

Lightening the Load

Vocation

Options for church buildings



The following pages give a short summary of the range of options for church buildings that you can consider. As part of Lightening the Load you are just considering options at this stage. There is much more information, guidance and toolkits available if you decide that you want to consider any of these further. If you can, think as courageously and creatively as you can about the possibilities for your church buildings and remember you can always change your mind if, or further exploration, you decide it's not right.





Continue as a Parish Church

If each of your buildings has a stable PCC you can continue to operate as individual PCCs. You should continue to plan your mission for the coming years together as a Mission Community with clear thought given to each building within the Mission Community and how they will support your Mission Action Plan. Where you have larger worshipping communities with more resources available consider how each parish can support the others.

Specialist missional use within the Mission Community

Are there particular church buildings that may be best suited for different missional activities and worship that you might do more effectively together as a Mission Community? If a number of churches are struggling to engage children and families can you identify one church where you could focus this work? For example, could you run a Mission Community Messy Church in the church building that is closest to local schools? Or perhaps there is a smaller church building that you might use for more contemplative, intimate candlelit services or a monthly Evensong. In 'The Theological Reflection on Rural Life, Mission and Ministry' we reflected on the description of church buildings in the ancient Exeter Book. It describes churches as "leomo laemena", limbs of clay: the church Body, fashioned of the same clay (limmus) as Adam. People and churches: living and compacted clay, both fashioned for prayer and praise. Try to think of the use of each building as its vocation. What might God be calling this building to be to those living nearby?



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Becoming a Festival Church

A Festival Church is one that is no longer open for regular services but celebrates the major festivals and other significant events within the community. It is seen as a Mission Community resource and those festival services are big events which are resourced and supported by people from across the whole Mission Community. Their focus is missional around these festivals and they should be aimed at engaging a large number of the wider community. Festival Church status is seen as a stopping off point. Ideally the community will engage and church membership will grow with a need for more regular services again. If there is no significant community engagement after some time then as a Mission Community you might consider if there is still a need for a church building in that location.

Explore additional ways the community could use the church building.

This would involve consulting your community and others to find out if there is any need or interest in using your building for something else when it is not in use for worship. This could be something such as a café, library or shop, or simply offering the space for hire by existing community groups.

This could be something that church members want to develop jointly with the community which you would be actively involved in running the initiative, or you could take a more hands off approach. Either way, you will need to have a small group from your Mission Community who are willing to be involved in managing the project.

Explore cultural or commercial partnerships who might use the building

You may want to work more directly in partnership with individuals that might wish to use your building for their own business. Examples of this could be partnering with a local artist or entrepreneur to develop a commercial or cultural use for the building. This can provide a really exciting opportunity to get your local community talking about and interested in your church building. It's also likely to bring a demographic of people into your church building who might never think about entering a church. This then gives you a great opportunity to let them know what you use the building for and how welcome they would be to join you for worship. This small rural church in Norfolk has really embraced this opportunity.

www.historymystery.games/escape-game-blickling-norfolk



Leasing part or all of the building

Similar to the additional uses above, you can consider another party leasing all or part of the church building. They would then have responsibility for repair and maintenance of this section.

These types of lease generally contain a clause whereby either the Chancel remains the full responsibility of the PCC and available for regular public worship (also retaining responsibility for repairs and maintenance), or the whole building remains available for occasional offices.

Closing the church

Making a decision to close a church building is always going to be painful and difficult. Demographics of our rural landscape change over time and communities develop and shift. Sometimes there is simply no longer a need for a space for worship in a particular location. If you have consulted the local community and they have expressed no interest in supporting you to find an alternative use for the building then sometimes it is better to free up your time and energy by closing the building to focus more on the other opportunities within your Mission Community. Although this decision is one that must be made at Parish level it's crucial that the PCC and church members are supported in this decision by the wider Mission Community. This will help to ensure that they continue to feel that they belong as part of it.

