



# SERVING OTHERS A SIMPLE GUIDE

Engaging with our local community is part of our 'Journey Out'. God created all that is, seen and unseen. God is involved with all our lives, he came to live amongst us in Jesus. God loves all people equally, and rejoices in community within the Trinity. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be involved in our community, our society, and all life around us. Just as God reaches out to us, so we are called to reach out to others and share God's love with them.

## A PRAYER



*Dear Lord,  
 Help us to follow your example,  
 by looking out for those who,  
 each day, feel that they are marginalised,  
 who cannot find hope,  
 who believe that they have little to offer,  
 who are overcome by the challenges of poverty.  
 Help us to widen our horizons,  
 to make space for the stranger,  
 to watch out for those who feel invisible,  
 to give time to the outsider,  
 to talk to the person facing silence,  
 to restore justice and value.  
 Give us the courage to undertake this,  
 the determination to join with others  
 in seeing grace in every human face,  
 and the faith to embrace the opportunity in your name.  
 Amen.*



## CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY

As churches, we are already engaging with our communities, but often we do not recognise or celebrate it.

As 'church scattered' (in our everyday lives during the week) we are a network of Christian disciples making a difference to those around us. We are being 'salt and light' wherever we are, whatever we are doing. As 'church gathered' we undertake initiatives together that help make our communities flourishing places to live and work.

As both gathered and scattered church, 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.

“ 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, a freelance community theologian and lecturer*



## 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. As we become familiar with those different to ourselves within our community, so we learn more about the amazing diversity of our world.

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, but only if we are prepared to listen to those beyond ourselves. 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 or Churches Together groups)? 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. Listen to what they have to say.
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

- **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?**

Where are the public spaces your neighbours already gather? Sports clubs, parks, pubs, beaches, coffee shops etc. and 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.

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.

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

'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

You will find some useful community audit tools on our website:  
[www.trurodiocese.org.uk/mission/community](http://www.trurodiocese.org.uk/mission/community)

## CONTACTS:

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 Liz Wallace. [Liz.wallace@truro.anglican.org](mailto:Liz.wallace@truro.anglican.org)

## Resources

There are a number of links and to be found on our web pages

**[www.trurodiocese.org.uk/mission](http://www.trurodiocese.org.uk/mission)**

See also:

- Transformation Cornwall, a joint venture between the Diocese of Truro, Cornwall Methodist district and Church Urban Fund supporting faith groups engaged in anti-poverty work  
**[www.transformation-cornwall.org.uk](http://www.transformation-cornwall.org.uk)** Debbie Croucher is Transformation Cornwall's Development Coordinator  
**[Debbie.croucher@truro.anglican.org](mailto:Debbie.croucher@truro.anglican.org)**
- Churches Together in Cornwall  
**[www.churchestogetherincornwall.org.uk](http://www.churchestogetherincornwall.org.uk)** sharing ideas and offering support to churches wanting to work together to engage with their community effectively and helpfully through ecumenical working. David Smith is the Ecumenical Missioner for Churches Together in Cornwall. **[ses.dhs@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:ses.dhs@hotmail.co.uk)**
- Church Urban Fund **[www.cuf.org.uk](http://www.cuf.org.uk)** have a useful page on 'Growing Church through Social Action'
- The Cinnamon network have ideas on local projects:  
**[www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk](http://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk)**

“ 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*

The Simple Guide series were inspired by the 'Living Faith' materials produced by the Diocese of Oxford – *with thanks.*