



Leading your Church
into Growth

Talking about the 'E' Word as we come out of Lockdown

7 steps of how: or the rainbow colours of evangelism.

Over the past few months thousands of people have been plugging into online services. In addition churches have been visiting, delivering to and helping care for lots of people in our local communities.

During lockdown Leading your Church into Growth produced, 'Talking about the 'E' Word in a time of Lockdown: 7 steps of evangelism' to help people think about using online contacts and those that came about as a result of extra ministry in order to share the Good News. See <https://bit.ly/2U3HF8a>

We are now beginning to move into a time of re-opening our church buildings. The re-opening of our buildings will probably happen over three phases:

- Open for private prayer and funerals
- Open for small gatherings
- Open for larger services and events

Suddenly after weeks of lockdown it is beginning to happen and it is actually coming as a surprise to many of us.

Over the last few days and weeks dioceses have been putting out lots of essential and helpful advice about cleaning and tidying, social distancing, risk assessments and the appointing of responsible and well-equipped 'presence' people. The point of this simple paper is not to repeat this guidance but to look at our gradual re-opening from the perspective of growing our churches. This growth as always needs to be growth of relationship with our local community, spiritual growth of our people and numerical growth of the congregation and membership.

Optimistic Attitudes

There has been quite a bit of negativity about our buildings. Therefore, perhaps the first and most important move is to establish a positive attitude toward our church buildings. Re-opening and returning to them should be a confident and joyful movement. You might like to pause and reflect on the positive impact our buildings can have:

- They make a strong and well received statement to the local community.
- They offer hospitality to lots of local groups.
- They are still the main place for weddings, baptisms and funerals.
- They are the place where God's people gather and as such they hold lots of good memories.
- They are the principle place for us to worship and praise God.

Of course, buildings are not essential but, in another sense, they are 'our Temple'. As such they hold our pulpit from which the word is preached and the Eucharistic table, the place where we break bread.

Yes, of course, there are problems. We may have too many (on the other hand we may have too few in some places). Many of them are big, cold, dark and forbidding. In the main, however, they are sacred places, gathering points and kingdom mission stations.

With this in mind, we offer you some practical steps. Don't do too many but do do some or at least one.

'Don't you have a saying, "It's still four months until harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.'

John 4:35



Develop your contact list.

This list consists of all those people you have been helping, visiting or giving food parcels to and those attending your online services etc. As you reopen your church it is advised that you take contact details of those entering for the purposes of 'track and trace'.

If creating a big contact list is too much for you to handle at the moment then simply sit down at your desk and scribble out a personal list of around 5 contacts you are working with. These are the people you want to help in an evangelising way as your next step and they are also the ones you will want to invite to church as we reopen.



Have on online guest service.

We have seen that a lot of people have found it easier to come along to church online – in fact many churches and benefices have connected with new people through their online worship.

Why not, therefore, plan a 'guest service' – Sunday worship that prioritises those who are not yet Christians, rather than the needs of those who worship regularly.

Consult your contact list and invite people to come along to this service. Ask your regular congregation to do the same. Plan worship that will be inspiring and speak of the Good News that our Creator God came to save us in Christ. Plan a short, engaging evangelistic sermon, and invite people to respond to that. Consider how you might do a follow up for those who want to know more.



Run an online 'seeker's course'

Just as we have been experiencing that folk find it easier to join worship online that to come to a building they may never have been inside before, so too we many are discovering that people find it easier to come to a 'seeker's course' on line. These courses run for 6-10 weeks and are designed to explore the Christian faith in relation to questions about life that people are often asking.

Leading your Church into growth has its own '[Start Course](#)', but there are others available too. Why not plan to run one online. Invite those who came along to your guest service.



Look ahead to the autumn: Harvest, All Souls, Remembrance Sunday & Christmas.

At this time we are in a stage of 'partial lockdown'. Public worship is not allowed in our buildings, but some are still shielding and so not able to attend. Furthermore, although we hope and pray it will not be the case, as medical advisors monitor the rate of infection, it is possible that there is a 'spike' and a re-applying of some aspects of

lockdown. Although this is the case, it is worth trying to consider what will happen in the autumn. If buildings are fully open, what will Harvest Thanksgivings be like? Given that there is a pandemic, would it be sensible to have a special service around remembrance for those who have been bereaved – either lost a loved one, or some may simply want to mark the loss of freedom and a sense that time has been taken from them. It seems early to say this yet, but Advent and Christmas may be upon us sooner than we think: it will pay to be ready and to consider how we might invite our new contacts and if our carol service format might change based on what we have learned from online worship.



Start planning for 'welcome parties'.

A lot of churches run 'welcome parties' periodically. These are usually meals, perhaps with a bit of input, that are run for those who are new to the church since the last welcome party. Most of us now have a list of new contacts we have made during lockdown. Inviting them to a party in your house will not be possible for some time, so here are a few possibilities for different stages as the lockdown is lifted. The secret as always is warmth, food and conversation

- Have smaller parties but more often.
- Invite a small number to a BBQ in your garden so they feel safer.
- Offer to cook them a meal, or buy a takeaway, deliver it them, then have a brief chat over Zoom.
- Bake a cake, deliver it to them, then have a brief chat on the doorstep and leave them a letter to the next START course.
- You could try a Zoom welcome Party. Invite a few new people with a couple of warm home team group leaders. Their job would be to help keep the conversation going, but not say too much and keep in touch with the group afterwards.
- We have divided our church/community into 15 groups of about 8. Some of these didn't know one another before, but have become firm friends. We could encourage them to have parties and make sure we drop in.



Continuing to stream some content online once you are back in church buildings.

When church first reopens many of our older, ill, and vulnerable members will not attend. There is some evidence from churches in other countries that others who have got used to the ease of online services may not come to the building for worship. Whatever we might think about this in relation to discipleship it may be a fact we have to adjust to. It will be necessary to have services in the building, but also have something online.

There are lots of variables as to how different churches will be able to do this including: does the church building have Wi-Fi or not (and if not is it worth paying the monthly cost for Wi-Fi?) What is the budget of the church? Can you afford a permanent system especially for streaming live from church? How might that effect Safeguarding issues if children appear in the stream?

If possible, experiment and trial before committing to an expensive solution, and recognise that, if that is beyond your church, there will be a way to do it without Wi-Fi in the church or the need to purchase expensive cameras.

We need to keep making services, sermons, or 'thoughts for the day' available online, keep praying for our new contacts and developing suitable stepping stones for them, until they are ready to attend.



Create a culture of evangelism as we move ahead.

How much is there a culture of invitation in your church/benefice?

What one or two things can you do to make steps in this area?

Sometimes a crisis makes us face up to a new reality. It may be that

for too long we have prioritised the needs of those who already in

church over those who are not yet followers of Christ. Jesus invited his

followers to make disciples of all nations: as we move ahead how

might we make evangelism more of a priority in our churches and benefices?

Finally

Remember don't do too much. Don't do what someone else is doing. Just do what you can do...

We do all this not because evangelism is part of our job description, something that we ought to do, another thing that we are supposed to do. We share the Good News, or attempt to, because we love God and His church and because we want to serve our and His people.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 9:36