

Lightening the Load

Vocation



Opening Prayer

As you begin this session, read together the 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 for your gifts of gentleness and humility as we learn to share our gifts and common loads, that they may be lighter for all to carry.

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
- post it notes
- flip chart 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.

For this session, people should sit in their church groups.

On each table, provide copies of **Vocation resource sheet 1**

A reflection

If you are able, watch together the video **“What are you called to be?”**

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

Exercise 1: (Part 1: 20 minutes)

Preparatory Exercise

Working in your church groups, take a sheet of flip chart paper and sketch out your parish.

Think about the significant places in your village or town; school, post office, local shop, pub etc. Where do people gather in your community?

Next add post-its, of one colour, to name the opportunities surrounding each area. For example, is there a high number of tourists, a nearby school or perhaps plans for new housing in the coming years?

Now using post-its of a different colour, identify areas in your community where the church is already involved. For example, the church toddler group held in the village hall

Having a clear picture of the current situation, as well as what your community might be facing in the immediate future will help you to identify what changes you might need to consider in the next sessions.

Now you have a visual representation of your community, what do you notice? Are there common issues? Are there things that your community is particularly good at, or particularly need support with?

Exercise 1: (Part 2: 10 minutes)

As part of the worldwide Anglican Communion, we are called to mission as defined by The Five Marks of Mission

The Five Marks of Mission:

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Considering your community, and the place of the church within it, where are the opportunities to fulfill our call to mission as defined above?

Add these to your map.



Exercise 2: (15 minutes)

SWOT analysis

While often seen as a tool for business, an honest analysis of your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats can be incredibly valuable when making future plans.

Each church in your Mission Community will have different strengths, and the missional opportunities will differ. Each church will have different areas of weakness and things that threaten their future.

Use **Vocation resource sheet 3** to carry out an honest SWOT analysis on your church (both the building and the community). For example, a strength might be that your church building and grounds are particularly picturesque; a weakness could be a lack of social media engagement.

Plan an event: (20 minutes)

Use the 2:44 cards to plan an 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 up.

Display the following events on a flip chart:

- A harvest supper

- A summer family event
- A fundraising event
- Support an existing community group
- A fun, social evening for the whole community

Each group should decide which event to plan – it doesn't matter if more than one group selects a particular event. But groups should think about everything they have talked about in this session and choose the event they feel best placed to plan.

Groups should send one person to choose 4 cards to enhance the resources already available to the church community.

Briefly feedback the plan for your event.

Exercise 3: (25 minutes)

Now you have a picture of where your strengths and opportunities lie, along with your areas of weakness and those things that threaten your future as a church.

But the traditional model of each church offering Sunday worship every week is no longer the only option available to us.

The document **Vocation: Options for church buildings** sets out the possibilities for using the buildings we have in different ways.

The key here is to not just jump for the option that looks the easiest to manage and finance.

As you look at each option, take time to consider what the vocation of your building might be at this time. Look again at your map from Exercise 1, and think about where your strengths and opportunities lie.

Use the table provided on **Vocation resource sheet 4** to consider what each option offers in terms of playing to your strengths and opportunities, while mitigating against potential threats and weaknesses.



Feedback: (30 minutes)

Give each group the opportunity to feedback their thoughts to the wider group.

Have someone make notes on a flip chart of the options each church thinks fit the vocation of their building and church community.

Are you building a picture of your Mission Community that lightens the load, and releases people to make the most of the missional opportunities God is placing before you?



Action plan: (15 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

"We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Romans 12.5). St Paul's image of the Body of Christ in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 reminds us that we each have different gifts and each need one another if the Church is to thrive as Christ's Body. That applies within a parish, but also across parish boundaries within a Mission Community. We are stronger together. What does that look like in practice? What do we need to change and what do we need to let go of?

Almighty God, by your grace alone we are accepted and called to your service.

Strengthen us by your Holy Spirit and make us worthy of our calling;

through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever. Amen.



Vocation resource sheet 1

Vocation in the community

What role does your church currently play in your community?

Are there areas of community life in which you could play a bigger part?

Vocation resource sheet 2

Who are you called to be?

The traditional model of parish governance in the Church of England has been two churchwardens and a PCC looking after the church building(s) and the administration for a single parish. In recent years that model has come under pressure because of the increasing problem of finding people prepared to be churchwardens, PCC treasurers and PCC secretaries. The average age of our PCCs in rural areas is high, and there is a very real prospect that in many rural multi-parish benefices, this model will be unsustainable within the next 10 years. Already many benefices have churches with no churchwardens, or one churchwarden who wears numerous hats, including being PCC treasurer.

Our church buildings are a blessing – a sign of God's presence amongst us, a sacred place of prayer and Sabbath rest, a symbol of heaven touching earth and earth aspiring to eternity. And yet, these wonderful places hallowed by centuries of worship in our communities are also a burden to look after, one which often falls on a small group of people.

Financial resources to maintain our buildings are scarce and will be even scarcer post Coronavirus. Parishes hope that the Diocese or the C of E or the government or the National Lottery Heritage Fund will ride to their rescue and fund building projects, but in reality there is no 7th cavalry. Diocesan resources are stretched covering stipends and

we are not a wealthy Diocese; the national church funds mission initiatives, not clergy costs or building costs; unlike some countries there is no government money other than VAT reclaim through the Listed Places of Worship Scheme; NLHF grants may well be harder to get in future; legacies to churches are fewer; funeral collections often go to charitable causes, not the church; many churches have sold their investments. The cupboard looks worryingly bare.

None of this will be new to you. It is the current reality, and not one we can ignore. Coronavirus forced a pause upon us. Our buildings were closed, our fundraising activities postponed. We had to be church in a different way for a while. That pause, those new ways, gave us cause to reflect. That pause, and the need to think differently, gave many cause to reflect on our current ways.

There is now a golden opportunity to step and examine our use of the buildings gifted to us.

How can we lift the burden of ancient buildings and instead use them in fresh ways to do what they were always intended to?

Our buildings were designed with one purpose in mind – to lift the eyes and hearts of all to God.

By lightening the load of these treasures, we can free people to fulfil their God-given vocation – to witness to the love of Jesus in their daily lives.

SWOT Analysis



Vocation resource sheet 4

Options for Church Buildings

	Plays to a strength	Makes the most of a missional opportunity	Provides support for a weakness	Mitigates against a threat
Maintaining regular Parish worship				
Specialist missional use within the Mission Community e.g. focused children's work or Taize worship etc				
Becoming a Festival Church				
Explore additional ways the community could use the church building.				
Explore cultural or commercial partnerships who might use the building				
Leasing part or all of the building to another group				
Closing the church to free up energy for opportunities elsewhere in the Mission Community.				