

# Church Stories

## AIMS AND OUTCOMES

- To understand the faith story of your parish.
- To be aware of significant events in that story which have shaped the faith journey of local congregations and communities.
- To appreciate what God has done in the past and what he's doing now, locally.
- To understand your local context and the changes which have happened in the community over time which might challenge you as you journey forward.

## RESOURCES

1. At least 1 roll of lining paper or wall paper (available in DIY stores).
2. Masking tape and blutack or similar.
3. Coloured pens (marker pens are ideal).

### Before you begin:

Use the lining paper to create a long strip along two or three walls of the room in which you are meeting. At one end put the date or approximate date that the first church began in your Parish. At the other end put today's date.

Draw a line horizontally round the room in the middle of the paper between the dates you've marked. Along the horizontal line mark occasional decades. Eg. 1500, 1890's, 1940's, 1960's, 2000 and so on. Leave much more space for the more recent decades.

### Introduction

Tell participants about the timeline and explain what the activity is aiming to achieve: identifying how God has worked and is working in your parish, and thinking about how that challenges your Christian lives both today and as you and your church family grow and flourish.

Individually

*10 minutes*

Give each participant a pen and ask them to write on the timeline any significant events that have happened during the lifetime of the parish. Many of these events will be historical and may be word of mouth stories. When they have completed this ask them to look at all the events and underline those which they believe have been significant to the faith journey of God's People in this place.

In small groups

*30 minutes*

Identify any major changes that have come about in their community over the last 30 years. Which changes have affected the church and its community the most? What is happening now that is inspiring and uplifting?

All together

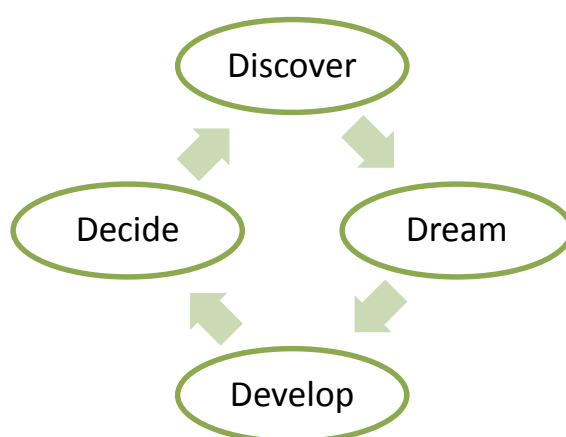
30 minutes

Share answers and discuss areas or issues which were raised by more than one group. Try to explore positive solutions to issues or problems, perhaps using Appreciative Inquiry.

Appreciative Inquiry is a way of asking questions that helps people focus upon what has been good about the past and the positive aspects of our present. It leads a group to think about building upon what has worked well rather than becoming preoccupied about what's going wrong. There are various elements to Appreciative Inquiry. Typically they are:

- Discover – Appreciate what is present when things go well
- Dream – Imagine the features of a flourishing future
- Develop or Design – Identify what you will do
- Decide – Create this future

The cycle looks like this:



As part of the Church Stories activity, you can concentrate on the 'Discover' element of Appreciative Inquiry; you could think about using the other elements for different activities, either as part of the Parish Programme or not.

Conclusion

10 minutes

Wrap up the session by identifying and summarising the positive and uplifting things that God is enabling in your parish. Remember, this is not a planning exercise for the future of your parish. The aim of the session is to think about what has changed over time, how God has worked and is working in your parish, and to think about how that challenges your Christian lives today and as you and your church family grow into becoming a flourishing church.

If you are interested in finding out more about Appreciative Inquiry the AMD team can suggest some resources: [www.clergyleadership.com](http://www.clergyleadership.com) contains a useful summary.