

DIOCESE OF ELY

**MISSION
ACTION
PLANNING**

Resources for the Process

**2 - “DISCERNING
CHURCH VOCATION”**

This leaflet is based on a document produced by the “Springboard Team”, “Discerning Church Vocation – a listening exercise for the local church”

The purpose of this process is to pay attention to the world in which we live in such a way as to enable the local church to:

- discern the shape of God's call to mission for *this* church, at *this* time in *this* place.

Scriptures to reflect on:

Isaiah 61:1-3

Isaiah 65:18-25

WORKING WITH A CONSULTANT/FACILITATOR

It helps to have someone working with you through this Discerning Church Vocation process – and preferably someone who is not a member of your church.

We are seeking to develop a network of such people – contact Malcolm Raby for further details.

There are four elements in the process of 'Discerning Church Vocation' as part of Mission Action Planning:

1 **Mapping our context.** This is an essential preparatory piece of work done best by a small group. Allow 4-8 weeks for this to be completed. The aim is to produce a map of the parish, and highlight key centres of the community – schools, pubs, places of worship, medical centres, community buildings, shops etc. (*In*

small communities there may not be any!) Use arrows to indicate centres outside the area to which people relate, such as: major shopping areas; major leisure centres; hospitals etc.

It might be possible to indicate where church members live within the community. The map needs to be displayed for an extended period.

2 Listening to our context. This stage can be done as an evening, or Saturday morning event, or as a series of brief day-time meetings. The aim is to invite the wider community and seek their views. A typical event might look like this:

20 minutes	Assemble; refreshments; map displayed.
35 minutes	Before the meeting, invite three community representatives to speak about the key characteristics/concerns they see in the community (no more than 10 minutes each).
10 minutes	Questions or comments on what has been heard.
30 minutes	In small (mixed) groups note words that express the issues, concerns, hopes, fears, aspirations, needs that people see to be real for this community. Each group is asked to agree on FIVE key words.
15 minutes	Informal break.
10 minutes	Brief feedback from each group.
20 minutes	Invite comments from non-church members about what they see the church contributing to the life of the community; what they would like to see the church doing more of/less of; where and how we can work together in partnership.
5 minutes	Express thanks to all who have come and taken part – end the meeting.

30 minutes PCC members to meet for informal discussion on what has been said and heard.

It is vital that a “listening attitude” is developed throughout the whole church. The suggestion is that in the month following the open meeting a genuine attempt is made to get together as many views as possible about life in the community and in the church. This could be done through questionnaires; suggestion box; door-to-door surveys etc. Sunday intercessions, preaching, articles in the magazine, news-sheets etc. should link into the process.

3 Discerning our shared vocation. The next two or three PCC meetings should follow the following pattern:

Meeting 1

REFLECTING

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|---------------------------|---|
| 15 minutes preliminaries. | Opening prayers, apologies, essential |
| 10 minutes | Summary of the “Listening Event” – someone should be asked in advance to produce this. |
| 5 minutes | In groups of two or three, answer the question: “What struck you most about the Listening Event?” |
| 15 minutes | Invite feedback. |
| 10 minutes | Prayer together. |
| 5 minutes | In small groups, identify three key issues that need to be addressed. |
| 10 minutes | Feedback – seek to identify two or three issues that should be addressed as a church |
| | Continue with PCC business ... |

Meeting 2

DISCERNING

15 minutes preliminaries.	Opening prayers, apologies, essential
5 minutes	Summary of where we have got to.
15 minutes	In small groups: "What could or should we do as a church in the light of all this?"
5 minutes	Feedback – list all ideas offered.
15 minutes	Back in small groups: Who has the vision to bring about things we have identified? Where will the energy for such work come from? What skills will be needed? Where does our faith fit in?
10 minutes	Feedback – share key insights from each group.
10 minutes	Praying together.
	Continue with PCC business ...

Meeting 3

DECIDING

10 minutes	Summary of progress to date.
15 minutes	In small groups, identify not more than three actions we discern as the vocation of this church to participate in the work of God's mission.
10 minutes	Feedback – share ideas from each group.
30 minutes	Work together to identify not more than three actions you wish to commit yourselves to.
15 minutes	Praying together.

Clearly the above is a suggested programme, and each church will want to move at its own pace. Making decisions may be the easy part

– *carrying them out may not be so easy!*

Key questions still to be addressed include:

- 1 How will the decisions made be implemented?
- 2 How do we communicate progress?
- 3 How do we inform the wider community of what is happening?
- 4 How will progress be monitored?
- 5 What is the proposed timescale?
- 6 Do we need to seek to develop partnerships?