



Community Engagement Ideas



One of the challenges many churches feel is how to connect well with the community in which God has placed them.

This leaflet gives ideas for engaging with and serving the wider community as well as examples of what has worked well. It isn't exhaustive, but our hope is it might just spark an idea, inspire prayer or offer encouragement.

Post office services and shops in Church buildings

Many local communities, particularly in rural or deprived areas find themselves without essential facilities such as post offices and local shops. Other areas find choices are limited with few opportunities for small, local or fair trade concerns. In some areas, Church buildings may be the only space available to the community. As a result, Churches are increasingly getting involved in hosting post office and other local community shop facilities.

In our own region, **Empingham Methodist Church** in the Stamford and Rutland Circuit opens as a post office once a week.

stamfordrutlandmethodists.org.uk/Empingham.html

In Leeds, **The Centre** Methodist Church in Methley is host to 'the wee shop' which is a home-made co-operative. They, with others, are

working alongside communities to ensure they are provided for.

the "wee shop"



thecentremethley.co.uk/theweeshop

If you are interested in developing community facilities such as a shop or post office, there are some really good resources out there.

Germinate: The Arthur Rank Centre offers support to rural communities and churches. It shares the story of **Wolds Valley Methodist Church** in North Yorkshire. They worked hard to keep the last Methodist Chapel in the area open. After a modernisation project and the closure of post office services, the space was seen as an ideal location for an outreach post office service. More about Wolds Valley and helpful guidelines for those thinking of hosting post office services in Churches can be found at: germinate.net

ChurchCare was developed as a support for those seeking to make best use of buildings in the Church of England. However, there is a strong ecumenical flavour to their work. The online resources they offer are therefore useful for and freely available to all denominations.

On their website they note how their work touches many denominations:

'To date, there are at least 35 cases of post office services being delivered from parish churches, Methodist chapels, United Reformed churches, church halls and centres.

They are all ensuring that communities are able to access local post office facilities where none would otherwise exist.'

churchcare.co.uk/churches/open-sustainable/post-offices

churchcare.co.uk/churches/open-sustainable/community-shops

Plunkett Foundation is a unique national organisation that supports the development of community shops in the UK. The website includes loads of information as well as tools and advice from those with experience. Please be aware that you do need to create a login with them to access some of the free resources, but there is also plenty to look at without creating a login.
plunkett.co.uk/community-shops

Cinema in Churches



Seeing a film in the cinema can be quite expensive these days. For those in more rural areas, availability and transport may also be issues. This means that for a number of people, the opportunity to watch a film in a cinema setting is limited.

Yet watching a film as a larger community is something many enjoy and it can help build community identity. Chatting after the film, finding out who liked it, who didn't and why is an important part of the shared experience. As a result, there are a number of Churches and communities getting involved in local cinema projects.

In Cornwall, **CFylm** aims to establish a network of community film clubs across rural Cornwall by providing practical support to local people interested in setting up and running a film club for their community:
feastcornwall.org/events/cfylm/

Below are 2 websites with stories and information about cinema in local communities. **Cinema For All** was not without set-backs, but by asking community opinion and working with local volunteers a monthly film night is now well established:

villagehallcinemas.co.uk/
cinemaforall.org.uk/advice

Also useful is
bfi.org.uk/neighbourhoodcinema/



Using film in mission

'...some filmmakers are interested in more than just making money... as genuine artists they invite us to explore the pain and the joy of being human, to look deeply into ethical issues and dilemmas, and at times to enter into worlds far different from our everyday experience...such films help us to understand a little better what it is to be a human being and, in a few cases, even to see a little more clearly the emerging kingdom of God.' (Edward McNulty, *Praying the Movies*)

This quote shows how film can be a rich resource when thinking about some of life's big questions. Watching a movie with others can open up great conversations and can be a really effective 'connecting point' in mission. Organisations like Damaris Media provide resources for films and how to shape discussion afterwards. damarismedia.com



Valuing the community and being generous

We've heard of many different ideas that churches have been using to show how much they value everyone in the community. Some folk are taking cakes and treats to local schools, police stations etc to say thank you for the work they do, others are making soup for university students during Freshers week.

In **Sleaford**, the town centre URC has become a late-night safe waiting place with hot drinks. The important element is that these are acts of pure service and generosity.

The Methodist Church has produced some useful resources around the theme 'A Generous Life'. Find them here methodist.org.uk/mission/a-generous-life and click the 'The Wheel of Generosity' link to generate your own small act of kindness.

Other useful resources are books like *Holy Habits* by Andrew Roberts holyhabs.co.uk/ and *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* by Robert Schnase which explore generosity and share examples of how churches respond robertschnase.com/books/five-practices-of-fruitful-congregations/

A place to meet

Isolation can be a problem in many communities. Our buildings can sometimes feel a great burden as maintenance costs both time and effort. Yet they are also a valuable space for people to meet, particularly in situations where opportunities to meet are limited. Examples of churches offering space to meet include luncheon clubs, dementia cafés, community cafés, and cooking lessons for single people.

It is interesting that food is often at the centre of meeting opportunities. In our region, the examples are too great to list comprehensively but include **Marshchapel Luncheon Club**, **LMC Cafe in Littleover**, **Cafe Eden at Peachcroft Christian Centre**, **Kingswood Luncheon Club** (started 1976), **the Ark@Phoenix Farm**, **Nottingham** and **High Street Coffee Bar in Witney**.



Social Action

Issues of poverty and debt including food poverty are often highlighted in the media. Churches are increasingly recognising issues such as these in their local areas and looking for ways to respond. There are now a number of social action organisations and initiatives offering help and inspiration for churches seeking to meet community needs in this way.

Below are details of a few helpful organisations as well as examples of churches already responding.



Christians Against Poverty (CAP) are a

Christian organisation with expertise in debt management. Many of their projects involve working in partnership with local churches of all denominations. There are therefore many ways that churches can connect with this organisation from hosting projects, to volunteering or fundraising. The CAP website notes *'We exist because nobody should be held hostage by debt and poverty. But the truth is that they are rife in the UK.'*

capuk.org

The Trussell Trust

is one of the largest umbrella organisations for the provision of Foodbanks. Working in partnership with local agencies, they offer emergency food for the whole household sufficient for a minimum of three days.



There may already be a Foodbank running in your area that as a Church you could get involved in supporting. If there isn't one, and you feel it is needed, working across a circuit or circuits and with ecumenical partners is a good way forward. trusselltrust.org/

Job clubs are another way of meeting community need. Most offer practical help with things such as writing a CV and how to look for work. There's also space just to chat about how things are going. In Lincolnshire, **Brigg Methodist Church** hosts one weekly.

Saltbox is a Christian Centre that supports, encourages and promotes the work of Christian Churches. It is involved in prayer and outreach initiatives as well as social responsibility work and community engagement. saltbox.org.uk/community-engagement

Responding to Homelessness

is something a number of churches have felt called to. Some churches and members are working alongside local charities, others are responding by using their building to offer hot meals or overnight accommodation.

Shelter is a national charity that works to address homelessness. shelter.org.uk/

Peterborough Soup kitchen has been running since 1983 peterboroughsoupkitchen.org.uk

Emmaus is a Christian charity active in Leicestershire and Rutland emmaus.org.uk/ leicestershire_rutland

For all aspects of social action, understanding the needs of the community in which you are located is essential. Local Authority websites can offer some really useful information, but don't forget to speak to real people as well.

Local Councillors, Neighbourhood support groups and Community Police Officers are helpful starting points. Church members living locally may have helpful community insight. Neighbours are really important as well.

What are their thoughts about the needs of the community? This might literally be those who live next to or near the Church, but it could also include other Church communities. What are their experiences? What can we learn together about responding to community needs?

Family Support

A report looking into the diversity of family life and a Core Skills for Family training course launched at the family ministry conference **We are Family** in September 2015. These are helpful resources for Churches who recognise that part of their calling is around supporting families. Because families are diverse, so are the ways in which churches can support them. The following are just a few examples of projects that have focussed on engaging with and supporting families.

The Wesley Playhouse

thisisit.me.uk/ opened in 2007 as the first church run outreach mission for families providing a **soft play** area and café.



In the south west the **Bridge Community Centre** in Launceston (bridgecommunitycentre.org) offers soft play, a skate park, cafe and various groups and activities.

The **Breakfast Club** runs weekly at a Church in the Peterborough Circuit. It offers a safe space for parents of young children to meet and share over a cuppa and toast or a bacon sandwich. Originally a SureStart project, continuing commitment from the church and community means it keeps developing in order to meet the needs of the parents and children who attend.

In Grantham, one of the Circuit churches offers **homework space with broadband** for young people who don't have access at home.

St John's Methodist, Market

Weighton is a small rural church in Yorkshire that intentionally sought to meet the needs of parents and families. In 2008 there were no children or families in the life of the church. Since then they've established 'Tea and Toast' for parents and young children after they drop off at the school next door. It now welcomes up to 50 families.



Other family activities and services have been added so that the church

is now thriving with parents and children all week long, all very much based on the expressed need of families in the village.

Fresh Expressions

Truro Methodist Circuit have resourced a vibrant, colourful space with artwork, toys and activities all based on the Creation. **Little Eden** at Twelveheads meets every Sunday afternoon for pre-school children and their families. After a time for playing there is a Christian craft activity before very simple, in- the- round worship. [facebook.com/Little-Eden-1061195477309369/](https://www.facebook.com/Little-Eden-1061195477309369/)

A number of the stories and projects shared have roots in Fresh Expressions. Their website notes: *'Fresh Expressions seeks to transform communities and individuals through championing, resourcing and multiplying new ways of being church.'* More stories and inspiration can be found at freshexpressions.org.uk/stories

On the road...

Mobile ministry has proved a really great way of meeting people where they are. The reality is that not everyone is comfortable coming into Church premises and sometimes we lack space in areas that would value a place to meet. Some Churches are therefore getting mobile and taking to the road in order to be a presence in the community.

The **RoadHog** is a mobile youth facility in



the Boston & South Lincolnshire area. During the day it provides education on youth-related issues for local secondary schools and at night goes out to the villages and town areas of Boston. The project was launched in 2009 and is run by Lincolnshire Youth Mission (LYM) as an ecumenical venture. The project is backed by prayer and trained volunteers and feels these are key to its success.

roadhogbus.org.uk/

The **GodPod** is a single-decker bus that travels around Lincoln and the surrounding villages. It is a **Lincoln Methodist** initiative that aims to 'be church' wherever it stops. The bus currently goes into villages, housing estates and secondary schools mainly, but not exclusively, for children and youth work. That too comes under LYM's work.



New Housing

A number of churches and circuits have seen new housing developments being established in their locality. For some, there has been the opportunity to be engaged with the new developments from the start. Discussions about community and faith space with developers may be integral to the whole project.

In other areas of new housing there have not been built-in opportunities to connect with those undergoing the development work.

Churches Together in England has a lot of resources around responding to the new housing areas.

cte.org.uk/Groups/44993/Home/Resources/New_Housing_Areas/New_Housing_Areas.aspx

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Liskeard and Looe Methodist Circuit in Cornwall seek to inspire healthy communities through Intentional Health. intentionalhealth.uk

In addition to this, in response to the growing mental health need amongst children and young people, their family worker has developed Creative Relaxation for children and young people.

The sessions encourage and enable children to use their imagination and natural creativity in helping them to understand who they are, how they are in relationship with others and what they believe.

facebook.com/CreativeRelaxation/

Getting more inspiration

There are so many ideas that Churches are exploring and working with that it is impossible to put them all in this leaflet, but here are a couple of great places we've found for more ideas and inspiration.

Rural Action Yorkshire launched **52 (almost) Painless Things Your Community Can Do** in February 2015. Their ideas are drawn from groups and individuals across the country. The focus is on rural areas, but they recognise many of the ideas would work anywhere. Ideas include a book exchange, a community allotment, a hen-keeping scheme or installing a defibrillator.
ruralyorkshire.org.uk/52-things-campaign



Being a learning church

Discerning how we best engage with the communities in which we are placed in only one aspect of our ongoing learning and development as churches. There are a number of useful resources that can enable churches to reflect well on the whole of their mission and ministry.

Germinate: Arthur Rank Centre's 'A Discipling Presence' resource supports those living and serving God in the countryside. It contains thinking about worship, evangelism, children and young people and making the best use of church buildings. It encourages, challenges and inspires. germinate.net/a-discipling-presence

The Methodist Church Discipleship pages help to equip us, as Christians, in our life-long journey of exploration into the heart of God's love as we follow Jesus in heart, imagination and imitation. The website contains helpful sections on Bible study resources and discipleship resources, as well as stories that people have shared.
methodist.org.uk/our-work/learning/discipleship/

Life on the frontline is a six-session DVD resource which aims to inspire and equip Christians to make a difference on their 'frontlines', where they spend most of their time. Each session has a short film, discussion material, Bible reflections and stories relating to real life. *Life on the frontline* is one of a number of resources developed by LICC to help nurture whole-life discipleship.

licc.org.uk/resources/what-is-life-on-the-frontline/

Another helpful resource is

Fruitfulness on the frontline

licc.org.uk/resources/discover-fruitfulness-on-the-frontline/

The Healthy Churches Handbook and **Developing Healthy Churches** both by Robert Warren are helpful resources for churches wishing to learn, develop and seek God's will for them into the future. The books are orientated around seven 'marks' of healthy churches and include sessions for churches to use. Some churches have used the resource as a series or short course, others as part of a vision day.

A number of churches have found ways to reflect on the material in the resource as part of a preaching series or through themed services of worship.



How we can help

The Learning Network started in 2013 and we've been privileged to work with churches, circuits and districts in many different ways through our shared learning and development. You've been kind enough to offer positive feedback about our working together:

'Very thought provoking at the right time'

'Everything was really useful, but particularly the creative ideas and practical techniques as these I will use straight away'

We value your feedback, both encouraging and constructive so please do keep it coming.

We are keen to continue working together into the future and will offer a range of learning and development

opportunities. Details are on our webpage (see below)

We hope this leaflet is helpful because an important part of working together is responding to learning needs locally. We are keen to explore how we best work together to be a God-filled force across our region and in our communities.

This might mean offering learning and development with a specific focus on discerning mission and engaging well where God has placed us. It might also include continuing development for those leading worship, vision days and themed events or supporting church and circuit reviews including working well as leadership teams. Please, get in touch with us to explore how together we can be learning people of God.

DMLN East Central Team

methodist.org.uk/our-work/learning/network-regions/east-central-region/



DMLN East Central



@dmlnec

Left to Right: Jane Bingham (Coordinator), Gill Thomas, Nigel Pimlott, Adam Sanders.

