

DIOCESE OF ELY

**MISSION
ACTION
PLANNING**

Resources for the process

**5 – Discussion Paper:
What is “church”?**

What is our ‘unconscious mental model’ of church? This will control many assumptions and expectations about what church really is. For many people:

CHURCH = Building + Priest + Sunday Services

So “keeping church going” is seen as keeping the building open, finding the money for the Parish share (or equivalent) and getting enough people into church on a Sunday to keep the system going.

Mission-Shaped Church has challenged such a model with its emphasis on “fresh expressions” of church, suggesting that church needs to become:

CHURCH = Community + Faith + Action

In other words, a community of people drawn together by faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. this leads them to take action in the world and live by a different set of values. The challenge is for our churches to be seen as “**engaging faith communities**”

FAITH

- What motivates people who are involved in the life of our church?
- Why do people come to our church?
- How do we nurture faith in church members?
- How effective are we in witnessing to the wider world?

COMMUNITY

- To what extent do we function as another organisation that people can join – or are we a community where people feel they belong and have something to contribute?
- To what extent is our church a place where people are polite to one another – or a place where we can be honest, sharing pain, joy, doubts and fears?
- To what extent is our church a place where people can be real, discover their gifts, and find a sense of vocation?
- Do we celebrate joys and share sorrows? Are we known for both laughter and tears?

ENGAGING

- In what ways are we involved in the local community?

- Do we do things FOR the community or WITH the community?
- Are we listening to the world around us?
- Does what happens in church help people to live out their faith in the world?

It is not a case of one model or the other. BOTH are clearly needed at this time, and we need to be clear as to who we are trying to reach – and how best to reach them.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has called for a “mixed economy” of church so this is not just a radical thought!