



# Signs of the Kingdom



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  
**DIOCESE OF  
WORCESTER**

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**Responding to God's call to be a Kingdom People**



# Kingdom People

love • compassion • justice • freedom



The Church is God's gift to the world. It is called to be an effective sign of God's Kingdom. Jesus's first words in his ministry were 'Repent and believe the good news: the Kingdom of God is at hand'. As Christians together, we are called to be those who both hear and proclaim that message, becoming signs and agents of the transformation of the world according to God's loving purposes in Christ. This applies across all traditions and in all settings. It applies to small village churches as well as large urban churches; to churches that are struggling as well as to churches that are thriving. A senior pastor in the United States has famously stated that 'the local church is the hope of the world' and I believe that to be true. God is transforming the world through the agency of the local church.

But what does the Kingdom of God look like? It is certainly somewhere where Kingdom values prevail – values of love, compassion, justice and freedom. Our churches should be communities where the Kingdom is our core conversation, where these Kingdom values are evident and through which we strive to incarnate them in our communities. The Rural Dean of Malvern once said that it would be great if, when people were seen going into a church, others might comment that 'they are the people who are about love, compassion, justice and freedom'.

This Kingdom People initiative aims to be a gift to the parishes and not an additional burden. It aims to provide a framework in which churches might flourish and grow rather than impose a blueprint of how every church should look.

I warmly commend it to you.

The Rt Revd Dr John Inge  
Bishop of Worcester

## Developing a Plan

The fruit of this Kingdom People initiative should be that churches end up with a focussed plan of action. It is important that they avoid the temptation to do too much. The old adage of 'doing a few things and doing them well' is wise advice for churches as it is for individuals. Good ideas can be very attractive but it would be unwise to act on every good idea. You need to prayerfully discern what are the best things for your church to be doing in this season of its life - even if other good things remain undone.

**Identify what needs addressing** Ask each person to identify (one or two) characteristics that they think need addressing. If they identify with one or more of the bullet points (listed under each characteristic in the centre pages) then they should write that down. If none of the bullet points capture what they feel needs addressing then they should write a single phrase or sentence that conveys this e.g. 'our patterns of worship' or 'doing work with children in the school holidays'. You might want to invite them to write the number of the characteristic and the bullet point or sentence on a large Post-It note.

**Create lists** Use a flipchart to record every comment (using a separate page for each of the eight characteristics). If you have used Post-It notes then you could affix them to the flipchart sheets or simply to a wall. Some characteristics will emerge as the key ones and some bullet points or sentences will have been identified by a number of people. It is good to invite general comments at this stage.

**Explore options** As a whole group, identify three or four areas that need to be addressed. Identify what action could be taken (you could break into self-selected groups for this part). Record these suggestions on a flipchart.

**Planning action** Decide what are the next steps you should take. Identify how you can best implement and monitor such action. Plan how you can communicate this decision to the whole congregation, the deanery and (if not asked for in the Articles of Enquiry) to the Archdeacon.

Once a plan of action has been agreed, it acts as a magnet (drawing people together around the agreed plan) and a compass (pointing the direction of travel). The next phase is for the PCC to work out in detail what steps are needed to achieve the objectives, who will be responsible, and what resources need to be redirected to fulfil the plan. A clear plan of action helps a busy or struggling church overcome the conflict of competing agendas – if a proposal won't help deliver the plan, then it is not a priority. The agreed plan can be written up in a working document which is then reviewed and updated in the light of experience.

**Stay connected** It is important throughout this exercise to remain in an attitude of prayer and openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. What we are seeking is God's guidance and God's assistance. Jesus said; 'I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.'

# Moving Forward

**Create a Group Checklist** Once everyone has completed their own individual checklist then their scoresheets should be collected and each score plotted onto a fresh scoresheet. The resulting Group Checklist will have a number of ticks, 1's or x's in the scoring columns (showing how many people have chosen that score) and also a numerical total in the right hand column. You might also want to calculate an average score.

**Identify strengths** These can be 'read off' from the group checklist (both visually from seeing where the majority of ticks are but also numerically from the 'total' column. It is then worth reflecting on how those strengths came to be so. Answering this can help a church discover what is likely to be involved in addressing whatever it is that is holding it back.

**Notice differences** It is important to look at any characteristic that has attracted a wide spread of scores. This may be due to people looking at the same thing from two different angles (or because of different values or priorities that they possess). For example, when assigning a score to the seventh characteristic ('ready to engage with and serve our community') then a high score could reflect the quality of the church's engagement with global justice issues while a low score might be because of a weakness in the church's work to meet the needs of local people. A wide spread of scores can indicate differences of opinion that have hitherto not been addressed.

**Look at what is holding you back** This is when it is necessary to look at the characteristics that have attracted the lowest scores. It is then worth asking some searching questions such as: Where do we see evidence of this not being a strength in the life of the church? Has this always been the case? If so, then why might that be the case? If not, then what has brought about the present situation?

The crucial thing is that, rather than just build upon a church's strengths, it is vital that any weaknesses (or comparative areas of less strength) are addressed. Christian Schwartz is the founder and director of the Institute for Natural Church Development and has undertaken a significant amount of research into what helps churches to grow. He suggests that concentration on the 'minimum factor' (the area of church life that is least strong) makes a significant difference. He uses the illustration of a barrel in which the characteristics are the vertical staves of the barrel (and their length is determined by their score). If water is poured into the barrel then it will only fill to the level of the shortest stave. Most churches reach a point at which their capacity to grow or to participate more fully in mission have been exhausted. Christian Schwartz suggests that this capacity (just as with the capacity of a barrel) can be increased if the shortest stave (that is, the area of church life that is least strong) is strengthened. His research suggests that churches which work to improve their areas of least strength are more likely to grow and participate more fully in mission.

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# Introduction

This booklet provides a framework within which a church (or a group of churches) can look at its life and identify ways in which it might better respond to God's call to be a Kingdom People. It is based upon research undertaken in 2012 into what churches in Worcester Diocese were doing and what factors helped or hindered them in their activities. The first and most encouraging fact that the research identified is that our churches are already responsible for a huge number of very worthwhile initiatives. The research also reported that '*involvement in initiatives had led to spiritual growth both in church members and in volunteers from the community. The openness and generosity shown by church members had encouraged those disenchanted with church to engage again and be drawn into fellowship.*'

A clear priority also emerged concerning the provision for children and young people. Nearly one third of the initiatives identified were about working with children, young people and schools. The provision of small groups within the church also proved to be very significant and were described as a '*key source of friendship, fellowship and spiritual nourishment.*'

Many other initiatives were to do with pastoral care of those who are not members of the church (and revealed that our churches are very outward-looking in their ministry).

In all, the research helped identify what appear to be signs of health in our churches. Mission has been described as '*finding out what God is doing and then joining in.*'

We now know what God is doing (and what He is inspiring in our churches). The research has led to the identification of eight characteristics that form a picture (or a vision) of how churches should be. It is not a theoretical wish list but is based on what God is actually doing across parishes in the Diocese of Worcester.

The first three characteristics are derived from the three priorities identified by Bishop's Council in 2009. They reflect a clear understanding that we are participating in God's mission and that our effectiveness is a result of our being deeply rooted in prayer and inspired by our coming together for acts of worship. Archbishop Justin says that '*it is actually in the renewal of our spirituality, in seeking Christ and His love for us, that we overflow into the world.*'

The provision for children and young people is then reflected as are the factors which lead to a deepening of our discipleship (including the provision of small groups) as well as those factors that enable, equip and release people to minister to others.

Our call to care for those in need forms the basis of the seventh characteristic. This is not just about the exercise of a pastoral ministry but also about reflecting on and engaging with social and political issues and developing Kingdom-focussed projects and partnerships.

The eighth characteristic flows from the others and recognises that the church building itself needs to serve our need for a place of prayer and worship as well as resourcing our mission to and among the wider community.

Call Waiting ([callwaiting.org.uk](http://callwaiting.org.uk)) has been designed to help churches pray for and promote vocations as well as offer guidance and inspiration to individuals.

## 7 ready to engage with and serve our community

*Healthy churches combine vibrant worship with service to their communities. In other words, they take both the first and the second great commandments of Jesus seriously by endeavouring to love both God and neighbour. As Christians we need to discern what God is already doing in our communities and join in to promote the Kingdom, doing all we can to show God's love. This will be by campaigning and working for structural justice as well as organising ourselves to deliver care and offering individual acts of kindness.*

**Outward looking focus** Churches should have a 'whole life' rather than a 'church life' concern.

**Meet the needs** Some churches have worked with organisations such as Street Pastors ([www.streetpastors.co.uk](http://www.streetpastors.co.uk)), Christians Against Poverty ([capuk.org](http://capuk.org)) and the Trussell Trust Foodbanks ([www.trusselltrust.org](http://www.trusselltrust.org)).

**Passionate and prophetic** Local and global issues should be given prominence in preaching, in intercessions and by encouragement and affirmation of those with a passion to act prophetically. Organisations like Christian Aid ([www.christianaid.org.uk](http://www.christianaid.org.uk)), 38 Degrees ([www.38degrees.org.uk](http://www.38degrees.org.uk)) and the One Campaign ([www.one.org](http://www.one.org)) help churches and individuals address issues of social justice. A number also find inspiration at events such as the Greenbelt Festival ([www.greenbelt.org.uk](http://www.greenbelt.org.uk)).

**Occasional offices** The National Weddings Project has put together a number of very good resources ([at www.yourchurchwedding.org](http://www.yourchurchwedding.org)) Churches also offer care and support to the bereaved (organising informal meetings as well as services of remembrance).

## 8 committed to making our buildings fit for purpose as a spiritual and community resource

*Our churches are sometimes seen as a burden and some can be. However, if they are made fit for purpose, most can be a wonderful blessing both to worshipping communities and wider society. Too many churches are locked for all but a couple of hours a week when they could be a vital spiritual and community resource. We should seek to do what we can to enable them to be used to their full potential for the praise of God and the common good.*

**Accessible** Bishop John has urged all PCCs to arrange to leave their churches open all day and every day to provide a welcome in the name of Christ to all comers and convey to them something of the love of God.

**Prayers** Those who unlock and lock the church might be encouraged to pray a prayer as they do so. Others may make more use of the church for daily services like Morning Prayer or Compline.

**Sensitively adapted** On the ChurchCare website ([www.churchcare.co.uk](http://www.churchcare.co.uk)) there is some very good advice for those seeking to adapt their church building.

**Visitors to the church** Churches should develop a strategy for encouraging and welcoming visitors. Information about this is available on the diocesan website.

Initiatives like ‘Open the Book’ and ‘Messy Church’ are important alongside the traditional role of the church in areas such as chaplaincy and governance.

**Involved** Some churches involve children and young people in decision-making processes including strategic planning and the making of appointments.

**Unchurched children and young people**  
Thought should be given to a strategy for making trusting relationships with unchurched children and young people.

## 5 devoted to growing deeply as disciples, offering our time, talents and money to God

*Conversion is not a one-off but a continuous process. If we are to find the abundance of life which God yearns to give us in Jesus and share that life with others, we need continually to turn to God. Becoming a disciple is a lifetime’s task as we share ever more fully in His will for us. It happens through both grace and discipline. It requires commitment to the life of prayer, to study of the scriptures and to receiving the sacrament in public worship. It requires sacrificial giving of our time, talents and money.*

**Discipleship training** The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity ([www.licc.org.uk](http://www.licc.org.uk)) has some very good resources and courses to equip Christians and churches for ‘whole-life discipleship’ in the world.

**Helped to grow** All Christians need to be encouraged to grow and develop in their discipleship. Churches need to ask whether they are putting their resources into ministries that help people become more like Christ, or whether they are just keeping people busy.

**Small groups, mentoring, short courses and Bible study** are proven ways of helping people grow in their discipleship and encourage others in their growth.

The generous giving of **time, energy and resources** can be encouraged through the careful use of material such as the Giving for Life material (free and online at [www.parishresources.org.uk](http://www.parishresources.org.uk)).

## 6 resourced and released to minister to others

*When Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of his ministry that the Kingdom of God is at hand he did not expect his listeners to sit about and wait for it to appear. He wanted them to embody it. Each of us within the body of Christ has God-given gifts and a calling to witness and minister in Christ’s name. We must ensure that we discern how God wants us to use our gifts in His service and seek His power to do so. There is no more fulfilling way to spend our lives.*

**Open to the Spirit’s leading** A conscious effort to discern God’s priorities and an openness to being guided is essential.

God uses all sorts of people with all kinds of **different gifts and experiences**. The people who welcome, lead prayers of intercession and administer the sacraments should reflect this diversity.

**Mutual support and accountability** Many churches now have a variety of different staff meetings and gatherings so that everyone is able to exercise their ministry within a supportive and affirming framework.

**Vocations** Jesus told his disciples to pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send more labourers into the field (Matthew 9: 38).

# The Checklist Exercise

The Checklist has been designed to help churches take a ‘health check’ and identify ways in which they can be more effective as signs and agents of God’s Kingdom. It is a particularly useful exercise for a Church Council or Leadership Group - helping them to identify the church’s future priorities. It can also be used with a whole congregation or at a parish away day. In 2012, the PCC of Great Malvern Priory undertook a similar exercise and made use of a website called ‘SurveyMonkey’ ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) in order to maximise the number of people who could participate in the exercise. The PCC then looked at the responses to the ‘health check’ survey (including various comments that had been invited alongside the numerical ‘score’).

Beyond undertaking the actual exercise outlined in this book, a church will need to reflect further on what action it is to take and how progress is then to be monitored.

The exercise is best undertaken in three hours (with breaks) - perhaps as part of an away day for the PCC or congregation. It can be done in two evening sessions (each around 2 hours long) or in a (shortened) form in one 90 minute session.

The scoring is as follows:

- 6 this is a strength
- 5 there is evidence of much of this
- 4 we are making progress in this area
- 3 there is some evidence of this
- 2 there are only a few signs of this
- 1 this is a weakness

## Outline of the Exercise: 5 steps

- **Do the Checklist exercise**  
Introduce the Eight Characteristics then individuals score the church on each of the eight characteristics. This is done individually without conferring.
- **Create the Group Checklist**  
Transfer individual scores onto a flipchart to demonstrate the profile of the church.
- **Reflect on the Checklist**  
Identify current strengths as well as what might be holding you back. Notice too any differences in your perceptions.
- **Identify what needs working on**  
Develop a group list of issues from reflecting on the Checklist. This list should highlight clear mission priorities as well as specific areas needing attention.
- **Take action**  
Having agreed the main areas that need attention, priorities for specific actions need to be identified which will best address the issues raised. A plan of action should be drawn up.

# Using a Facilitator

It is highly likely that your church might want to invite someone from outside the parish to lead the process outlined in this pamphlet. There are many advantages to seeking external help from a ‘facilitator’ when carrying out an exercise like this.

These include:

**Affirmation** A facilitator will help you to affirm the good things that are happening, which are easily taken for granted or overlooked.

**Objectivity** An ‘external’ person may be better able to be objective about a church’s strengths. A facilitator would see things with ‘fresh eyes’ and is less likely to accept without question the way things are. An outsider asking questions can help a church move beyond the ‘givenness’ of a situation or habit and then reflect on how it came to be so.

**Expertise** A facilitator may be able to draw upon a wide range of skills and experience. They would at least bring the experience of another church and deanery but they may also bring insights from their professional life or from other organisations with which they have worked.

**Releasing leaders** Having someone else lead the process can free up local church leaders (such as the incumbent and churchwardens) to participate more fully in the deliberations.

**Keeping everyone to task** A facilitator would help a group keep to the task when they might become distracted or want to move to ‘other business’.

## Kingdom People Facilitators

There are plans to train a number of facilitators who will then be offered to assist churches. Their role will be to work alongside each church to:

**Listen** to the people in the church with whom they are working and to reflect back what they have heard.

**Manage the process** outlined in this pamphlet in order to help the clergy and people discover the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the church they are all called to serve.

**Accompany the church** on the journey, providing the helpful perspective of a ‘critical friend’.

Introduce the parish to possible **resources** (including financial resources) that may be available.

Help the parish come to a **clear response** to the process that will shape their life going forward. This will most likely be in the form of a ‘plan’ that is stretching, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based (SMART).

You may already have a facilitator in mind. They could be a professional consultant, a leader in another denomination or someone else known to you. However, if you would like help in identifying a facilitator (from the list of trained Kingdom People Facilitators) then please send an email to [kingdompeople@cofe-worcester.org.uk](mailto:kingdompeople@cofe-worcester.org.uk). You may wish to include a brief description of your church and identify the main contact person.

Worship should reflect the great themes of justice, holiness of life, generosity and compassion.

**Reflection and stillness** Time and space should be given during the service for silence and reflection. Some churches announce a time of quiet preparation before the service begins (as a kind of ‘decompression zone’ that allows people to prepare for entering worship).

**Positive** At the Transfiguration, Peter says to Jesus that it is good for them to be there (Mark 9:5). There is a lot to be said for his simple recognition that it is good to be present where Christ is being glorified.

## 3 equipped to witness to the Gospel of love, compassion, justice and freedom

*Jesus commanded his followers to go and make disciples of all the nations. If our faith is important to us we shall want to share with others the good news of God’s healing and forgiving power. We do not need to be great theologians to describe to others what God has done for us in our lives. There is nothing more powerful than testimony.*

**Tell their stories** TV soaps are more popular than documentaries, and a simple yet personal testimony can be more effective than endless well-argued sermons.

**An enquirers group** In 2007, parishes nationally were asked whether they had provided an enquirers course or group for those seeking to know more of the Christian faith. Only 36.3% of parishes in the Diocese of Worcester had done so. Recent Alpha Courses have shown that there is an appetite for such initiatives.

**Specific events** Some deaneries have held evangelistic Mission Weekends for which they received training and support. Activities such as ‘Pray One For Me’ on Ash Wednesday and ‘Back to Church Sunday’ have also been fruitful.

**Trained and equipped** One Deanery recently held a training day on how people might tell their own story of faith. ‘Lost for Words’ (CPAS) is a course that can be used by parishes or small groups.

## 4 dedicated to helping children and young people to belong and be nurtured in faith

*Children and young people are not only the Church of tomorrow they are the Church of today. Jesus showed preferential consideration for children and we must do the same. If we do not do so, not only will the future of our churches be in doubt, they will be impoverished in the present. We have much to learn from children and young people in our parishes and schools and much to offer to them.*

**Provision** Sunday Schools have played a crucial part in the Christian formation of children and young people. A well resourced Sunday School or Junior Church can still play a vital role in a church’s outreach to young families. There is some very good material available from both Scripture Union and The Good Book Company.

**Schools and colleges** In 2010, a report entitled Going for Growth set out a vision for the Christian nurture of children and young people. It spoke of ‘every child and young person having a life-enhancing encounter with the Christian faith and the person of Jesus Christ’.

## 1

## deeply rooted in prayer and study of the scriptures

We are made for relationship with God in Jesus. Deepening that relationship must be our first priority. This happens through prayer and study of God's Word. It is, further, in God's power, not our own, that we must seek to be instruments of His Kingdom. We must always remain connected to Jesus, the true vine, in prayer and study of the scriptures for without him we can do nothing.

**Importance of prayer** Prayer needs to be at the centre of our lives as Christians. It should be our last act before we fall asleep and the first act when we wake.

**Develop and grow** Teaching people how to pray is perhaps the most important task that we undertake. Some churches have used Lent and Advent as a time to provide teaching on prayer using visiting speakers, study guides and small groups. Sometimes a number of people who subscribe to the same Bible Reading Notes also meet regularly to discuss what they have learnt and to pray together.

**Quiet days and retreats** Prayer can sometimes be more about what we undo than what we do. Sometimes we need to get away or to rest from our busyness in order to achieve the kind of peace that leads to a deeper communion with God. Many churches (and some deaneries) now plan a regular pattern of quiet days and retreats. The Retreat Association maintains a directory of retreat centres and a list of retreats that individuals can sign up for (see [www.retreats.org.uk](http://www.retreats.org.uk)).

**Accompanies all of the Church's work** Ole Hallesby wrote that '*If the labour of prayer does not precede as well as accompany all of your work in the Kingdom, it will become nothing but the work of a human, more or less capably done and with more or less effort and agitation as the case may be, but resulting in nothing but weariness both to ourselves and to others.*' Prayer before, during and after church business meetings should be more than merely perfunctory. Prayer is part of the business of the meeting.

## 2 renewed and transformed by regular worship

*Prayer needs to be not only individual but corporate. From the very beginning Christians met together on the first day of the week for the breaking of the bread and for the prayers. Churches should be schools of virtue in which we seek God's grace and encourage one another in faith, hope and love. Our relationship with the true vine must be nurtured by regular praise and receiving of holy communion.*

**Expectation** Our attitude to worship determines to some extent what we get out of it. If we come to worship hoping and expecting to be drawn deeper into fellowship with God, then a rich and life-giving encounter will often take place.

**Expresses the whole of life** The church should be alert to the live issues of the local community, the nation and the world. Those conducting services or leading the prayers of intercession need to be alert to some of the things that will be weighing on the hearts and minds of those who will be attending worship.

# Scoresheet

Characteristic	Score	6	5	4	3	2	1	TOTAL
1 deeply rooted in prayer and study of the scriptures								
2 renewed and transformed by regular worship								
3 equipped to witness to the Gospel of love, compassion, justice and freedom								
4 dedicated to helping children and young people to belong and be nurtured in faith								
5 devoted to growing deeply as disciples, offering our time, talents and money to God								
6 resourced and released to minister to others								
7 ready to engage with and serve our community								
8 committed to making our buildings fit for purpose as a spiritual and community resource								

# The Eight Characteristics

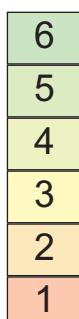
## 1 deeply rooted in prayer and study of the scriptures

- there is a recognition of the importance of prayer and a spontaneous desire for it
- people are encouraged to develop and grow in their personal discipline of prayer and devotion
- the church's programme includes opportunities for prayer and reflection such as quiet days and retreats
- prayer precedes as well as accompanies all of the church's work



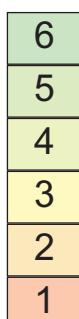
## 2 renewed and transformed by regular worship

- there is an expectation that people will meet with God in worship and be transformed by the experience
- worship expresses the whole of life: its ups and its downs, hopes and fears, politics and problems
- reflection and stillness are encouraged through effective use of time and space
- people talk about worship in a positive way



## 3 equipped to witness to the Gospel of love, compassion, justice and freedom

- people are encouraged to tell their stories of what God has done and is doing in their lives
- an enquirers group or course is regularly offered for those wanting to know more about the Christian faith
- time is set aside for specific events that share the gospel with those on the fringe or outside the church
- people are encouraged, trained and equipped to be effective in their witness to God and his Kingdom



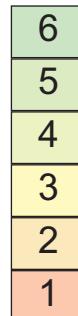
## 4 dedicated to helping children and young people to belong and be nurtured in faith

- provision is made for children and young people to learn about the Christian faith during the Sunday services
- the church makes the most of opportunities to engage with children and young people in schools and colleges
- children and young people are involved in the life of the church (from decision making to ministry and mission)
- there is a strategy for engaging with unchurched children and young people



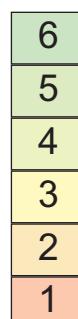
## 5 devoted to growing deeply as disciples, offering our time, talents and money to God

- discipleship training embraces the whole of life
- - personal habits and public commitments, thoughts and actions
- relationships are nurtured so that people feel accepted and are helped to grow in faith and be effective in action
- the church's programme includes provision for small groups, mentoring, short courses and Bible study
- people are encouraged to give sacrificially of their time, energy and resources



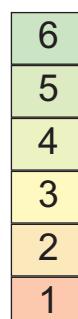
## 6 resourced and released to minister to others

- the church and its people are open to the Spirit's leading about what they should be and do
- the different gifts and experiences of all are valued and given expression in and beyond the life of the church
- all ministries are exercised within a collaborative team in which mutual support and accountability are encouraged
- vocations to authorised, licensed and ordained ministries are prayed for and encouraged



## 7 ready to engage with and serve our community

- the church has an outward looking focus and engages with the whole of life and with the wider community
- the church works in partnership with others in order to meet the needs of local people (especially the poor)
- the church is passionate and prophetic about love, compassion, justice and freedom, locally and globally
- occasional offices such as weddings, baptisms and funerals make sense of life and communicate faith



## 8 committed to making our buildings fit for purpose as a spiritual and community resource

- the church building is accessible during daylight hours
- prayers are offered in the church building on a daily basis
- buildings have been sensitively adapted so that they offer hospitality to all kinds of groups, meetings and activities
- there is a strategy for encouraging and welcoming visitors to the church

