



How to ...

Make the most of your church buildings

The purpose of this Church Buildings Review Toolkit is to enable churches to look at how effectively they are using their buildings and facilities for mission - how their life as a church is 'a Christian presence in every community.' The process reflects the Diocese's intention that we use all our resources in the most effective ways for the mission of the Gospel. To this end, each building must be a place where all people are safe and welcome (and are working towards the Diocesan 'Safe and Welcome' awards), where the Gospel's concern for the poor may be taught and acted upon and through which every member may become a fuller disciple of Jesus Christ.

The potential of every church building is to serve God's mission; it provides a constant reminder of the Gospel to the community around it; it is place of worship for the Christian community and a place of welcome for those who come to it. It is a sacred space, a place of prayer and worship and through its people a source of pastoral care. In many communities the church building is used for only a few hours every week, but still needs to be maintained and cared for.

Churches are not evenly distributed, with small villages often having a medieval church for a small community, areas of towns and cities built in the Victorian era with several churches within walking distance and modern housing estates perhaps having no church at all. In some communities its presence can be seen as entirely positive, whilst in others it may be viewed as irrelevant or with contempt.

The cost of using and maintaining church buildings is rising and in some cases may reduce the effectiveness of the mission of the Gospel. We should also take into account the environmental impact of all our buildings and the way we use them. It may be that we are the last generation who can afford to use the churches in our care for just a few hours a week.

We are custodians of the buildings in which we worship God. Each generation has altered the way they are used in mission and for the expression of our faith. There is no wrong or right way to use church buildings, provided God is truly worshiped within them. No matter how beautiful or ancient they are, we do not engage in the worship of the buildings themselves; God does not need our church buildings even though in faith, past generations, and we ourselves, have lavished wealth upon them and joyfully used them for God's work.

We are responsible for using all our church buildings effectively for mission, to meet together in comfort to sing God's praises and most importantly to grow in discipleship in the safety of our communities of faith. The difficult question that each congregation has to face is whether their much loved church building is helping or hindering the Gospel message.

This toolkit will guide you, in more detail, to consider the broad questions of:

- How do we use our buildings?
- How would we like to use our buildings as part of our mission as a church in our parish?
- What needs to happen to enable us to use our buildings more effectively?

Process

We suggest that you spend some time as a PCC or buildings/fabric committee to work through and consider the following questions which are grouped into three sections: Reviewing the situation; Thinking further about use and developments; and Outcomes/What next.

Our hope is that by working through the questions you will find yourselves in a position of being able to draw up an action plan for where to take things next.

[1] Reviewing our situation and circumstances

First let's consider your buildings and their use.

- 1.1) Describe your buildings and facilities.
- 1.2) How is your building currently used?
- Sundays, Midweek Church Groups, Hired out to community groups for use.
- 1.3) What percentage of your parish income is spent on maintaining your church building?
(Exclude major projects) *Are you spending too much? Or too little?*
- 1.4) Are there other church buildings and congregations locally in the community?
- 1.5) Are there any other community facilities in the parish or locality?
- 1.6) Do you view your building as an asset or a burden?
- 1.7) Are there activities, programmes or projects that you would like to launch, but cannot do so because you do not feel that your buildings offer the appropriate facilities? *Eg. Alpha, Café Church, Toddler Group...*

[2] Thinking Further

*Is your church building helping or hindering the mission of the Gospel?
What are the obstacles and what opportunities does your building offer?*

For each question consider the extent to which the statement is true for your church and what you would like to do in order to make that statement more true;

Our building is:

- 2.1) A building in which we as the people of God can worship God.
1 – 10 rating (1=low, 10=high) :
Possible actions to consider to improve rating:
- 2.2) A building which is welcoming to visitors and newcomers who don't regularly attend our services or activities.
1 – 10 rating (1=low, 10=high) :
Possible actions to consider to improve rating:
- 2.3) A building that looks good, and has an inviting appearance.
1 – 10 rating (1=low, 10=high) :
Possible actions to consider to improve rating:
- 2.4) A building which appropriately honours the God we worship and which speaks well of the Christian faith.
1 – 10 rating (1=low, 10=high) :
Possible actions to consider to improve rating:
- 2.5) A building which provides the facilities we need to operate all of the activities and programmes we feel called to run as part of our mission as the church of God in this parish.
1 – 10 rating (1=low, 10=high) :
Possible actions to consider to improve rating:
- 2.6) A building which is accessible to all members of the community with good accessible facilities.
1 – 10 rating (1=low, 10=high) :
Possible actions to consider to improve rating:
- 2.7) A building which can be maintained easily and affordably by members of the church and our contacts, both now and into the future.
 - a) Now:
1 – 10 rating (1=low, 10=high) :
Possible actions to consider to improve rating:
 - b) In the medium term – the next 5-10 years.

[3] Outcome One:

If you feel that your buildings may be underutilised you may find it helpful to consider the following questions:

- 3.1.1) Are there physical improvements that could be considered to enable your building to be better utilised? For example, redecorating, heating systems, installing toilets, signage, carrying out repairs, accessibility modifications.
- 3.1.2) Would it be appropriate to advertise that your church has halls available for hire to the local community? This could be online, via a church notice sheet or in local magazines.
- 3.1.3) Are there any local organisations, or other churches that might benefit from using the facilities you have available? For example, foodbanks, uniformed organisations, Christian congregations, local council community workers.
- 3.1.4) Are there changes that could be made to church activities, or new church activities that could be started, that would make better use of the facilities you have available? For example, Moving morning prayers into the vestry, launching a Messy Church in the church halls. Have you thought about doing some fundraising activities to make these changes happen, bringing in the expertise of a fundraiser, or investigated what external funding might be available?

[3] Outcome Two:

If you feel that your buildings and your use of them are not adequately serving the mission and ministry of the church, then you might find it helpful to consider the following questions:

- 3.2.1) Is there any possibility of sharing with other denominations on a regular basis or as part of a formal sharing agreement? (Chris Dobson on chris.dobson@bristoldiocese.org, can advise on ecumenical matters)
- 3.2.2) Could your church enter into partnership with other agencies, churches or organisations to provide better facilities and make the church the centre of your community?
- 3.2.3) Are there other community buildings which would better serve the wider needs of the church and community for some of the activities run by the church?
- 3.2.4) Would it be wise to relocate services into another building over the winter months to save on heating costs?
- 3.2.5) Is it timely to consider a buildings reordering or redevelopment project to make changes to the buildings to help them to better serve the needs of the church? In which case we should make contact with the DAC to explore possibilities.
- 3.2.6) **An extensive Church of England guide to discovering the role your building can play in your mission is available here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/making-changes-your-building-and-churchyard>**

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