

8. Church and Community Surveys

Purpose

These survey suggestions have been developed to help churches become better acquainted with those attending and more carefully understand their locality. It is vital for church leaders to find out as much as possible to avoid making many wrong assumptions and becoming increasingly detached from local people.

The process involves five stages:

1. Gathering information

Finding out all you can about your local area and who lives there.

2. Church survey

Discover the personal background of those present - their hopes and desires for the church, as well as contributions they are making or could make.

3. Community survey

Get to know the social composition of your locality - vital in discovering points of contact and appropriate forms of outreach.

4. Reporting to the leaders

Collate the information and share your discoveries with church leaders. Explore together how to use the information to minister more effectively within the church and community.

5. Reporting to the church

People will want to know the basics of what you have discovered.

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Stage 1 – Gathering information

Key questions.....

1. Who attends church here?

Look at Sundays, midweek, age and gender profiles. Use the church survey questionnaire to discover more factual information about those prepared to meet with you.

2. Who lives here?

What can you find out about those living in your locality? Discover (where possible) information relating to age, housing, education, health, mobility and employment etc.

Census information and web sites such as "Up My Street" are useful. Visit the local library and Council. Talk to the local Councillors.

3. Who lives where?

Seek to identify on a map the locations of those involved in the church. How far are people travelling? What transport do they use? What is the potential sphere of influence of the church?

4. Who works where?

Mark on a map the main location of members and regular attendees for their place of work. Identify the main forms and places of employment in your area.

5. Who meets where?

Identify meeting places of various groups within your locality and seek to discover where people in the Church may meet apart from Church buildings.

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Stage 2 – Church survey

Devise a short questionnaire using your own questions or some listed below. Arrange visits and use the questions as a basis for discussion.

1. How long have you been attending?
2. How far do you travel to church and by what means of transport?
3. What encouraged you to come?
4. How did you hear about the church?
5. How were you first introduced to Jesus Christ?
6. What contribution do you endeavour to make to the church?
7. Apart from the church what local community activities are you involved in? Any particular hobbies?
8. What is the best thing about your church?
9. What one thing do you think would make the biggest difference to enable the church to be more effective?
10. Would you be willing to do more than you are already doing? Is there a contribution you would like to make?

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Stage 3 - Community survey

Devise a short questionnaire using your own questions or some listed below and seek to engage local people in conversation.

1. How long have you lived in this area?
2. How would you describe this area?
3. What is the best thing about living here?
4. Is there anything you particularly dislike about living here?
5. Do you follow a particular faith?
6. Have you ever visited any of the Churches in the area?
7. Do you think the Church has anything to offer people in this locality?
8. When this survey is complete we will publish the results. Would you like a copy?

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Stage 4 – Reporting to the leaders

Summarise what you have discovered about the church and locality. Use this information to review your current outreach programme and what new opportunities could be available.

You could use the following sub-headings:

- Members
- Those attending but are not members
- Buildings and Publicity – what impressions do these give?
- History – where has the church come from?
- Future – what vision have you discovered about the future?
- Community involvement
- How representative is the church of the surrounding community?
- What changes would make a significant difference in the church and how it relates to the community?
- What significant changes would you encourage?

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Stage 5 - Reporting to the church

A brief written summary of your finding would be helpful. (no more than 2 pages). Rural Ministries would also like to receive a copy of this and any observations about the process you have been involved in.

At an appropriate meeting:

- Share some of the relevant discoveries you have made about the church and local community.
- Encourage people to consider one or two appropriate responses in terms of action. Identify specific actions that could be taken, making use of available resources.
- Along with leaders be committed to both the action and implementation of anything agreed.
- Agree to monitor progress made at agreed intervals.