

Lightening the Load

Expectations



Photo by Ingmar on Unsplash

Opening Prayer

Before embarking on this session, read together these words from Matthew 11 and root the conversations to come in prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, you called all who are weary and burdened to come to you, to take your yoke upon them and to learn from you, for you are gentle and humble in heart. Your yoke is easy and your burden is light, and you promise rest for our souls (from Matthew 11: 28-30).

In our coming to you, we pray to be freed from all fears and discouragement to walk radiantly as your followers.

This we ask in the name of the Son, the power of the Spirit and the loving, merciful goodness of our heavenly Father.

Amen.

Resource list

for this session, you will need:

- flip chart (+ sheets of flip chart paper for each table)
- post it notes
- A4 paper for each table
- marker pens
- biros
- copies of resource sheets
- Action plan resource sheet
- laptop, projector and speakers (if possible)
- downloaded video or Wifi access
- 2:44 cards
- refreshments (nice biscuits!)

Before you begin:

As people arrive, have hot drinks and nice biscuits available.

Encourage everyone to sit with people who attend a different church in your Mission Community.

On each table, provide copies of the **Expectations resource sheet 1**

A reflection

If you are able, watch together the video *"It's what's expected"*

If you don't have the ability to do this, an overview of the reflection is given on **Expectations resource sheet 2**. Read this slowly together. (you may wish to give everyone a copy of this reflection)

Exercise 1: (25 minutes)

Look at **Expectations resource sheet 3**

Write the tasks given onto individual post-it notes.

Then take 5 pieces of A4 paper and label them "Clergy", "Wardens", "PCC", "Volunteers", "Paid staff" (if you have any)

Part 1:

Allocate tasks to the relevant piece of paper based on who you believe is carrying out them. If any are not relevant, disregard them.

If you don't know who does them, make a separate group these.

When you have completed this part of the task, record your lists on **Expectations resource sheet 3**

Part 2:

Now repeat the exercise, but this time you should allocate tasks based on who you believe is actually responsible for them. If tasks could be done by different groups, use extra post-its.

Again, record your list on the resource sheet.

Part 3:

Now you have a completed grid, what do you notice?

Which tasks are being done by the 'wrong' people?

Which columns have too many tasks in them?

Where is the mismatch between expectations and reality?

Where are the expectations too high?

Feedback: (10 minutes)

Share your thoughts as the whole group.

Are there things that need to change?

When you also consider the list of ministries you thought about before we started, does this change the picture?



Plan a fundraising event: (20 minutes)

Use the 2:44 cards to plan a fundraising event.

This is a game and not to be taken too seriously!

Every resource in **Lightening the Load** uses this game in a slightly different way.

It's a chance to have a bit of fun together, but also to apply your learning from the session. You will hopefully also find that it reveals something about working together to Lighten the Load.

For this session:

Place all the cards on a table face down. Each group should send one person to choose 4 cards.

When all groups have chosen, write up on a flip chart the resources selected.

The groups then have 10 minutes to plan a fundraising event that features at least 3 of the resources chosen by the group. You should also chose up to 3 resources picked by other groups to add to your list.

Briefly feedback the plan for your event.

Exercise 2: (20 minutes)

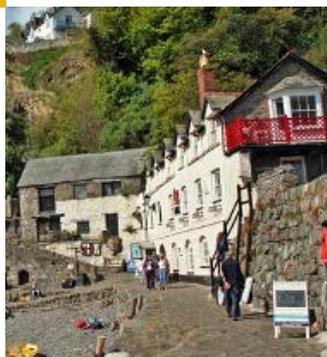
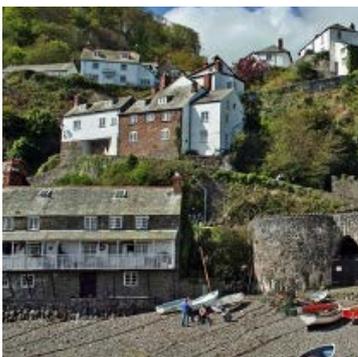
Questions for discussion

As a group, reflect on these questions.

1. How might the needs of your Mission Community change over the next 5-10 years?

2. Within your Mission Community is each church able to have its own governance and administration or would you free up more energy and resources if you had a system where responsibility is shared by a whole Mission Community and each Parish supports each other?

3. Within your Mission Community where might you want to ask the local community to be involved? What needs to be focused around the local community at Parish level, what can you share as a Mission Community? Are there areas that might work more effectively at Deanery level?



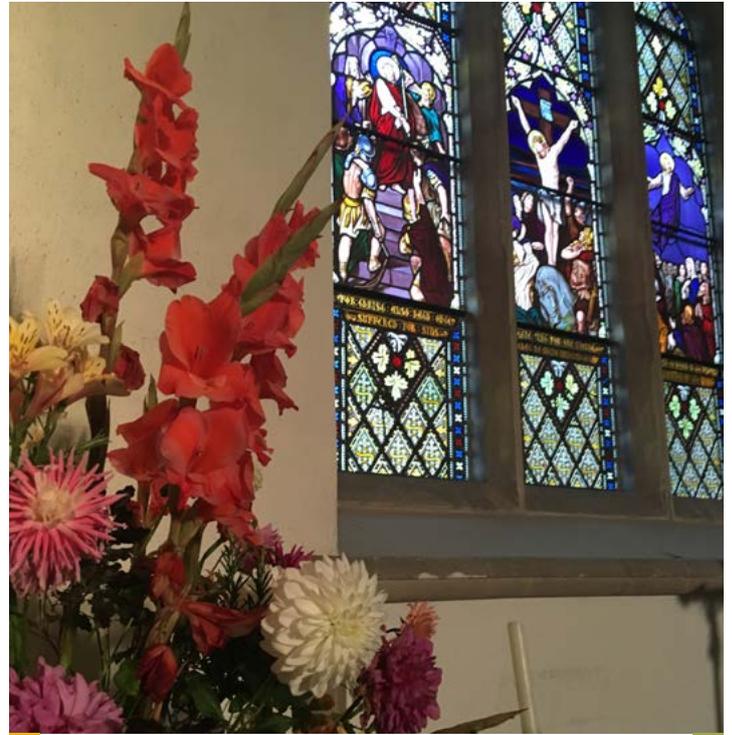
Exercise 3: (20 minutes)

Take time to read through Expectations resource sheet 4.

The table sets out some of the options you might want to explore. Think through some of the possibilities you considered in the previous exercise. Look at where your opportunities are focused and consider how you can release energy most effectively to make the most of these.

The session 'Organisation' looks in more detail at the options for Governance, so part of your action plan from this session might be to look further at that resource.

Discuss these options in your small groups for 15 minutes. Feedback your thoughts about areas worth looking at further as a larger group



Action plan: (10 minutes)

As a group, decide on 4 key action points from your discussions.

Use Resource sheet: Action plan to agree and record these, along with an outline of timescale, and the people responsible for leading on each action point.



A closing thought and prayer

What does God expect of us as his disciples? In the book of the prophet Micah we read: "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6.8). How does this affect our view of the expectations placed upon us in our rural churches and communities?

O God, you know us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers,

that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright:

grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers

and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. Amen.



Expectations resource sheet 1

What are you doing?

In this session, we are going to think about the expectations placed on us as church leaders.

Before we begin: start to think about all the ministries that volunteers in your congregation are involved in (you will need this later!)

Expectations resource sheet 2

Its what's expected

We've always done that here

How many things fill our church calendars because they have just "always" happened?

The Holy Week reflections every day, the Passover meal, the Walk of Witness, the hour at the cross, the sunrise service on Easter Sunday

The carol services, Christingles, Midnight communion and Christmas Day

The annual holiday club for children from the school

But many of these things simply have not 'always' happened, in fact few have. But year after year, particular periods of the year become cumbersome and exhausting for both clergy and laity, because of the events and services that are 'expected'.

The Diocese say we have to...

Roles that need filling, training to carry out those roles, paperwork and reporting - all things 'expected' of individual churches that drain energy and threaten to squash the joy of being a disciple of Jesus.

But have we fully grasped what is actually expected of individual churches, and what could be done differently? Are we asking more than we need of a limited number of volunteers?

Both clergy and laity are stretched very thin in rural ministry. One of the burdens can be unrealistic expectations placed upon us by churchgoers and non-churchgoers, and indeed the expectations we place on ourselves.

Some expectations may derive from an earlier time when the context of the church was different. In previous times we had more clergy looking after fewer parishes, larger congregations, more people to do things, more significant donations from local landowners and so on. Now we have far fewer clergy, smaller congregations and less money; yet in many cases we are trying to do all the same things and more.

Very well-meaning people from different backgrounds - both churchgoers and nonchurchgoers - can have quite differing expectations about the ministry of the Church in their community. That can take its toll on clergy and churchwardens alike. The experience of the Coronavirus crisis could add even more expectations about the importance of online worship. The weight of expectation can lead to exhaustion, stress and a sense of failing in our service to God and our communities.

But the very act of honestly naming those expectations may bring some sense of relief or a feeling of solidarity with others as we realise that other people feel the same as we do.

Sharing the expectations which burden us isn't always easy. But to name burdens is not a sign of weakness. It is the first step towards gaining perspective on them, and being able to say: that is a healthy expectation and that is not; that is a priority and that is not; that we should continue doing and that we should prune.

Expectations resource sheet 3

TASK	DONE BY	RESPONSIBLE FOR
Rota for leading/ preaching		
Other rotas		
Weekly pewsheet		
Safeguarding		
Social media (facebook etc)		
Website		
Finance		
Building maintenance		
Health and safety		
Children and/or Youth work		
Advertising of events		
Baptism/Wedding/ Funeral bookings		

Expectations resource sheet 4

Thinking outside the box: ideas to consider

	Ideas to think about
Admin and Data Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admin is a calling. Is there someone in the Mission Community who has a vocation to admin and could be trained as a volunteer Mission Community administrator/ manager? • A single Electoral roll officer for all the churches (or the Mission Community administrator/ manager) • A single Data Protection expert for the Mission Community
Church maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One or two people in a Mission Community with a particular interest/skills who take responsibility for arranging the maintenance work on all the churches • Joint service contracts for all churches on boilers, fire extinguishers etc. • A single Health and Safety officer for the whole Mission Community • A Friends Group from the community to help with the repairs and maintenance of the building.
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A single point of communication for email enquiries (i.e. a Mission Community administrator/manager) • If this doesn't happen already, a single newsletter for all parishes in the Mission Community • One and the same folder of orders of services across all the churches • If this doesn't happen already, a single website for all parishes in the Mission Community
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Joint Council with a single set of accounts with separate columns (and ring-fenced money) for each parish • A single treasurer for the Mission Community supported by individuals who do the banking • Greater use of the Parish Giving Scheme to take the pressure off treasurers • A single person reclaiming the Gift Aid for the whole Mission Community • One or two people in a Mission Community with a particular interest/skills who take responsibility for grant applications for all the churches • Establishing Friends' Groups to raise money for the fabric of the building
Working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gathering PCC treasurers/PCC secretaries/administrators together for an evening of filling out returns forms • Some meetings by Zoom
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working as a Mission Community Council with short PCC meetings held immediately afterwards in the same venue, or in Zoom break out groups for legal business and to formally agree recommendations of the Mission Community Council. • Establishing a joint council for all the parishes, with the PCCs either becoming dormant or remaining active, but delegating certain responsibilities • Combining two or more Parishes into a single new legal Parish with one stable PCC • Pastoral reorganisation to make your Mission Community a single legal benefice.
Policies and templates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt the same policies and templates in each parish across the Mission Community.