

QUOTES

'Opening the church physically and emotionally to the surrounding area, and being able to walk past every day and see the doors open, and people coming in and out... That's the overall success.'

An incumbent

'Community ministry...takes seriously the fact that people have spiritual needs and if churches do not help people address these needs then few other agencies will. Churches have often been duped by our deeply secular culture into providing welfare for those in need without being clear about how this helps the church fulfil its primary task...(to) do business with God.'

Ann Morisy

'I have a fervent belief that if we want to reach a post-Christian society, we have to be Good News before someone will listen to Good News.'

Adam McLane

'Many churches seem to struggle with building a good reputation in their neighbourhood. But churches that are transformational are not waiting for the neighbours to come to them. Instead, they go out and meet the neighbours. They have abandoned the "come and see" model for the "go and tell" model.'

Ed Stetzer

'We started a foodbank in our town, and our eyes have been opened. We would never have known, or believed, that a heavily pregnant woman was living in a tent with her partner, with no food to eat, less than 200 yards from one of our churches'

A foodbank volunteer, Berkshire

Copies of the other 'Simple Guides' in this series are available from Diocesan Church House, Tel 01865 208224. Please note that the 'Simple Guide' series is paid for by Church Commissioners funding, not through parish share. Printed on 100% recycled FSC paper.

RESOURCES

If you would value talking through community engagement in your parish/benefice with someone in the Diocese who has experience, we have a network of people who are willing to be 'sounding boards' and to share their insights.

Contact alison.webster@oxford.anglican.org.

Audit and other tools

- Peterborough & London Dioceses have produced useful community audit tools (google, 'Diocese of Peterborough community audit' & 'Diocese of London community audit')
- Barnados Community Profiling tool (www.barnados.org.uk google 'community profiling')
- Church Urban Fund have many useful resources (www.cuf.org.uk), google especially 'CUF poverty look-up tool' and 'CUF community value toolkit'.
- Rural toolkit: www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/publications-and-resources/profiling-tools
- A detailed guide to ministry and mission in the community, from Derby Diocese: www.faithinderbyshire.org/attachments/article/48/chapter-2.pdf

Useful organisations and programmes

- Serve UK's Discovery programme: www.serveuk.org
- Tearfund's 'Catalyst' programme: www.tearfund.org/en
- The Cinnamon network (micro grants available for community projects): www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk

Publications

- Growing Church through Social Action, Church Urban Fund, www.cuf.org.uk/research/church-growth
- Tackling Poverty in England, an asset-based approach, Church Urban Fund, cuf.org.uk/abcd/
- HOPE: the heartbeat of Mission (see www.hopetogether.org.uk), book available from alison.webster@oxford.anglican.org



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT A SIMPLE GUIDE



As churches we are already engaging with our communities, but often we do not recognise or celebrate it. As 'church scattered' we are a network of Christian disciples making a difference to those around us. We are being 'salt and light'. As 'church gathered' we undertake initiatives that help make our communities flourishing places to live and work. As both gathered and scattered we engage through caring for our neighbours, looking after our vulnerable family members, volunteering in schools and other local organisations like food banks and homeless shelters, going to work day by day, and by taking an active part in the cultural life of our cities, towns and villages.

PRAYER

*God of possibility and promise, You lavish us with gifts and potential,
With all that we need to partner with you to make a difference in our communities.
You call us to be joyful with those who celebrate, and to weep with those who mourn.
Give us the confidence to reach out to you, to take your hand and be led.
Show us the hands of those around us who are also your partners.
Help us to recognise them and to hold onto them
To bring about the transformation you desire.*

Amen

Alison Webster

**Social Responsibility Adviser
Diocese of Oxford**



WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

We are called to love our neighbours, not just our fellow Christians. That means being citizens of our local communities and of the world. Indeed, the world is very much reflected in our neighbourhoods, and familiarity with the real diversity of our communities will often bring many exciting opportunities for global as well as local connection.

Community engagement flows from an intimate knowledge of the contexts in which our churches are set. We may find there is the need for a lunch club or a drop-in café; for a toddler group or a carers' network. We may be able to host facilities like the Citizens Advice, Credit Union, Food Bank, or winter night shelter for homeless people. We may have a building that is great for concerts and arts activities. Whatever our focus, looking outwards and connecting beyond the limits of our congregation can be enriching and challenging and this is where life and renewal are found.

As an essential part of holistic mission, community engagement needs to be intentional. At its best it develops organically. Plans and strategies are good, but be ready for the unpredictable and for surprises. This Simple Guide is just a starting point: it gives the rationale for being good news in our communities, and some tools and resources for getting on with it.



HOW CAN WE DO IT?

Simply put, community engagement is about working in partnership with God and with others for the common good. We can do this by:

1. Recognising that church buildings belong to the whole community, not just to church members: being open and welcoming with our physical spaces is a great way to make connections.

2. Identifying assets: where is the energy and the joy in your neighbourhood? What activities are already going on that you can support (including those run by other churches)? We don't need to invent a 'Christian' version of things. Simply join God in the places where God is already at work.

3. Building relationships with local influencers: they may be long-term residents, business leaders, politicians, artists. Buy them a coffee and discuss your common vision for your community, and let them know what the church has to offer.

4. Looking for hidden hurt: we need to look below the surface of our communities. What are the things people don't talk about; the aspects of life they won't show? It may be domestic abuse, family conflict, depression, isolation and loneliness. It may be the challenges of poverty or the challenges of wealth.

5. Focusing on justice: getting to know the needs of our communities will expose injustices that we may be unaware of. Actions taken in one place can have a profound impact – for good or ill – where we are and in places far away. We are called not just to feed the hungry, but also to ask why the hungry have no food.



ACTION IDEAS

Three questions provide a good starting point:

- **How well do we really know our community?**
- **How well does our community know us, and what are people's perceptions of our church?**
- **How well do we really know one another?**

Ask yourselves: what are the public spaces where your neighbours already gather? Sports clubs, the park, shops, pubs, bars, coffee shops, supermarkets, GP surgeries, school gates. Think about ways in which, as church gathered and church scattered, you can find out about the lives of others. Chat to people in the supermarket queue, or in the doctor's or dentist's waiting room – such 'wasted time' can serve you well in community intelligence gathering. Pray for the people you meet.



More formally, you could undertake a community audit, including exploring the demographic data for your local area.

Find out what other churches are doing, have done, or plan to do.

Design a questionnaire to find out whether people find the

church open and welcoming, or whether they feel reluctant to enter it, or are simply unaware of what the church is and what it does.

'Walk the parish', noting significant places, people, events and facilities. Pray about those things. Come back together and share what you found out.

Map the connections you already have as a network of individual Christians. You will be surprised at the complexity of the spider's web. Pray for one another, and consider ways in which you can build upon this connectedness with the community.