 4: Reflect on and discuss the questionnaire responses***

If you asked participants to complete the questionnaire 'To get you thinking' before the first session, this may be a good point to discuss responses; or if they were handed in, to report on some of the key findings and lead a discussion on issues that have arisen. Alternatively or in addition this could be part of session 3.

If it has not already been completed, and if time allows, you could ask participants to complete the questions at this point or after session 1.

## ***Exercise 5: Finding solutions - what could your church become?***

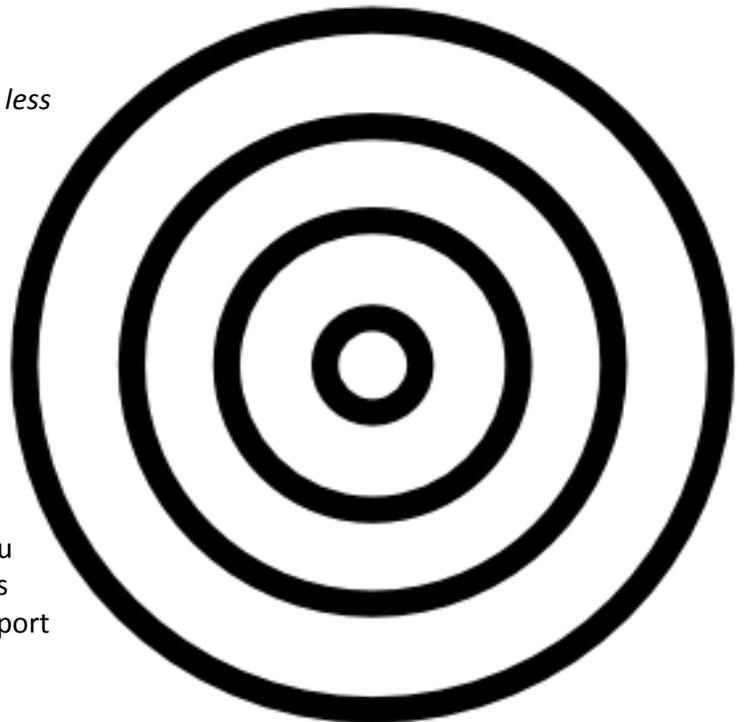
*You will need: concentric circles drawn on a flip chart page.*

Help the group to gather what was said in the previous exercises and briefly summarise. From this you may be able to identify one of the main things expressed that they want the church to become. Focus on using the comment most repeated, for example, 'that the church becomes more representative of all ages'.

If one key thing doesn't emerge easily then you can draw a series of concentric circles and place the agreed key ideas on the outer ring boundary. Allow each person in turn to move one idea one space in. After each person has a turn this should narrow down the choice to one idea which moves into the centre circle. If more ideas make it to the centre then return them to the outside ring and repeat until only one does.

Working on just one idea, ask yourselves the question: *'when is this issue not a problem or less of a problem?'* Using the example of the age imbalance above, the answer to these questions could be: *'at all age services and when children contribute and worship style supports newcomers; and also at social events with food e.g. harvest supper, film night and pancake party.'*

The solution then becomes doing more of what you note in your answer. The plan that you produce at the very end of this process should reflect this. In small stages you move towards the solution. The results of this exercise will be recorded in your Session 1 report and used in Session 3.



At the end of Session 1 make sure you keep all the comments made on post-it notes and flip charts. You might like to photograph the results of the exercises as this can be a visual record that can be easily circulated.

Consider offering the handout *the 'Researching and Surveying your Community'* if you think it will be useful at this stage. Otherwise offer it at the end of Session 2.

Everything discussed must be evaluated, summarised and included in your report for Session 3.

## Session 2: Investigate your context

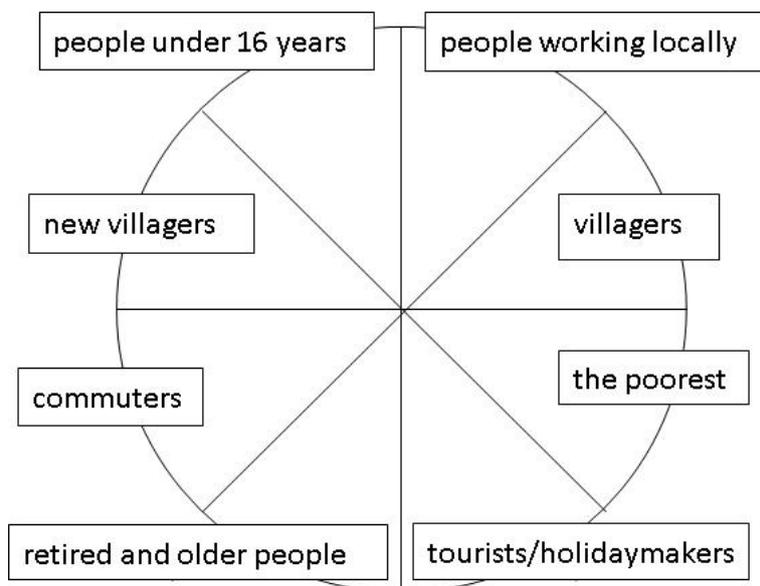
The two main exercises in Session 2 use visual techniques to tell the church group what they may already know. It should give insights even to those who think they know the area well.

It may suggest that the church is a close, but exclusive, group. It may also show where the church doesn't reach or link. Try to assist participants to think creatively in order to notice any potential to work with partners, or how they might better use the gifts and interests of their congregation. They may find that what they currently do for mission reasons has become tired and ineffective despite their original intention, for example. This discovery could free participants to refocus, rethink their efforts and how they could make renewed connections into the future.

### Exercise 1: Looking at your Local Area

You will need pens, pencils or crayons and the pie chart in the participants' pack or use an A3 version or flip chart to do it together.

They can do this exercise individually or in the group depending on the number of participants.



Ask participants to look at the general groupings in the booklet. They may wish to customise this for their village/area and add other segments. They may have a travelling community close by, for example, or there may be a key festival that happens every year near to their village etc.

They should shade in the segment lightly where they think they have weaker connections and more intensely where they feel they have made stronger links.

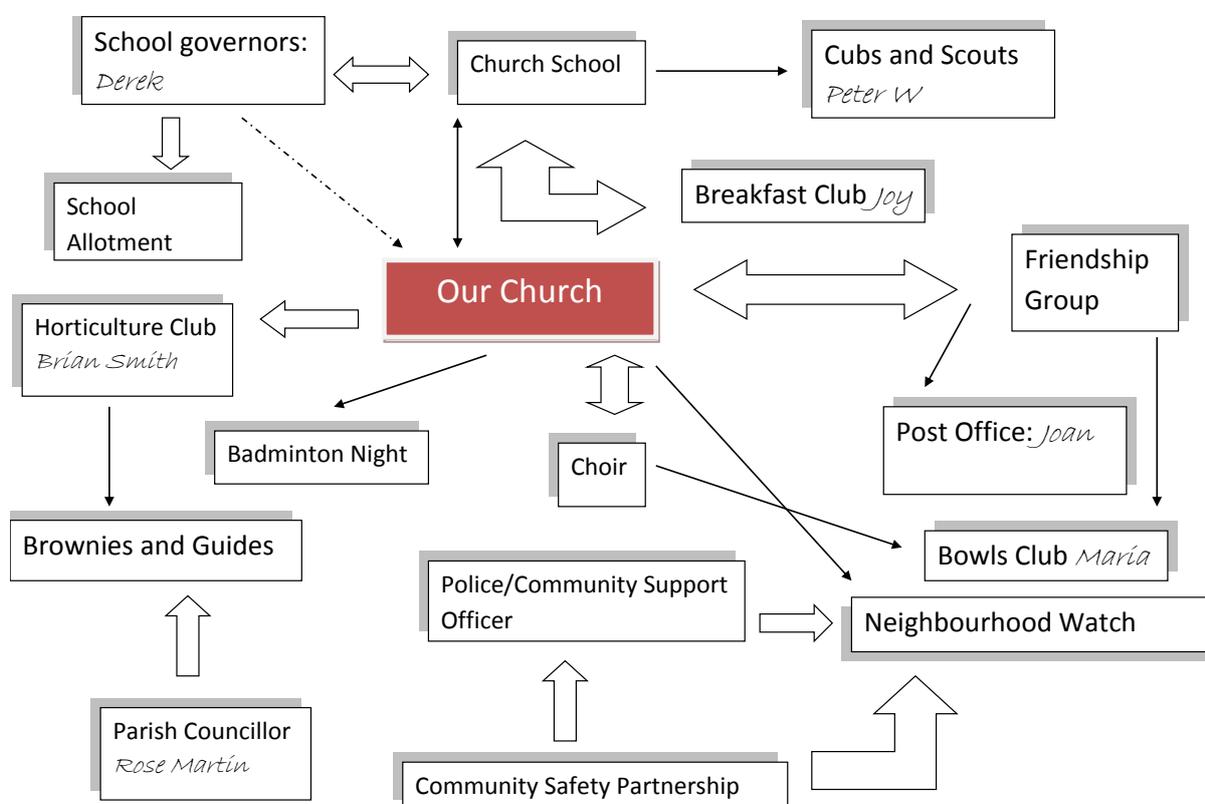
Remind them that at this stage they are generalising. They can put flesh on the bones of their findings outside of the session by following up with some statistical research and more detailed explorations of how their community works.

## Exercise 2: Mapping your Connections

You will need pens, pencils or crayon and blank paper, or flip chart paper to do it together.

Ask participants to list the groups and organisations that local church members currently relate to. Then ask them to draw a diagram like the social map in their booklets and on the next page, with the church at the centre. Ask them to plot how they interact with the groups that they have identified as relating to or potentially working with. Show links between groups using the suggested key. In certain areas, particularly in rural settings, key people may belong to more than one group and provide a link from the church to that part of the community. Add their name if they agree. They will also find this helpful in identifying links that are currently broken.

In complex situations they may draw several of these and or decide to ask key individuals to construct one for their own connections. Don't get overwhelmed with the detail. Think together about how connections could be improved.



Make notes as you go along of anything you think is important to include as a key theme in the feedback report. Reflect on these two exercises.

Do these exercises inform us about those we are working with regularly and where there is no interaction? Are there easy connections that could be developed using the interests and enthusiasm of church members and existing relationships?

## *Prayerful reflection*

The exercises today will help create a simple visual impression of your community connections. Look carefully at the results – the pie diagram and your community map. Ask the group these simple questions.

- Do these show you who you are currently working with and who you are not?
- Are there connections that could be improved or worked on to develop relationships between church members and the wider community?

It would be good to spend time in listening prayer and quiet reflection.

The questions above and your prayerful reflection may prompt you to think further about a key community group in more detail. At some point you may want to take the opportunity to listen to people from this group and improve your connection with them.

Small churches can also become better connected if they work with other churches. If you are in a partnership or team of churches, share your knowledge to enrich your community connection or check your initial impressions with people who have local expertise in those churches and beyond.

Collate the results of this feedback for sharing in Session 3.

## *Further research*

It would be helpful to conduct more research or assemble statistical data to follow on from your initial findings. Is there any existing research, for example, from a village plan?

Help the group decide what further research would be helpful. You may want to circulate the paper *'Researching and Surveying your Community'* which has suggestions on how you can carry out research and survey your wider community.

“Qualitative” research such as interviews with key people or informal focus groups can be effective. “Quantitative” research – such as questionnaires – can work well if they are well constructed, don't ask for too much information, and there is a way to get a reasonable response rate (say hand them out at the end of a community meeting and give time for them to be filled in).

The Church of England and Church in Wales have people in each Diocese with access to statistics for each parish. Obtain this data for the church you are working with: it will help you to a wider understanding of the churches context and could lead you to ask interesting questions.

Decide who is going to do what. Some may be able to meet with leaders of a residents' or village hall association, or to talk to a local head teacher. Others could check existing information and statistics on the community, conduct a formal survey, or conduct research at a stand at a community event.

Decide how and when to collate and distribute the research results. These results can help to put flesh on the bones of assumptions you make and provide further guidance on ways forward.

## Session 3: Deliberate over what you have heard

### Preparing for the Session

The aim of the meeting in Session 3, and your role as facilitator of the group, is to allow what has been learnt from Session 1, Session 2 and the research to be formally presented, clarified and discussed.

It is a good idea to have a gap of two or three weeks between Session 2 and Session 3 to conduct research, assemble the results and share them with those who plan to attend Session 3.

Find a way to distribute the information or display it – perhaps in church - so members can have time to think and pray about it before you meet. Be discerning when you consider what you can display publicly and what you can't. Try to stand up to any pressure to hurry to a meeting date ahead of what is planned, especially by a decision-making body (such as the PCC or church council) – to allow church members who need time to reflect time to do so - and encourage those in a hurry to use the time to pray about the plan.

If you plan to run this event with neighbouring churches try to get a neutral venue, or delegate transport organisation to a specific church member to help encourage and enable people to come.

Devote half a day at least to Session 3. When you meet, be humble and open in order to give people room for their own responses. Leave some space for God to prompt you. Include a short act of opening worship at this meeting and time for listening prayer. If you are presenting the report on the findings, and fear you may be biased to a particular priority or outcome, ask someone else to lead the discussion after your presentation.

### Planning the agenda

Plan your meeting agenda carefully with realistic timings for different things such as your presentation on what you saw or heard or read; a time of worship; comfort breaks and refreshments. Resist anything extra being tacked on to the day, however worthy.

Ask all church members to pray before you meet and encourage spiritual discernment.

### Presentations and prayer

encourage them to keep the information relevant and ensure it is time limited.

As you present from session 1 and 2, and draw the results together, summarise what you found or heard and suggest what that might mean whilst remaining impartial. Don't be too timid or too aggressive. Be concise and don't be tempted to present all the information you have gathered. Keep any responses you quote directly as anonymous contribution; and use pictures and graphs if you can. Make research data, evidence or information from any exercise distinct from any suggestions. Present your findings then allow people to ask for clarification before the facilitating the discussion itself.

Have a time of listening prayer and after a period of silence, encourage the group to share any insights, words, scriptures or images that they feel God has given them.

### Leading the discussion

- You could use an impartial note-taker to record comments whilst you chair the discussion. You can come back to these notes when you review the session.
- Invite comments and allow others to reply or respond to comments made. Take care not to allow negative emotion to direct you or be disregarded. Give everyone time to speak interrupted without allowing one or two to take over the discussion or be dominant.
- During the discussion opinions like ‘that will never work here’ should not be ignored; listen, explore and question what this is about. Recognise it may be about focus: what to stop as well as what to begin. If time pressure is the main issue explain that other things may have to happen less often to accommodate things that need to change.
- This stage is particularly important for people who need time to absorb information and reflect before planning, and as a leader you will have to exercise patience. You may have to hold others back who are eager to get on and implement practical solutions.
- A few questions that might help your discussion include:
  - What encourages or inspires us?
  - What shocks or saddens us?
  - Is there anything further that we need to find out?
  - What did we find out about our church culture and that of the wider community?
  - What needs, opportunities and priorities have emerged for us?
- During the discussion simplify what priorities have emerged under a smaller number of headings. Encourage everyone to offer further ideas under those headings *as if time and money was no barrier*- this is known as a ‘blue sky thinking’ exercise. Don’t let panic or allow cynical remarks to stifle this. Remember the beauty of this exercise is it is creative, open, stimulating and experimental.
- Keep your horizons wide and ask what the results mean for the community as a whole, not just for the church.
- It is possible, acceptable and positive to field lots of ideas. Encourage everyone to participate and build on ideas, relating it to the work you did in Sessions 1 and 2.

### **Active Participation**

You can encourage participation from the group during or after the discussion by using active methods of voting such as:

- A tokens scheme - each person gets a certain number of tokens or marbles and you have jars with headings which are the identified possibilities they can put their tokens.
- A sticker bar chart - similarly each possibility is a heading on the axis of a large graph of squared paper and each person can add any of their sticky dots to any of the ‘bars’.
- Give everyone three traffic light cards to ‘straw poll’ at certain times during discussions – red for ‘no’, green for ‘yes’, orange for ‘maybe’.

At the Session 3 event you may not get further than identifying the priority to take forward by heading or theme. In that case they may want to work together further as a group to look at exploring what they might do under that particular focus. Again you could allow free input of

ideas and voting methods, or a small group could work on it after Session 3 with those from the church who have relevant experience, before offering this to all church members or the ultimate decision making group.

### **Taking ideas forward**

Agreed ideas should be prioritised and inevitably there will be a process of discarding some or even many. If you want to do this together you could use voting (see above). Otherwise this stage could be the responsibility of those leading the process or a local decision-making group.

The smallest churches will probably have just a single priority and final area of action surviving from this process. This is appropriate where resources are currently almost entirely committed. This one priority should engage most people, or the process may tail off. If more priorities emerge they should be realistically spaced over time to avoid overload and stress. Your decision-making group needs to look at what can be tailed off, or even lost completely, in order to allow the new priorities enough time and resources. Make sure lay volunteers and paid staff are treated well and encouraged so this can succeed. No-one person should be left with a huge amount to do.

If any ideas arise which are imaginative but not based on fact they may need to be researched before the group plan more details, e.g. does the local Nursing Home welcome input from your church and what would they like? Is it support for their summer fair, or a fortnightly communion service? Do the residents and manager think differently? If no-one knows then listen rather than guess.

Encourage partnership working. Working together with another group may be slower but it is also a more careful and sustainable process. Relationships can be built and both parties can learn from each other.

## Session 4: Make a plan

This final session is an opportunity for the group to draw a clear picture of what has been found in the process so far: to show what was done, the process taken, the findings and the agreed priorities. At this point this the group are still drafting a suggested plan.

As a facilitator, encourage the group to be realistic and set a timetable to achieve the plan. Where possible, work out who will do what. Prompt participants to make clear intentions and share the work to sustain their plan. Help them to make their plan as inclusive as possible and see where help might be needed to develop their skills and delegate tasks.

Some churches find change difficult and are reluctant to move from long held traditions. There may be bruises from a history of something ending badly, being seen to fail after a long term investment, or coming unstuck financially. In this environment trying something new or trying something again is difficult. The instinct of 'that will never work here' from some members should not be allowed to inhibit creativity and energy. Likewise, what may be required from you is to steer the group away from the historical local success which may no longer be appropriate, and to try something new.

Time is one of the resources that needs to be managed. Generating enthusiasm for any activity with unrealistic demands on the time of unpaid people is unfair. This is even more the case in a small church where a replacement volunteer won't easily be found, and existing volunteers can feel extra pressure.

Can you work ecumenically or with other organisations where appropriate? Sharing initiatives is probably a better use of resources and demonstrates love for one another.

### Drafting the plan

- Help the group make a realistic and achievable timetable of the plan. It is easy to be too ambitious to begin with.
- Will the plans fit the rhythm of village life and local church members' other responsibilities, or is there a ratcheting up the time commitment expected from them in the plan? What is offered may need to be more flexible or seasonal than in a larger church. For example, an activity that is monthly or once per term may be developed without undue pressure if something in the current church programme is dropped to allow it to happen.
- Help the group identify opportunities for ecumenical and partnership working.
- Discuss how to ensure that the plan happens. How could the plan to be monitored and reviewed? When or where will church members be updated? What is the timetable for completion when should the process be revisited?

Before finalising the draft, go through it looking at it as a whole and ask these questions:

- Does the plan match the overall church beliefs about mission, or has the group been distracted away from this?
- Is there a clear sense that what is planned has been drawn from what has been listened to and learned in sessions 1 and 2, and discussed in session 3?

- Does the plan keep to big picture – participating in God’s mission in the world - or does it look self-centred? Has the group been drawn into power play, or acting out of competition?
- If the church is part of a group of churches, is there full consideration of the opportunities to work together?

Take care to have only one idea or priority which requires long term tenacity and doggedness.

### **Finalise the plan**

When helping to finalise the plan consider the following:

- Can something be achieved that is simple and low cost which fits the priorities and helps others to see the plan working positively?
- As a start, could something be simply reinvigorated for mission reasons?
- Is there something that already works well which could be changed in a small way in line with the mission priorities?
- Is there something that can be done in partnership instead of in competition?
- Is there something that can be stopped to give this plan the space and resources needed? This is probably the hardest decision of all.

**Sacrifice and generosity may be the only way to allow action. Encourage the group to act together and keep what they do visible for and to other church members.**

### **Pilot**

The plans they make may be, or just feel, risky: something that may or may not work. Try to handle that discomfort openly. Remind them that the early church was risk taking and saw massive growth! If something new involves a lot of change or energy suggest it is piloted or trialled for a time. Agree to a review at a couple of points in the future and adjust what happens in the light of this.

## **Plan complete? Act, see, and reflect again**

***‘Sometimes, we have to take a long walk back and have another run at things to make sure we get everything in the proper rhythm, and draw out the lessons we need for our own day. Sometimes a story is the only way of telling the truth.’***

***Acts for Everyone, Tom Wright, SPCK, 2008***

At regular periods as you work on delivering the plan encourage the group to take time out to reflect on what has been done and report it to the church and wider community.

For some people a story of what has happened will be a better method. Where they have permission to share such information, it may help people to comprehend the results much better. Share outcomes or results even if what happens is something other than what was intended.

Take the time to celebrate what happens and encourage each other.

## Feedback

Please take time, once the course has finished and your role as facilitator is complete, to feedback your experiences to Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre. It helps us to review our material and identify where improvements need to be made.

**A form for collecting participant feedback** is included in the Participant Pack. You can return the completed forms to us or alternatively include a summary of their comments as part of your facilitator feedback below.

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## Facilitator Feedback Form

<i>Information about you</i>	
Your Name	
Contact e-mail	
Telephone number	
Village/church where the course was held	
Start and finish date of the course	
Denomination	
Total number of participants	
<i>Feedback on the quality and effectiveness of the following material:</i>	
On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is poor and 5 is excellent please score the following	
<b>How useful did you find the Facilitator Guide</b>	1    2    3    4    5
<i>Comments</i>	
<b>How useful did you find the Participants Booklet and exercises?</b>	1    2    3    4    5
<i>Comments</i>	

**In general summarise your experiences as the facilitator, identifying what went well and what went less well.**

**Taking into account the Participant feedback you collected do you consider the experience to have been worthwhile and useful for those who took part? If not, please say why.**

**If you think the materials, or the EFRM course itself, could be improved in any way please add your suggestions here.**

Many thanks for taking time to complete this form. Please send your feedback as an e-mail attachment to [info@germinate.net](mailto:info@germinate.net), or by post to: EFRM Feedback, The Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, CV8 2LG.