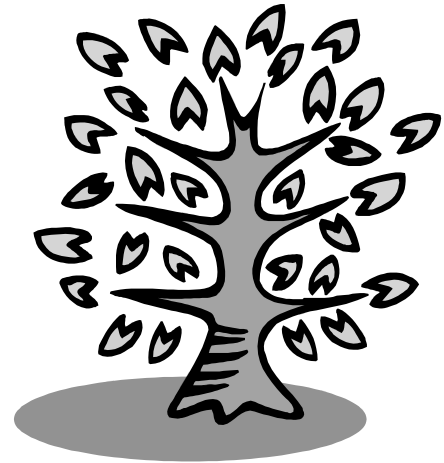


How to grow our church

Principles of Growing Churches for All

How to Grow Our Church 11: Engaging With Our Community

'You are the salt of the earth' (Matt 5:13). Through this picture Jesus challenges the church to engage effectively with its surrounding community. We are called to communicate the love of God, as we live out a practical and relevant gospel that people can understand, relate to and benefit from. It means engaging with people at the bus stop or school gates, in the workplace or pub, among the homeless or on the football pitch.



So where do we start? We have to be honest about our strengths and weaknesses, as well as realistic about what we can do to share God's love with those around us. We also need to be listening to the surrounding culture, in order to understand peoples' felt needs and to discover the opportunities.

For example, loneliness and isolation are commonplace today, especially with more and more people living alone for different reasons. Many are looking for a supportive community in which they can find acceptance and their needs met. Here is a great opportunity for any church to offer practical and unconditional help e.g., through a parenting group, play scheme, over 60's club, baby-sitting service, skills workshop, debt clinic or a young peoples' drop-in centre.

As you think about the community around us, think through the following questions:

- What is the community (geographical or networks) that you consider to be our church's responsibility?
- What sort of community is it – in terms of housing, age of population, racial patterns, general culture, sub-cultural groups, income level, and environmental issues?
- What needs within this community could be met by our church?
- How effectively could this be done? What future needs can be anticipated and prepared for?

*From a series, 'Principles of Growing Churches for All',
Written by the Rev Paul Hardingham, a vicar in Ipswich.*

Loving God

Loving God, we give thanks for the birth of your son Jesus Christ,
both in human form in Bethlehem and in spiritual form in our hearts.
May he reign as king within every human heart,
so that every town and village can live according to his joyful law of love.
by Thomas Munzer (c1490 – 1525)