

growing ministry together: OVERVIEW

This conversation kit is for PCCs, ministry teams and small groups who:

- want to develop their own potential as disciples of Jesus Christ
- want to work together imaginatively to develop people in their churches and wider communities for service
- are seeking to be 'good soil' and a healthy vocational environment where God grows the gifts of the whole church into fruitful ministry
- are wondering why it is so hard for people to volunteer themselves for the things that need to be done!

This conversation kit is a simple set of questions and resources. Each church community will use it differently and identify responses that enable them to be a healthier vocational environment through both affirmation and challenge. It will not provide quick fixes but potential conversation starters for the flourishing of church communities.

Ways to use the conversation kit:

- engage with one question for part of a meeting, and work through one question at a time in meetings over the coming year
- as the basis of an away day for the PCC or any group from the church
- with a facilitator from the diocese or deanery to accompany you for one session or more
- as a basis for developing conversations that best fit your church

The four questions and their significance to your church

The following four questions invite your church to ask itself honestly about how healthy a vocational environment exists within it. These are questions of discernment, not judgement.

- *Direction: How is your church developing a vision that inspires participation?*
This question is designed to help assess whether your church has a compelling direction, whether you sense that God is in it, and how this is shared. Whether articulated or not, feeling like we are in a community that inspires us towards participation and investment of our hearts and lives is critical to the growth of ministry.
- *Calling: How does your church encourage people to find their niche and offer themselves for ministry?*
This question explores how people identify their gifts and asks us to consider the methods we use to ask people to do things at church. Is everyone expressing and developing God's gifts through the church and in the whole of life. It asks whether people are encouraged or perhaps even prevented from considering ministry as a healthy use of the lives God has given them.
- *Equipping: How does your church equip people for their task or role?*
This question seeks to unpack how people are prepared for service so that they perform the task or role well and also mature and grow through the experience, whatever they do. What steps can help ensure this is done more thoroughly and therefore builds confidence?
- *Affirming: How does your church affirm and support people's ministries?*
This question invites honest reflection on how we support people so they can grow as the people God is shaping them to be. People need to know how they are doing if they are to be convinced that what they are offering is of value. Active support by the whole church, not just by the clergy, gives people the kind of feedback that can encourage them to explore ministry appropriate to them and can prevent people being stuck in one particular role.

‘What kind of ministry is growing in your church?’

This is the question underlying ‘growing ministry together’. ‘Ministry’ is a word used differently by individuals and churches. In this context, it refers to that broadest sense of ‘service’ or ‘giving of themselves’ that those who follow Jesus offer, knowingly or unknowingly, within our family lives, church communities, our work (whatever that is) and wider community life. Different churches will encourage various understandings of ministry. We know it is not just about clergy but it is sometimes hard to get that across!

The four questions focus particularly on the expressions of ministry that flow from the church as the body of Christ, both enabling healthy life as a worshipping community, and sharing that life with others beyond the limits of a particular church. Ministry in this sense is a spiritual expression of Christ’s love for us and all people, pictured most poignantly within the gift of baptism.

The four questions in the conversation kit can help build up a picture of your church at present, and how you can identify your next steps for developing people in ministry.

It might help you discover what percentage of your congregation:

- Willingly gives help to social events, fundraising or projects, short term or long term, etc
- Exercises ministry in pastoral care, worship leading, community projects, hospitality, prayer, outreach, etc, that once would have been seen as the responsibility of an ordained person?
- Are people prepared to represent the church in schools or community organizations?
- Has a growing sense of call to ordained or licensed ministry which may need to be discerned and exercised at a local or national level?
- Have experience of project management or team work or other skills that the local church could learn from?
- Have a particular passion for what the church needs to do more of or less of?

Notes for facilitating the questions

- There is a leaflet for each question on Direction, Affirmation, Calling and Equipping. There is no right order in which they need to be done. Leaflets can be given to individuals meeting to discuss them, and depending upon the group, you will need at least 20-30 minutes per leaflet. In the session it is probably best to read aloud the biblical texts, comment, story, and then, according to the availability of time, to choose ‘going deeper’ questions most appropriate to address. You may have other questions directly related to your church or fresh expression that need to be added.
- It would be good to include an opportunity within the discussion for the group to judge how high a priority that issue is and do some realistic action planning - even if that is only finding out more information (see the options from the resource list on the leaflet or online). You may want to wait until you have discussed the other questions in the kit before identifying what actions are most important. You can take the questions in any order you choose!
- Each question needs time for gathering people’s genuine experiences and listening carefully, especially if the response between people varies, and there may be viewpoints that need to be understood more fully. Seek an honest picture, if you can, and evaluate what significant responses you all have, and see if there are simple things that can potentially make the most difference.
- Whoever facilitates the questions will need to be familiar with the issues that arise and have an idea of what resources are available. See the facilitation notes on the diocesan website.
- *Our prayer is that this conversation kit helps our diocesan church communities to grow spiritually, reimagine ministry and build partnerships that enrich communities.*