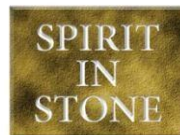


## Church Buildings for Everyone: A Visitor Welcome Toolkit



An adapted version of a document produced by Inspired North East's Spirit in Stone Project for the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle.



THE LINDISFARNE LEGACY



## **Church Buildings for Everyone: A Visitor Welcome Toolkit**

Adapted Version for the Diocese of Ely  
2020

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### **Original Document Completed August 2015**

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## I. Introduction

This toolkit is a practical resource to help volunteers in local churches to enhance their visitor welcome, plan new activities and produce new materials. It was initially produced for use in the North East of England as part of the Spirit in Stone-Lindisfarne Legacy project, but was later made available online for use by churches anywhere.

The toolkit has been adapted slightly in order to support parishes in the Diocese of Ely, but most of the material remains unchanged and thus full credit must go to the Spirit in Stone project team.

### Spirit in Stone: The Lindisfarne Legacy project

*Celebrating the heritage of historic churches across the North East of England.*

The Spirit in Stone project aimed to build capacity in historic parish churches to open their doors and welcome visitors to share the fantastic heritage on offer.

The project team worked with 50 churches in 7 local area 'clusters', to engage volunteers and visitors in the rich cultural heritage of historic places of worship in the North East. This was made possible by support from a number of organisations including the Heritage Lottery Fund, English Heritage and the Dioceses of Durham and Newcastle. The project included events for children and adults, training workshops for church volunteers, exhibition materials, information for visitors and the creation of several local heritage trails.

The toolkit was intended to extend the reach of the project, with copies distributed to all parishes in the Dioceses of Newcastle and Durham. The toolkit is intended to cover most topics with advice to get you started and ideas and pointers to further information, but it is not intended to be an exhaustive compendium. If it were it would lose its value and quickly become dated. Rather the intention is that you add your own notes, materials and ideas to the 'folder' as you tackle different projects so that if others in your church take over responsibility for a project, they have a very clear idea about how it was conceived and operated.

The toolkit was piloted during 2014 with the 48 churches that took part in the 'Spirit in Stone' project in both Newcastle and Durham Dioceses and adapted in the light of their experience.



## 2. The Church in Our Community

The Diocese of Ely is blessed with 334 churches, 43% of which are Grade I listed and 40% Grade II\*. The buildings span over a thousand years from the Saxon period at Great Paxton to the 1958 Stephen Dykes Bower church at Arbury in Cambridge. From the glorious, often unique architecture to the enormous range of historical artefacts contained within them - intricately carved pews and screens, lecterns and books and stunning stained-glass windows.

Churches are our “greatest architectural and cultural legacy”

Rachel Morley, Friends of Friendless Churches.

Places of worship are integral to the landscape of Britain, representing centuries of belief, craftsmanship and design. The buildings and their churchyards are centres for discovering local history and will often be the bastion of local distinctiveness that give the surrounding settlement its sense of place. They are enduring centres for communities, with the potential to bring people together through a variety of activities.

Whatever their origin they all testify to a living faith but, if they are to be accessible and welcoming to all, they need to be open. Locked, they give out so many negative messages and appear elitist. Opening the door and inviting people to share, explore and use the church is a first step in building its future.

The challenges then are to provide a welcome that speaks of loving and caring; to tell the stories of our church in interesting and engaging ways, and to provide opportunities for people to explore their own faith and spirituality.

Every church is different – some have exciting stories to tell others are a place of calm to take time to reflect. The main thing is to celebrate and share what is unique about your church and not to bite off more than you can chew.

**Whatever you do, do it well!**



*Wiggenhall St Mary Magdalene Scarecrow Festival*

## Why Share Church Buildings?

Churches are buildings to be shared – The Church is about its people and church buildings were the hub of the community in medieval times. Why not now?

- The church building must be used to share and communicate our Christian faith.
- Keeping the church unlocked for those who need to pray or find solace harmonises with our Christian faith.
- Glorious architecture speaks to us of the awe and majesty of God.
- The history of the church tells us much about the history of the area.
- Churches are full of monuments and other treasures that are part of our common heritage and need to be accessible to the community.
- They provide a record through their registers of life events in families and communities across the centuries.
- From a purely practical perspective churches are large buildings providing the opportunity for hosting community events, for concerts and meetings and everything in between.

The more we use the building, the more it will be open and accessible. It really isn't rocket science but sometimes we get set in our ways and forget really what the church should be about.

The PCC is responsible for church repairs and maintenance and churchwardens are responsible for the contents. However, churches and churchyards are not owned by the Diocese, nor the PCC, they are held in trust by the incumbent, not just for the congregation but for the *whole* parish.

## Who Wants to Come In?

Parishes often keep their churches locked because they say no one would want to come in, but when a church opens its doors for the first time one of the most common responses from visitors is, "Oh I've gone past this place on so many occasions and always wanted to see inside but it's never open." So if there is any one answer to this question, it's probably 'more people than you think'. See "*Who visits church buildings?*" to find out more.

## How to Keep Churches Open

Opening a church can seem like a daunting task, especially if you feel under pressure to open seven-days a week from dawn 'til dusk. There are also practical matters to consider, particularly regarding security, but a lot of this is also common sense. Options include:

- 1) Have the church open and unattended during daylight or business hours, with a team of appointed keyholders who open it and lock up.
- 2) Open during daylight or business hours with someone in attendance to welcome visitors and provide a discreet security presence.
- 3) Open at limited, but clearly advertised times to coincide with when your neighbourhood is active.
- 4) Open just part of the building that you can easily control, such as an entrance lobby, side chapel or transept.

You might have come across churches which are kept locked but advertise near the entrance contact details for a keyholder. Ecclesiastical Insurance Group (EIG) advises against this: guaranteeing the safety of keyholders can be difficult, especially if they are put in a position where they have to refuse access. For this reason, it's better to make the key available from a commercial organisation – say, a nearby café. But

wherever you choose, make sure that it's only a short walk away and that the contact information is prominently displayed and easy to follow. Make sure the door can easily be used and doesn't need a special knack to open.

The Church of England website contains advice on [church security and crime prevention](#). Churches are designed to be open, welcoming buildings. Incidences of theft and crime should not prevent this. Here are some simple steps that you can take to help protect your church from crime.

- Lock your church after dark unless there is a service or someone present
- Keep keys safe with an official or in a secure place away from the church. Maintain a list of keyholders
- Protect high-value items. Secure items to the floor or wall or replace items with cheaper alternatives when services are not taking place
- Lock away valuables and money. Keep money, silver, brass and pewter items in a safe or secure area such as the vestry or a church officer's home

## Insurance

Most insurers recommend that churches are kept open because of the positive effect that it can have on security. It is important to check with your insurer to see what advice is on offer and whether your policy would be affected. Ecclesiastical insurance, for example, believe that an open church can actually be less at risk than one that is closed and locked because, in the open church, the community is participating in church life much more and a potential burglar or vandal will never know when someone will be there or come in. Ecclesiastical also states that there is no impact on the church insurance premiums if a church is open during daylight hours and proper risk assessments have been completed.

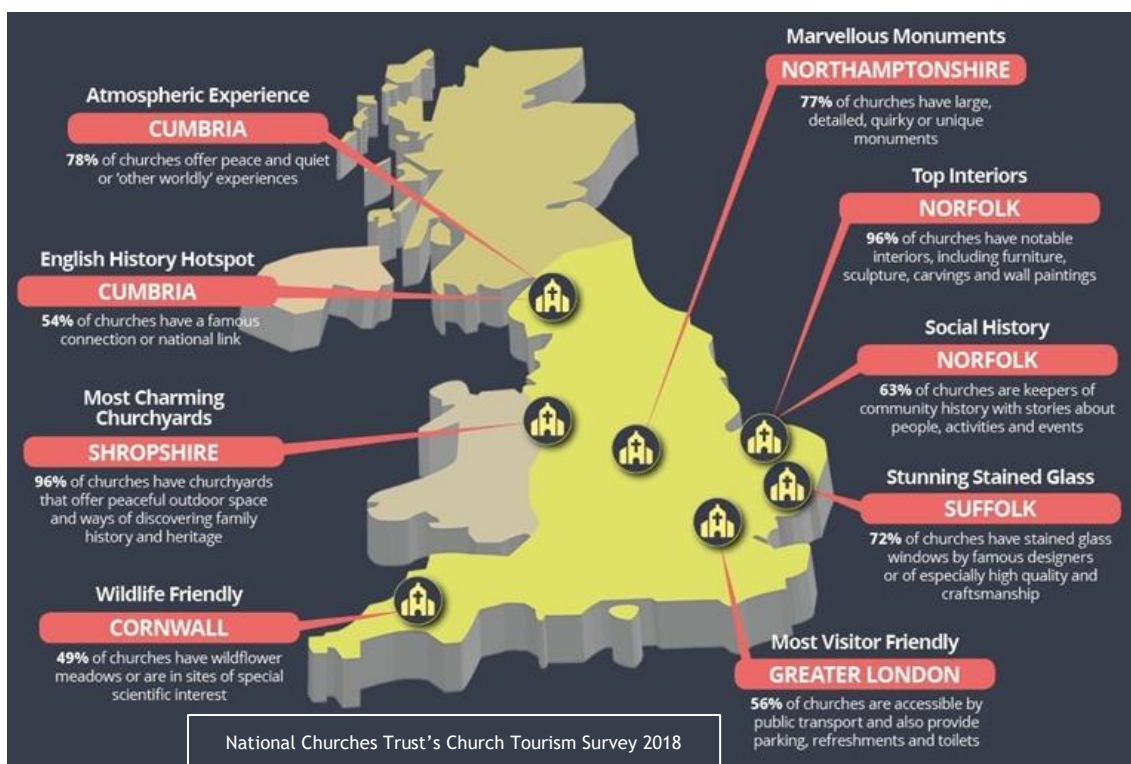
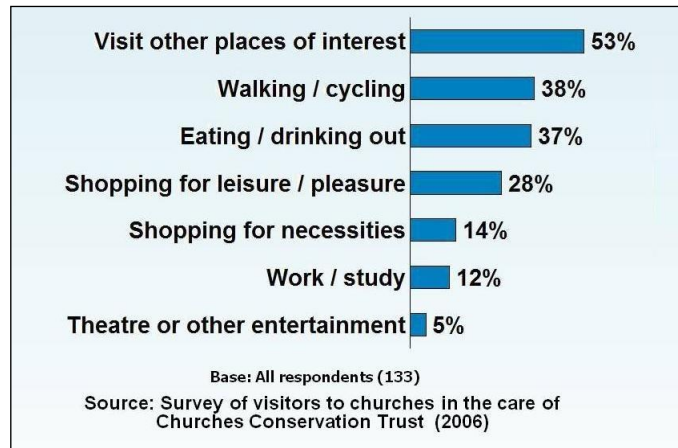
For more information visit: <https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/open-churches/>

## Who Visits Church Buildings?

The simple answer is anyone and everyone. The people who visit churches and their reasons for doing so vary widely. They range from:

- the regular worshipper to 'seasonal' worshippers
- local residents – longstanding ones and those new to the area
- local tourists and those from far-flung destinations
- enthusiasts who already know about the church and its history to members of the wider public who came across it by chance
- a guest at a baptism, or wedding to a mourner at a funeral in need of help and support
- busy people snatching a quiet moment during their lunch hour to someone in the community looking for a place of peace and calm in a turbulent world.

Research shows that for many people a visit to a church (outside service times) takes place as part of a trip involving other activities.



People come for different reasons:

- peace and quiet
- a place to reflect
- a family history quest
- a love of history or architecture
- a place of interest on a walk or bike ride
- a picnic in the churchyard
- a shelter from a storm (both meteorological and psychological!), or
- just plain old curiosity.



For whatever reason they come, the church and its welcomers must be welcoming and responsive to the visitors' needs.



*Ely Cathedral*

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### 3. Bright and Beautiful

#### Caring for your heritage

A cherished church is a well-maintained church. If you don't love your building, why should anyone else? Bird and bat droppings can daunt the best of us, but damp is the arch enemy:

- Are the gutters and gullies free of leaves and other debris?
- Have you checked the soakaways?
- Is vegetation well clear of the outside walls?
- Can you see signs of damp such as rotting woodwork or stained plaster?

It may be time to consider forming a Church Maintenance Cooperative or banding together with neighbouring churches in your deanery to procure a contractor's services. Making someone else responsible for these routine tasks will give you peace of mind.

If your church has a Friends scheme or volunteer supporters from the wider community, the chances are they will help to keep it clean, tidy and well maintained.

Perhaps there are people who would enjoy caring for the church linen, cleaning, arranging flowers, cutting grass in the churchyard or recording its wildlife even if they are not members of the regular congregation.

Are you open to new ideas or do you tend to guard the building from non-worshippers?

Relying on members of the local community for church-cleaning parties or churchyard tidying days can be difficult if they don't feel welcome at other times.

## Reordering your Heritage

Sometimes what you will want to do to make your church attractive and welcoming to visitors may involve more than maintenance and having a tidy up! You may for example want to install toilets or a kitchen/servery for worshippers and visitors.

Our churches are a key part of the nation's heritage, so it is hardly surprising that special permission is needed for such alterations. The faculty system of 'Ecclesiastical Exemption' is designed to do this, while allowing a degree of freedom for churches to undertake minor changes in line with worship needs. It is operated by the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches on behalf of the Chancellor, a senior lawyer who issues the consents, following appropriate consultation with Historic England and various amenity societies.

### Key Statements

As part of your faculty application, the DAC will ask you for Statements of Significance and Need. The first document is one of the most valuable you have for your church and is worth doing even if you don't have plans for change because it will help you focus on the importance of your heritage, help you tell your story to visitors and help you think about a clear strategy for the future of the building. You will also be asked to demonstrate a genuine need for the change you are proposing. For example, if you plan to remove some pews to accommodate essential services, who is going to benefit? - and - is there clear justification for what you want to do?

### Get In Touch

Remember, early advice from the DAC is crucial and costs nothing. The Committee will often be prepared to come out to the parish and give you advice on site. Even if you think you may not need a faculty, the list of exceptions can change.

Church buildings have been developed over many centuries and the DAC is entrusted to ensure their character is safeguarded. If your first thought is for an extension to accommodate the essential services, then you will probably be asked to consider existing space within the church first. The process of change is complex and time consuming so you will need good advice and patience!

In years gone by, only the best craftsmanship was good enough for God's house and this still applies today. A



St Andrew's, Cherry Hinton

high standard of workmanship and timeless design is always worth aiming for, with an eye to the legacy we are leaving future generations.

## Further Resources

Visit the Diocese of Ely's website for more information including guidance on:

- Maintenance and Minor Repairs
- Church Cleaning
- Managing Volunteers
- Friend's Groups
- Faculty Applications
- Community Consultation
- Statements of Significance and Need
- Managing a Church Buildings Project
- Grants and Fundraising

For a really clear explanation of how Ecclesiastical Exemption works for churches, visit:

[https://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/eccexemption/ecclesiastical\\_exemption.htm](https://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/eccexemption/ecclesiastical_exemption.htm)

Historic England's website is also a good source of general guidance for places of worship.

<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/caring-for-heritage/places-of-worship/>

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## 4. Information and Signage

### Signs That Serve

Is there an obvious sign of welcome? The simpler the better.

It's a mistake to think that simply leaving the door unlocked will be sufficient to attract visitors. Many tourists say they feel nervous about entering a church, believing they may be 'interrupting something'. That's why the number of visitors increases significantly when there is a prominent 'church open' sign outside.

If your church is remote, could you have a portable A-board on the road or at the bottom of the lane? Does your church warrant a brown sign?

It's important to keep notice boards smart, up-to-date and welcoming. Try to display the diocesan coat of arms as well as the name of your church and a contact name and number. If service times are complicated, direct visitors to the porch where they can read the latest information rather than clutter the notice board.

### Be Inclusive

How does your signage serve people with disabilities? It needs to be inclusive and indicate whether assistance is available.

Be sensitive and avoid linking your welcome with security warnings:

'Welcome. Security cameras in action' (i.e. we don't trust you).

Even the phrase 'Welcome to our Sunday Services', begs the question: 'What about weekday visitors?' Is there a way of saying both?

Try to avoid hostile language such as:

- 'Staff only. Don't park here.'
- 'Don't let your dog foul this consecrated ground'

Instead, be courteous:

- 'Please use the car park across the road'
- 'Feel free to enjoy the churchyard with your dog but please pick up after it'.



Share your ambitions.

If you have a restoration project, try to mount a display with some simple explanations of what is being done and what you hope to achieve.

And if access to the church needs to be restricted for any reason, say how long this is likely to be for and apologise for the inconvenience.

### **Friendly Facts for All**

Imagine yourself visiting another church in another part of the country. What would you need to know? Some of the most popular questions include:

- What are the service times?
- What else happens here?
- Where are the parish records kept?
- Is there a good circular walk?
- Where's the nearest toilet?
- Where can I get a cup of tea or a decent lunch?
- Are there other local attractions or events?
- Is there a handy B&B?
- Are there other churches of interest in the area? (not just the benefice).

Do we expect visitors to pay?

Think hard about what you want to convey to visitors. Are they sources of income or is your building a tool for mission? Pleas for donations can sound negative and even desperate. 'It costs £xx,xxx a year to keep this church maintained. Please help!' Consider instead:

*'A special thank you for any donations you have made to this church. They help to keep the building open and welcoming for everyone to enjoy'*

If you have a charity of the month, then say so if only to show that what you do is helping others in the outside world and not all of people's donations will simply go to the church.

Be clear and concise

Information that is beautifully presented shows you care for your visitors and want to be courteous towards them without being patronising. Try to look at the building as a whole, to ensure its grandeur is not lost in

untidy distractions. A single pop-up banner can work well and one decently sized visitor table is plenty if you keep it free of out-of-date newsletters and magazines.

Limit the amount of local information on display and keep them contained in a designated area. Make sure the leaflets and posters you do display are in date and are relevant to the church and area. Minor touches such as having fresh flowers on display or making self-serve tea and coffee (or water during the summer) available can make a huge difference.

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## 5. Will Everyone Be Able to Access Your Church?

### Practical Steps to Help Make your Church Accessible and Inclusive

Accessible churches are churches that can be enjoyed by everyone – regular worshippers, people attending events and visitors of all kinds - including those with disabilities or other access needs.

About a fifth of the population have access needs, including people with hearing and visual impairments, wheelchair users, older and less mobile people, young families with pushchairs, etc. quite apart from the need to take note of Disability.

Discrimination legislation, this is too large a community for churches to overlook!

By making some small adjustments to facilities, providing information on accessibility and understanding the needs of people with accessibility needs, our churches can appeal to, and cater for, a wider range of people and attract more visitors through their doors.

*“A church that is better for disabled people is better for everybody”*

(Tony Phelps-Jones, Making Church Accessible to All)

*Three aspects to consider*

- 1. The people involved in welcoming and looking after visitors:** Training in how to offer to help people with disabilities can make a big difference. Confidence is everything, and a well-informed and helpful response can help to overcome physical barriers.
- 2. Making good information available:** This will inform people with a range of access needs about our churches' existing facilities.
- 3. The built environment, getting in and getting around the church:** Minor changes may be possible to overcome some issues, whilst more substantial measures (e.g. ramps, lighting, heating) are more costly and complicated to achieve, especially in a historic church building. However sometimes a 'suitcase' ramp may be all that is required and is easy to achieve.

It may not be easy to make major changes to a historic church building, but in many cases relatively modest adjustments can make a huge difference. These adjustments combined with good practical information and a friendly, informed welcome will help a wider range of people to visit your church – including regular worshippers, people attending special services, community events, or visiting for historical interest, family reasons or quiet contemplation.

'Tourism for All UK' works to build bridges between disabled people and the hospitality industry. Whilst theirs is the language of business, their simple and direct view of priorities seems just as relevant to churches. The priorities should be to:

- provide information for all visitors which meets their access needs
- offer Customer Service that is disability-confident
- think through the needs of all visitors.

## Access Statements

Prepare an Access Statement

An Access Statement is a description of a venue's facilities and services from the user's perspective. Put simply: a written description providing information on accessibility, covering all areas of the premises, from car parking to entrances, meeting spaces and toilets. This should identify what is in place, potential obstacles, and what might be modified if and when funds become available. If possible, it is good to show the church in pictorial form with good photographs.

An Access Statement can be useful as it can do a number of things:

- Walking around the church and thinking about accessibility can increase awareness, it can also help not only identify what is in place but what might benefit from modification or addition. That can of course help with obligations under legislation as the church can demonstrate that they have looked carefully at the building, facilities and service they offer and have made 'reasonable' changes.
- An Access Statement can be a useful tool for those in the church to be aware of so that they are familiar with a) the access policy and b) the details of what the public is being told about the building and understand where there are potential barriers and what solutions are in place.

### Advice On Creating an Access Statement

The aim of this advice is to offer relatively simple ways of helping you to take a look at your church facilities, to make them more 'welcoming for all'.

- Consider including this as part of your Parish Mission Action Plan?
- Involve disabled people and staff/church members in the audit process and writing it.
- Include good quality relevant photos and where possible floor plans.
- Show the date you produce your Access Statement.
- Make sure it can be easily found on your website (Home Page link).
- Make it available in alternative formats.
- Ensure Staff/stewards/welcomers are familiar with its contents.
- Keep a copy by the phone to help with enquiries.
- Keep it up to date, e.g. to reflect any changes you make to your building.
- Ask for visitor/user feedback.

Don't forget to consider social accessibility issues and not just physical accessibility in your church and community. For example, how do you reassure and encourage people who have never been in a church before that it is a wonderful shared place, and not just somewhere that people go to on a Sunday to worship?

## 'The Open Door' Accessibility Audit



The Newcastle Diocesan Disability Task developed and tested an easy to-use questionnaire to enable churches to carry out their own accessibility audit. Underpinning the development of the questionnaire is the recognition that whilst barriers to inclusion frequently occur because of disabling conditions, they are more often caused by the situation rather than by the disability itself. It is important, therefore, that each church community looks at its accessibility and inclusion for disabled people, becomes aware of barriers, and seeks ways to address these.

It is hoped that the questionnaire will prove to be an effective tool, helping to inform decisions on achievable actions to improve accessibility and inclusion. The questionnaire includes advice on how to use this as part of an action plan process.

It may not be easy to make major changes to historic church buildings, but in many cases relatively modest adjustments can make a difference in reducing obstacles for people with various disabling conditions. Combined with good practical information such as an Access Statement, you may be able to help many more people to enjoy visiting or attending your church.

The Open Door Accessibility Audit questionnaire is available on the Inspired North East website <http://inspirednortheast.org.uk> - look for The Open Door under the 'Useful Information' section.

### **More Information and Advice**

There are some good insights and guidance available in the following websites, including some useful advice sheets to download free of charge:

- Church of England - <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/accessibility>
- Through the Roof provides resources to help organisations and churches empower disabled people - [www.throughtheroof.org](http://www.throughtheroof.org)
- General Information - [www.churchsafety.org.uk/information/other/disability.htm](http://www.churchsafety.org.uk/information/other/disability.htm)
- Churches for All - [www.churchesforall.org.uk](http://www.churchesforall.org.uk)
- Tourism for All UK - [www.tourismforall.org.uk](http://www.tourismforall.org.uk)

## 6. A Sacred Space

Does your church feel like a sacred space, a village hall or simply an historic building with interesting architecture?

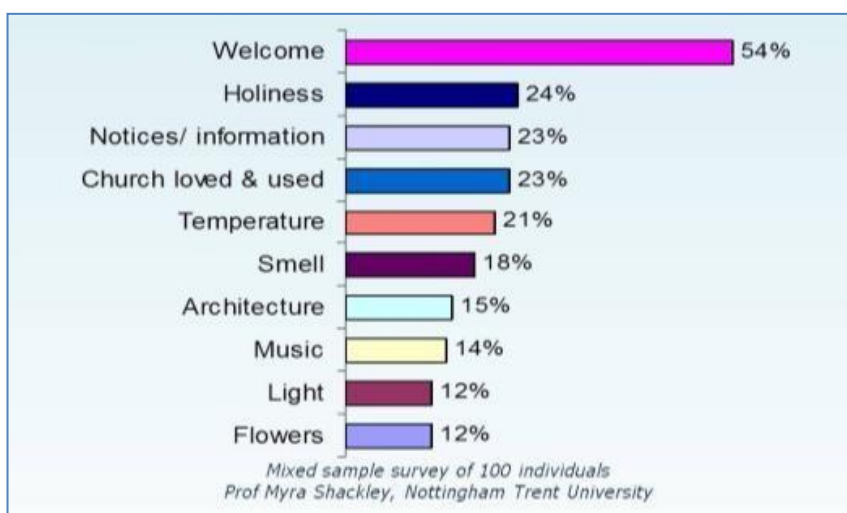
Some people work very hard to make their church a welcoming and active community space, but in doing so can lose the sacred and historic feeling that is so unique to churches and valued by so many. Similarly, churches filled with interpretation panels or laminated sheets dotted about can make a building feel full of facts but empty of grace. Getting the right balance requires careful thought and planning. Think about the different types of visitors and what each would expect when visiting your church, not just in terms of the information on display but also the look and feel of the church.

If you have a spacious church, try to resist filling it with stands and displays. Instead let people experience the awe and drama of the space and perhaps get the sense of another dimension. If your church is small, there's even more reason to cut the clutter.

Try and resist the temptation to store things under pews and behind screens. Many rural churches have little or no storage space, so consider storing rarely used items such as seasonal props and worship books 'off site' e.g. in the garages of PCC members, keeping a list of their whereabouts! Even notices left in the pews can detract from the meaning of the building.

Take a good look at what you have inside the church and assess each item. When did you last move, clean or review it? Is it still wanted? If it is an integral or historic part of the church, is it well looked after and have you interpreted it for visitors?

If your church is dark, could you have light sensors that activate on opening the door or an obvious timed switch to illuminate a key area of beauty in the church - for example the chancel?



Top ten factors appreciated by visitors to churches (sample survey, undated)

Remember, visitors tend to decide within 10-12 minutes if they will return to yours or any church. A challenging thought!



## **A Community of Faith**

What is the purpose of your church building? What does it say about your faith?

Consider displaying a statement of faith in user friendly language, either on a display board or in a leaflet if space is a problem.

Outside worship times, some churches may be manned, most not. However, a sense of the presence of God can be conveyed in contrasting ways. Some churches enable the senses to be stilled in holy and beautiful surroundings.

Perhaps mention within a Welcome leaflet that prayers have been offered to God here for x hundred years. A well-presented and quiet church on a weekday can be an invaluable aid to mission, and even agnostic visitors can feel their senses stirred and encounter a sense of the spiritual if they find the building welcoming.

Some churches are busy, warm and welcoming, offering hospitality to all comers, especially those who may not feel self-worth elsewhere. However if the church is manned, there is a fine balance between a warm welcome and an over effusive one which can be distracting. Even peering at people from a chair or high stool as they enter can be off-putting.

## **Who's Who?**

A display board of who's who can work in a spacious church if the photos and captions are clear and there are no curling edges, but consider whether you need to display all those faces, which might overwhelm and make some people feel excluded. The clergy and churchwardens might suffice with a short explanation of their role.

Perhaps you could display your people pictures in an album or well-presented loose-leaf folder so that visitors can have a glimpse of the activities you have in the church during worship and at community events, not just fundraising ones. This could also contain sentences by individual church members on why they come to church services, or what their Christian faith means to them.

## **A Place for Prayer**

Look no further than the visitors' book to see that the need for quiet prayer or reflection is a key reason that people enter a church outside of worship times.

For larger churches it is easy to set aside a quiet side chapel, but smaller churches might consider a prayer walk round the church. Both are effective but it is important to make the purpose clear and not scatter prayer aids randomly around the building.

Here are some tried and tested ideas that may help to address spiritual needs and take your visitors forward on a Christian journey:

- Prayer cards to take away. Include large print prayers and consider different languages.
- Prayer pebbles immersed in water that represents God's all-surrounding love. Say the prayer - let it go. Symbols speak louder than words and transcend language barriers.
- Consider how you can meet the spiritual needs of people from other cultures by providing something especially for them.
- A prayer tree or a box to deposit prayers. Make sure you say when these might be read out and what will happen to them.

- An opportunity to light a candle for a loved one, e.g. *Lord Jesus light of the world, we pray that your light may shine in our lives and in the lives of those we love.*
- Nightlights standing on pebbles in a large and beautiful stone bowl create a prayerful atmosphere.
- A labyrinth laid out on the floor of a transept or side aisle can encourage people to explore their own life journeys.



*Labyrinth at St Andrew's, Soham*

## A Helping Hand

Some visitors may come to the church seeking help so it is important to display telephone numbers of clergy and anyone else that might fill that role.

Contact numbers for the Samaritans, Alcoholics Anonymous and other useful helplines for those in need can be clearly displayed in the porch.

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## 7. How to Tell Your Story – the Printed Word

Visitors to your church will want to know some of the stories and facts about the building, artworks within it and connections with people, but it's important that you don't overload them otherwise they'll stop reading or, worse still, leave.

**Interpretation** is the term used for all the ways you tell people about your church. It's a key communication tool; more than just an exchange of information, interpretation is about creating meaningful experiences for visitors. It includes guidebooks, leaflets, walk-round guides, display panels and activity sheets. Interpretation is **not** the same as signage so it doesn't include directional text such as "toilets to the left", or "please give a donation", however, these still give an important impression to the visitor about the place and

organisation so they need careful consideration and, where possible, should complement interpretation. Signage is covered elsewhere in this toolkit.



## Writing for an Audience

Where should you start when you think about interpretation? It helps if you know who your audiences are, or who you want to attract, especially as interpretation isn't suited to a "one size fits all" approach. If you're not sure who your visitors are perhaps start with two potential audiences: retired adults, and families with children. The most common mistakes people make is to interpret for themselves and to try to interpret everything! You have to have a clear understanding of your target audience(s), what their expectations are, preferred learning styles, attitudes and behaviours etc....

Then you need to decide on what you're going to say to them. Successful interpretation must have brevity, clarity and conciseness, whatever your audience. The recommended amount of text on an exhibition panel or pop-up banner should be a maximum of 200 words, and you should apply the same rule to a leaflet/guide. Remember that you are writing something that should engage the reader, it isn't an academic thesis. It is better to work with a clear theme, rather than scattering random facts or trying to condense a whole subject into a short summary. Pick the most interesting or important elements; you can point the reader to other sources of information if they want to learn more.

Here are some suggestions of what interpretation should and shouldn't do:

*Interpretation should...*

- draw the visitor in
- spark curiosity and imagination
- be interesting
- tell stories in a way that has an emotive connection with the reader
- reveal information about your church in a clear and attractive style
- have brevity, clarity and conciseness ('less' can often be 'more!')
- try to have illustrations and/or pictures that are relevant and attractive

- be the best quality your budget will allow.

*Interpretation should not...*

- be an example of how much *you* know about your church
- be a list of dates and events
- try to cover every aspect of the history and story of your church
- use words and terms that are unfamiliar to the general visitor
- be poorly produced (if you are photocopying it yourself make sure it is a good copy)
- a collection of laminated sheets (these can look tired very quickly and are plastic over paper which makes them unrecyclable).

Before you write anything start by making a list of key dates, events and stories - give each a number and be prepared that not all of your list might make it into your final interpretation. Remember to look at your whole site, including the churchyard if you have one, and local connections.

It's a good idea to ask visitors what they'd like to know about - this can be different from what you'd like to tell them. Comments in your Visitors book can provide clues about what people find interesting about your church.

Now, imagine your audience as a real person in front of you when you start to write. Interpretation should be like a conversation; it needs to engage the reader in the same way and should have all the varieties of tone and expression you would use if you were speaking it aloud. A good place to start is to think about your experiences of guided tours of other churches, cathedrals, museums and heritage sites - which ones stick in your memory as being good, or bad, experiences? Think why this was the case.

It's very useful to start any written material with a short summary paragraph, not going straight into the detail. Use this to highlight the two or three most important things about your church first. Then if anyone chooses not to read any further then at least you will have conveyed the key points.

Look at your list of dates, events and stories. Imagine them as a series of holiday photographs; each gives a snapshot of time, story and place and, just like a holiday photo, there is one interesting detail to tell. Don't forget to imagine that your audience is in front of you as you write: how do you want them to feel? You need an emotive connection.

Write something for each of the things on your list. Stick with the image of it being a holiday photo and remember to write as if you are having a conversation; if you can't imagine chatting to a friend about one thing on the list strike it out. Inevitably there will be words and terms that are commonly used in church but may be unfamiliar to those who don't go to church. Some words can be explained through an illustration or photo, but others will need a simple explanation - or don't need to be used at all! Once you've finished writing, look at your sentences and then see if you can cut them down further.

Try to keep sentences short but do vary the length of them otherwise it can be quite rhythmically boring to read. Divide your material into short, discrete "chunks" that make sense independently, but relate to your overall theme. It's better to offer visitors separate pieces of text, rather than long blocks of words.

Use the active rather than the passive voice of verbs where possible. For example, try: "We can use evidence from below ground to re-construct the past" rather than "Evidence from below ground can be used to re-construct the past". Too much use of the passive sounds guarded and dull.

## Writing for Children

Writing for children should follow the same pattern; imagine the child you are writing for - what words would you use, how might you explain things? Children love stories, many of them love grisly facts and all have enquiring minds - so don't fall into the trap of writing children's interpretation that is full of "funny", meaningless information, peppered with puzzles, or a 'treasure hunt' that simply sends them on a mad dash around the building! Aim to make an emotional connection with the child and use all the principles detailed above just as you would when writing for an adult.



Illustrations or pictures are key to interpreting for children, especially if you want to make things accessible for children who find reading lots of text particularly challenging. A key thing to remember is that interpretation is not the same as formal education – interpretation should be enjoyable with the bonus that it is also educational, whilst formal education should be educational with the bonus that it is fun!

*Tip: It's a good idea to test things out before you commit to a full print run, particularly when aiming at different age groups, including adult audiences. Is it overly simple for older children, or too complex for younger ones?*

## Presentation

How you communicate information is just as important as what you communicate. Once you've established what you want to say, you need to consider how you're going to present it.

The first thing to address is layout, regardless of whether your interpretation is a leaflet, guidebook, child's activity sheet or an exhibition. The following is taken from 'Communicate' - a publication of good practice guidelines developed by museum education specialists and teachers in the North East:

### Layout

- *Line length* should be a maximum of 60-70 characters (including word spaces). Very short lines such as captions beside images can be hard to read because it is difficult to maintain reading momentum.
- *Leading* (the space between lines) should be at least a few extra points more than the font size; e.g. for 14 point font, leading could be 18-20 point. Some extra depth gives 'air' and aids readability without breaking the text up too much.

- *Paragraphs* should be separated using either a half or full line space.
- *Page breaks* - ensure that, if they interrupt a paragraph, there is at least two lines of text print either side of the break. Single lines look unconnected to the body of the text.
- *Columns* - make sure that, if you arrange text in columns, there is sufficient space between the columns to prevent readers accidentally reading across instead of down. If space is limited mark the column with a vertical rule.
- *White space* should be used meaningfully to assist visual interpretation of what's on the page.
- *Text alignment* should be to the left, leaving the right margin ragged. Avoid justified text (where there are even margins on the left and right) as this is hard to read because the word spacing is variable to ensure even margins.
- *Sculpting text* round artwork looks messy and is hard to read.
- *Printing text over the top of artwork* such as illustrations or photos is not recommended - put the text in its own box, or above the artwork, so that it can be read.
- *Vertical text* should only be used if absolutely essential and should be designed so that it is different from adjacent, horizontal text. Use sparingly.

#### Font

- Use a clear, easy to read font such as Arial, Univers or Humanst - these are recommended by the RNIB.
- Use a font size appropriate to the audience - minimum of 14 point for children and 12 point for adults.
- Avoid ornate fonts and simulated handwriting (unless you are replicating historical documents), equally avoid fonts that are too heavy or too light.
- Don't use too many fonts on a page; the variety is distracting. Use fonts in a consistent and meaningful way.
- Don't use capital letters for continuous text - it comes across as 'shouty' and is hard to read. The same applies to exclamation marks - they 'shout' too and should not be overused.
- Avoid underlining text.
- Use italic fonts sparingly and carefully, some are light and break up making them hard to read and large sections of text in italics are very hard to read.
- Use bold to highlight key words or phrases - remember that overuse will diminish the effect though.

#### Colour

If you use colour make sure the readability isn't compromised by lack of contrast and/or difficult colour combinations:

- The best colour contrasts are black on white, black on yellow, black on cream, blue on cream or a very dark colour on a very light colour.
- Avoid large blocks of intense, saturated colour which can cause eye strain.
- Avoid combining text and background/colour of paper which have similar intensity, whether too light or too dark.

- Avoid using reds and greens together as some people have difficulty distinguishing them. Equally avoid using variations of colours to denote things (such as different shades of brown) - this is hard to distinguish by people who are colour blind.
- Combining complementary colours can clash and cause eye strain.
- Avoid patterned backgrounds behind text.

#### Other Points

- Use headings to help the reader navigate the material and also see at a glance what is on the page. Headings also help to break up the page visually.
- Only number text if there is a sequence - use white space to separate them instead of bullets.
- Consider whether pages need to be numbered and only use if necessary.

### Being Clear about Your Aims

Now that you've thought about what you're going to communicate and how you're going to present it, it's important to revisit your aims again before you sign off your interpretation.

**AIM:** *What do you want to achieve?*

Whatever the size of your project - from a single leaflet or guided tour to a full exhibition – first agree exactly what it is you want to achieve. Be as specific as you can and regularly return to your aim to ensure you stay on track throughout.

Similarly, it can really help to draw up some objectives that support your aim. Make these aims and objectives specific, realistic and measurable. For example, your aim might be to 'increase the appeal of your church to visiting families' and your project might be to design and produce a family-friendly trail and leaflet. Your objectives, to meet that aim, might be 'to increase the number of families visiting the church by 10% in the first year' and 'to encourage families to stay longer at the church'. You can then measure whether you achieve these objectives by counting the families, seeing whether they pick up your leaflet and timing their visits. Use your success (or otherwise) to guide your future decisions.

**AUDIENCES:** *Who is your project for?*

As noted previously, it really helps to know who you would like to attract and engage. Think about whether you want your existing visitors and users to know more about your heritage or whether you want a project that will attract new and different audiences. Well planned interpretation will be appealing to most visitors but be clear about who you want to engage with before committing your time, money and resources

**MESSAGE:** *What do you want to say?*

Again, as noted earlier, be concise and focussed. Think about your audiences and what they would like to know and what would enhance their experience of your special place. Remember, what they want to know might well be different from what you'd like to tell them! And if you're not sure, ask them!

**MEDIA:** *What's the best way to share your story?*

There is a whole host of media to choose from, from leaflets and graphic panels to guided tours and apps. Choose your media once you've completed the steps above; know what you want to say and to whom first as this will help you make the right media choices. There may be several options to meet your aim and appeal to your audience, and your budget is also likely to influence your choices, so think carefully about the best solution for your church.



*Touchscreen Display at Great St Mary's Cambridge*

Never assume that a whizzy piece of technology or colourful exhibition will work just because you've seen and liked it elsewhere – every site and situation is different and each requires a tailored solution! Consider the long term care and maintenance of the media – guidebooks and leaflets will need to be restocked and might need to be revised occasionally; panels will need dusting and cleaning; and technology such as digital displays and audio guides will need maintenance and could become outdated quickly – such technology tends to be updated every 2-5 years so you might need a very healthy budget for the future if you invest in it.

Once you've done all of this, read your interpretation out loud and then try it out on other people. Make amendments and then produce it using the best means your budget will allow.

If leaflets are to be produced in-house try to use the following guidelines:

- make sure the quality of the paper is good so that text doesn't show through from the other side
- use thicker paper if producing an activity sheet which children are to write or colour on
- follow the good practice guidelines about colour when considering coloured paper
- use illustrations that will photocopy well in black and white and try to avoid photographs as they don't reproduce well in black and white photocopies
- make sure that the original copy is good and free from marks - check photocopies and clean the photocopier's glass screen to reduce marks
- don't produce vast quantities that are then stored in damp conditions.

## Display of Materials

How will you display your interpretation? Leaflets need to be stored so that people can easily see them. It's not always appropriate to put information boards or cards around the church but you might consider having some wooden paddles with information on, particularly at key areas, or use stands/easels (but make sure they aren't a tripping hazard). Avoid fixing items to the walls, pillars, pews etc... with drawing pins, blu/white tack or sticky tape, as they will damage and/or stain historic materials.

You could have some laminated sheets which visitors can use, but not take away, explaining what a font, pulpit, altar etc are, but try to keep them in one area as lots of laminated sheets dotted about the building can look very untidy and cluttered. Laminates also tend to look tired very quickly, particularly in damp environments, so they might need regular refreshing but remember they are a mix of plastic and paper which currently makes them unrecyclable. Always keep in mind that your church is a living church and make sure you



*Moveable displays at St Nicholas' Chapel, King's Lynn*



convey some of that in your interpretation. Visitors need reminding that they are in a church not a museum.

Remember your interpretation says a lot about your church - not just 'facts' - so presentation is as important as information. Nothing is too good for your church, so be as professional as you can. You may wish to work with a specialist interpretation team to create a bespoke display or flexible interpretation points around your church.

Find out more - resources, lists of suppliers and consultants

General Education in Museums - <https://gem.org.uk/>

Museums Association - <https://www.museumsassociation.org/home>

The Association of Heritage Interpretation - <http://www.ahi.org.uk>

Museums and Heritage Show - <https://show.museumsandheritage.com/>

National Churches Trust - <https://www.nationalchurchestrust.org/explore>

Church Visitor and Tourism Association - <http://cvta.org.uk/>

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## 8. Engaging Visitors via New Technology

The World Wide Web and widespread use of tablet PCs and new mobile devices have changed the way people find information and plan visits to places of interest. Churches are no exception. Some interesting applications are already in use which can help to engage with different audiences and offer an enhanced visitor experience. But remember that new technology is just one part of a broad palette of media, and you should select media to suit your aims, audiences and messages.

All the options described here need to be used and updated regularly, so you must be sure that you have the right people in place to manage these in the long term. There are numerous old and unused social media pages and outdated or unfinished websites for many churches which reflect badly on the church and the potential visitor experience. Just because you can do something (or everyone else is), doesn't mean you should.

*Warning: information in this page is liable to go out of date relatively quickly! For the latest advice on any aspect, you will need to engage in a bit of online research using relevant key words.*

### Start with a Website

A church website is a necessity if you wish to communicate with people before they cross the threshold of your church. It need not be complicated or too fancy, but with a little imagination it can be a platform for telling your church's unique story, attracting visitors and sharing your parish news with the world. It can even lead to people joining the church – most people moving into an area these days will research local amenities on the Web. Holidaymakers wishing to go to church are also likely to check online to find a suitable service, and people with disabilities may look online for information to help them plan their visit.

Would you like a website but are put off by technical lingo such as domains, hosting or content management systems?

Setting up a website has never been easier thanks to the ready availability of easy to-use online web-creation services. You don't need to spend lots of money on this. There are some easy-to-use low-cost website-building software packages available - and some website providers even offer free website hosting, including Webs.com, Wix.com and Google Sites. This is not too difficult for someone familiar with home computers, desk-top publishing and reasonably 'web-savvy'.

If you don't have the skill or patience to create your own, search for a site you like, see who designed it, and get a costing for something similar. Make sure training is included so you will be able to manage the content yourself once it is up and running - websites must be kept up-to-date!

At the very least, use 'A Church Near You' and 'Explorer Churches' to upload key information. The former, <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/>, is aimed at church goers, whilst <https://www.explorechurches.org/> is aimed at tourists and other visitors to church buildings. Try to make sure the two sites contain links to each other so people can navigate between them.

## Using Social Media

There is a bewildering array of different 'social' or 'user-generated' media available today. Current top-ranking channels include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest. Each offers different features and benefits depending upon what you are aiming to communicate, and how often you wish to do it.

Here is a shortlist of possible uses – but you will need to be selective and be sure that you - or someone in your congregation – has the capacity to keep these up-to-date and 'alive'. Facebook, for example, demands very frequent use to keep up conversations with those who wish to join in your 'community'.

- Facebook – great for engaging with a youth group or common-interest group. However you should consider the good practice guidelines on using social media with children and young adults. If you have a village/town Facebook page it can be more effective and easier to use this rather than setting up one purely for the church.
- Twitter – an information network made up of 140 character messages called Tweets handy for sending out brief news items, comments on current affairs, 'thoughts for the day' etc. Easy to do on the move from a mobile phone or iPad or Android tablet. Photos can also be shared via Twitter. The Twitter help centre is a good place to start: <http://support.twitter.com/>
- Instagram – designed for mobile phones it is good for sharing and building up a selection of photographs and videos of your church, activities and events.
- YouTube – can be used to offer music, online sermons, slideshow stories about your church history, etc. It is easy to upload video from a mobile phone, and a YouTube video can easily be embedded directly into a website.
- Pinterest - a photo sharing website that functions like a 'catalogue of ideas'. Registration is required for use. Users can 'pin' their own collection of images and share these with other people.

The Church of England offers advice and training through it's Digital Learning Lab - <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/church-resources/church-england-digital-labs>

Some of the County Community and Volunteering Organisations also run workshops: <http://www.cambridgecvs.org.uk/> <http://www.communityactionnorfolk.org.uk/sites/>

## Using QR codes



A 'Quick Response' or QR Code is a mobile phone readable barcode. Smartphones with a free QR reader app installed can be used to scan and click through to a webpage without having to type in a Web address. You can create QR codes very easily using one of the free QR creation websites such as [www.QRstuff.com](http://www.QRstuff.com). Simply enter the webpage address you wish to link to, then download the code for use in your publication (choose the 'short-url' option for best results).

Possible uses for QR codes:

- Place within a church notice board to enable mobile phone access to a website for details of events and activities.
- Include in notices about interesting features in your church, to enable more detailed information to be accessed.
- Use in a local trail leaflet to link to more detailed content specific to each location or church.

More about QR codes: [www.qrstuff.com/qr\\_codes.html](http://www.qrstuff.com/qr_codes.html)

## Virtual Views and other innovations

Google StreetView - allows you to get down to street level in Google Maps, and move around the actual street. It is now also possible to extend this into the interior of buildings. For churches this opens up the possibility of a virtual tour around the inside of the building. If your church is visually interesting, it can help to engage and attract visitors, help people planning weddings or other services, looking for venues for concerts or special events, school visits and so on.

Benefits:

- Integrates with Google, the world's biggest search engine
- In Google Maps, users can move from StreetView into the church building
- Anyone from around the world can view the inside of our churches and cathedrals
- Virtual tours are high quality and can be designed to highlight particular points of interest
- You can plug a virtual tour directly into your church website.

You will need to use a specialist Google-accredited photographer.

*Tip: it is wise to ensure that the church silver or other items of obvious value are not on show at the time of filming!*

## Augmented Reality

Augmented Reality refers to the use of mobile phone 'apps' to offer users a way of finding out more about features of interest, simply by pointing at them and connecting to a short spoken or visual narrative. It can be used to bring a magazine advertisement to life, or to enable a church monument, picture or window to 'speak'.

It requires investment in capacity and skills for researching and devising the narrative, and computer skills and some basic computer equipment to produce excellent, engaging content.



*Augmented Reality App at Peterborough Cathedral*

Augmented Reality could offer a creative way of engaging people with the stories embedded in our church buildings, including the Christian narratives represented. The target audience will, however, need to be carefully assessed to determine whether such media will be appropriate.

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## 9. Engaging Children in the Church

Churches have the potential to offer experiences that are rich in awe and wonder for children of all ages. Historic churches can also support children's learning. This section seeks to give suggestions for engaging children in the church.

There are likely to be three broad categories of children who visit your church:

- children who come to services
- children who visit, as tourists, with family groups
- children who visit as part of a formal education group, such as schools or uniformed organisations.

### Children Who Come to Services

If you have a Sunday School or crèche then you might want to encourage children to attend that, but not all children are happy to do this so they shouldn't be pushed if they show reluctance. Families with very young children need reassuring that, should toddlers or babies make a noise (and they will make a noise!) this will not be greeted with hard stares and tuts. They also need some resources to distract young children when they become restless and, if possible, a breakout area where they can take a fractious child rather than leaving the service altogether; this could be the choir vestry or a side chapel, as long as it is away from the main service to give the parent the sense that noise is not a problem. Put out some rugs (IKEA is a good source of cheap, washable rugs) and a box of toys before the service so it is ready should a family need it.

#### Welcome Leaflet

Consider having a leaflet you give to families as they arrive that reassures them that they are welcome and lets them know that there are many people in the congregation who have had children and know how stressful it can be when babies/toddlers begin to make a noise. Make sure that at least one of your welcomers each week has responsibility for welcoming and looking after families.

The following could be used for a leaflet:

#### **Welcome to St. Blog's Church.**

*There are activity bags at the back of church - please do help yourself to one - they are full of toys and activities for your little one to use during the service (each bag has a label which says what age child the bag is suitable for).*

*Please don't worry if your child becomes fidgety or cries during the service - we've all been there and the noise always seems worse to you than it does to us! If you need some space away from the service for a few minutes then you can use the room at the front of church on the right. Please do ask one of our welcomers (wearing the blue badges) to show you. There are rugs and toys so your child can let off a bit of steam. One of the welcomers will come and get you for communion if you haven't made it back into church. Please let one of the welcomers know if you need any help during the service.*

## Activity Bags

Activity bags, themed for particular age ranges, are a great idea for young children. A group of volunteers could get together to make them - colourful, cotton drawstring bags are perfect and you could decorate them with patterns or pictures so that they are attractive to the children. There must be clear labels with age ranges so that it is easy for adults to grab an appropriate one. Some churches have space to hang activity bags on pegs (in which case, make sure the pegs are low enough for a 2 year old to help themselves to a bag), but you may need to put them in boxes - or consider buying a portable coat rail if you have the money. The main thing is that they should be attractive to children and their parents.

See also page 31 for further ideas on educational church "explorer" boxes.



*Children's Activity Bags at St Michael's, Alnwick*

Activity bags will need regular maintenance so make sure you have a group of people who are happy to take responsibility for this. Colouring sheets, pencils etc. will need regularly replenishing and replacing, soft toys for babies need to be machine washed regularly and other toys need regular disinfecting to prevent the spread of germs.

### **Do:**

- pick toys that are age appropriate, machine washable (for babies) and capable of being disinfected (all other ages)
- have sheets of plain paper for all ages so that children can draw and write
- have plain pencils and coloured pencils ('twistables' are ideal coloured pencils as they don't need sharpening)
- look for books that complement church themes (see resource list in the Toolkit DVD) or stories
- source cheap sticker and colouring books or print out colouring sheets
- ensure bags are regularly checked, cleaned and replenished
- be ruthless and throw out any toys or books that have become damaged or are looking tatty.

### **Don't:**

- put felt tip pens in bags - they don't wash out of clothes, furniture or the floor!
- use wax crayons if you have an old, stone floor - check before you put them in
- say "yes" to offers of old, unusable pens/toys/books that someone can't bear to throw out - remember the activity bags are part of your ministry of welcome so they should be the best you can manage and you shouldn't take on someone else's junk

- put in any toys that can't either be machine-washed or disinfected - avoid knitted toys for this reason
- put in inappropriate toys - these include "gollies" or books with them in (Enid Blyton books contain them, especially Noddy), war toys (guns, tanks etc.), electronic toys or any other toy that will make a noise during the service, other non-pc toys (particularly check old books for language etc.) or anything sharp
- make "girls' bags" and "boys' bags" - put in toys that suit both sexes and remember that lots of little girls like to play with cars and lots of little boys like to play with dolls, and stick with primary colours rather than pink or blue.

Think about dividing bags into the following age ranges so that you can fill them with appropriate toys, books etc:

0 - 2 years      Toys for this age range should be new and washable. They *must* be age appropriate for safety reasons so check the packaging as all modern toys have age ranges on them. Simple picture books are a good idea even for tiny children and, as long as they are clean, second-hand books should be welcomed. Touch and feel books are also very good for babies. (Remember the advice earlier on non-pc books and see resource list for suggestions).

2 - 3 years      Put in a mixture of soft and plastic toys (observing the cleaning rules), picture books as before, but also include ones with stories (see resource list), colouring sheets, sticker books, paper and coloured pencils.

4 - 5 years      Toys which encourage imaginative play - look for any that fit your dedication or stories linked to the church (e.g. a lion for St. Mark, a monk etc.), books - both picture and early readers reading books (see resource list), puzzles, colouring sheets, sticker books, paper and coloured pencils.

## Children Who Visit as Tourists with Family Groups

We've already covered printed materials for children who visit with families in the section on *How to Tell Your Story (Chapter 7)* so you should have ideas for leaflets and spotter trails.

Think about what other, additional resources you might provide for children:

- If you have things to look at on the ceiling or high up on the walls then you could provide some children's binoculars which can be picked up and used whilst in church. Look online or in the supermarkets and go for the best magnification you can afford (aim for something priced at £5+ otherwise you'll get binoculars that have no magnification at all!) If you look specifically for children's binoculars then they will have a neck strap with an anti-strangle break fastening and should be designed to be durable. Put them in a box or basket with some suggestions of things for the children to look for.
- If you have space you might set up an activity station with a low table and a handful of chairs. Make sure they are child-sized and aim for infant rather than nursery height so that they are appropriate for a wider age range. Have baskets with coloured pencils, colouring sheets, activities and trails, but make sure they are site-specific, i.e. they reflect the stories and features of your church. Visit museums to get ideas and bring examples away to help you design your own ones.

- You could have some handling materials in a box or bag - look at the things in church that can't be touched but are interesting such as altar frontals, candlesticks, candles etc. You could put in fabric similar to that used in the altar frontal, a small candlestick, candles etc. with descriptions and questions such as "What does this feel like?", "Can you find the real one of these in the church?"

You might have a box of Lego or wooden building bricks and some drawings of arches found in your church; have some sheets with suggestions on how the children can build them using the Lego/wooden bricks.



Enjoying a Flower Festival, St Michael's Church ,Alnwick

Obviously, these are just suggestions and individual churches must decide whether they have space and/or funding for such resources. You don't have to do everything; maybe choose one idea and try it out. Experience from the museum and cathedral world suggests that such resources are really popular with families and greatly enhances your welcome to this group of visitors.

## **Children Who Visit as Part of a Formal Education Group**

Your churches have much to offer school groups and uniformed organisations, you just need to decide what and how you are going to offer it!

### **Uniformed Groups**

Uniformed organisations will relish the opportunity to visit church to support badge work and you can make contact with your local groups of brownies, cubs, scouts etc... to see how you can support them in this. It may be that they are happy to devise their own trail and just need a friendly welcome and someone who is on hand to answer any questions. Equally, if you have someone who can give them a guided tour, they may be really happy to take up the offer. Uniformed organisations often prefer to visit on the night they usually meet so make sure you have people who are happy to be in church on an evening.

### **Schools**

Anything you offer school groups will need to complement either the National Curriculum or the local Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education (RE) - this isn't as onerous as it sounds!

Schools with primary aged pupils are more likely to visit than secondary so you need to think about what you have to offer this age range. Where possible, make contact with local schools and offer to host a group of teachers for a familiarisation visit (offer tea and biscuits). Encourage them to advise you on what they want for their pupils, give them the opportunity to develop their own materials - or even ask if they can work with you to develop something. Also approach universities and colleges that train student teachers to see if they could give you some support and advice - they may even consider a student placement.



*School Visit at St Peter and St Paul's Church, Wisbech*

Remember that you are offering schools a *free* visit so they will be keen to take it up - but don't offer something you can't deliver; keep it simple and start small. Take a look at what other churches are offering, including those managed by the Churches Conservation Trust and make contact with the education team at your nearest Cathedral.

It is easy just to focus school activities in churches on RE and History, but there are a wealth of subjects that can be covered from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) to drama and public speaking. This is why it is so important to talk to teachers to find out how a visit to the church could help them to teach the curriculum, and to look around for inspiration at other places that schools visit. Avoid creating lesson and activity ideas in isolation with the hope/assumption that they will appeal to teachers.

Church buildings can also present great opportunities for pupils to learn about heritage skills and crafts and other workplace skills. If you have a building project planned, included activities that engage children in the capital works, such as demonstrations and hands-on activities led by stonemasons and carpenters, and talks about the job of a church architect. You could involve pupils in a 'Takeover Day', a national initiative run by Kids in Museums - <https://kidsinmuseums.org.uk/what-we-do/takeover-day/>

"Takeover Day is when museums, galleries, historic homes, archives and heritage sites invite young people in to take over jobs normally done by adults...Over the years, young people have:

- become tour guides, curators, shop assistants, cleaners, welcome hosts, receptionists, press officers and even conservators
- co-curated exhibitions and events, including late night gigs, sleepovers or performances
- delivered learning sessions for other groups of children
- created merchandise for a shop



- given their perspective and feedback on websites, events and interpretation
- taken over social media channels.

Once you have established your "offer" ask a local school to try it out and give you feedback so you can make changes. If you have a significant historical church, you should consider marketing your "offer" beyond the locality.

Asking visiting groups for money can feel awkward, particularly when it's local schools who have tight budgets, but it is important that the wider community understands its role and responsibilities in caring for and using church buildings. Depending upon your church and area, asking for a donation rather than assigning a fixed price might be more appropriate. Once people understand that this money goes towards the maintenance, repair and daily running costs of the church, which is the sole responsibility of the parish, they are usually quite happy to give; people are often more wary if they think their money is going into a central pot and thus will not directly benefit a specific church.

### **Ideas and Resources for All Three Categories**

The following ideas and resources can be adapted to work with all children, whether they are from your church community, visiting as part of a family, or from a school:

#### **Special events**

There are several times in the church year when you could develop a special event and/or a range of activities. The obvious ones are Christmas, Easter, Mothering Sunday and Father's Day, but you might also think about your patronal festival, or linking into a national event such as the Big Draw (<https://thebigdraw.org/>), or Heritage Open Day. As with all other suggested activities, start small with something you can resource both financially and in terms of volunteers. Here are a few ideas for special events:

**Christmas:** A crib service is always popular and many churches host them. Think about using different stories or telling the story from one character's point of view. If you have a gifted volunteer they might tell the story in role. Christmas stories, with associated craft activities could be offered to local schools; either led by volunteers, or with a paid storyteller.

Christmas Songs Sing-along: almost everyone has a favourite carol and a Christmas chart topping song, so why not hold a sing-along event with some of the favourites in church.

**Easter:** Lots of churches offer Holy Week activities for their church families; with a range of stories and craft activities. If you can, use the whole church as a space, with each part of the story told in different areas. A Lady Chapel makes an excellent Garden of Gethsemane, or Upper Room. Again, there are lots of different versions of the Easter Story, which you can tell over the course of a couple of days. Family stations of the cross are a powerful way of considering the events of Good Friday.

Craft activities are always popular with children (of all ages) as well as an Easter egg hunt, or an Easter trail which is generally easier to organise than an egg hunt.

**National events:** There are a range of events that museums and cathedrals take part in during the year, and there is absolutely no reason why churches shouldn't be involved if they have the time and volunteer resource. Find out what other attractions in your area are doing.

**Significant historical events and milestones:** if your church has links to a particular historical figure, or event you could consider developing a range of activities for significant milestones, (e.g. Magna Carta, Battle

of Waterloo, WWI). As with other events, you could offer a range of activities and stories for families and schools. Always make sure they are relevant though - don't do dinosaurs or aliens unless you have evidence of them at your church!

Remember to advertise special events as widely as possible (including via social media) and, if you are running them as family activities, capture visitor data in the form of email addresses so that you can send them details of the next event you have planned - you constantly need to update this list as children grow up and families move into/out of the area.

### Educational "Explorer" Boxes and Bags

Explorer boxes or bags are a great way to engage children in your church. They can be used with primary school groups and families and are widely used in museums and cathedrals.

Boxes and bags should be filled with a range of resources and activities to encourage children to engage with the church - to be active, rather than passive, learners in the church environment. Items in the boxes, or bags, allow children to use their senses, to be inquisitive and to explore. They encourage children to look at the church in a different way (such as through binoculars, a frame, or with a torch), they introduce children to particular stories or periods of history and they enable children to explore and talk about the building.



*A Spirit in Stone Explorer Box*

An explorer box, or bag, gives children the confidence to engage with your church in a way they might not otherwise; it breaks down the barrier between the building and the child.

If you have the budget then consider creating individual explorer bags for families: this allows each family to borrow a bag whilst they are in church (you might also consider having a character who accompanies the bag, such as a soft toy mouse or bat, etc). For primary schools it is best to have an explorer box which has multiples of each resource and a range of activities so that the class can break down into smaller groups to use the different activities in the box; boxes can be designed to be used during visits or be taken into a school to be used before a visit.

### The Churchyard

Activities don't have to be limited to inside the church, as children love to explore the churchyard. From bug hunts, to nature inspired crafts there are a variety of ways you can engage children in the natural and built heritage outdoors. Some schools may already have a Forest Schools teacher who could help you come up with ideas. Caring for God's Acre and the County Wildlife Trusts also have resources and special events to help you make the most of your churchyards.

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

<https://www.wildlifebcn.org/>

<https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/home>

## 10. Build a Visitor Experience

Important though it is to simply open your church, try and think creatively beyond this to offer your visitor more from the time they spend with you.

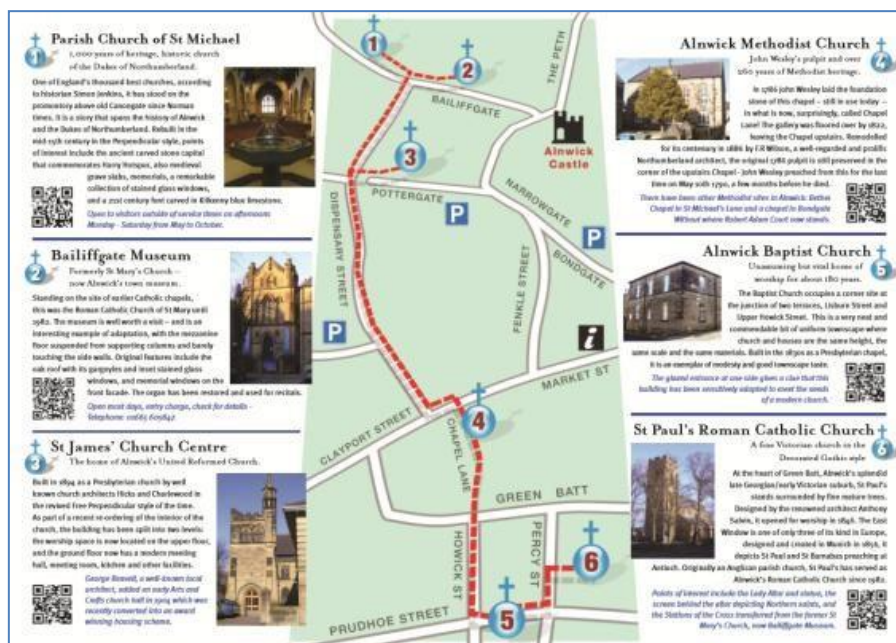
### Be Creative

Go beyond the 'look and see' concept of flower festivals and art exhibitions, lovely as they are. Offer an activity that allows tourists to be part of the local scene such as brass rubbing, a heritage workshop, painting a picture or discovering local flora in the churchyard.

Here are some eye-catching ideas:

- Have a medieval day with exhibition, guided tours, children's activities and local re-enactors.
- Invite craftspeople into the church to talk about stained glass windows or a wood carver to demonstrate how the pew ends might have been carved.
- Host workshops on traditional limewashing or brass rubbing. Invite special interest groups.
- Do Hands on History sessions about tracing your ancestors.
- Host Come and Sing or Come and Play music days.

### Strength Through Working with Others



Example of an ecumenical church heritage trail for Alnwick, Northumberland

If you can get together with other churches to create heritage trails or churchyard discovery projects, you are halfway to the successful promotion of your church. Local tourism agencies like 'packaged' activities they can promote as part of a day out and your church could benefit greatly from exposure on their websites.

You could create a circular walking trail with a churchyard picnic site halfway round, or a cycle route taking in other places of interest. A trail based on a memorable theme such as 'The Glories of Glass' or 'Saints and Symbols' could work well over a longer route. Ensure leaflets are available in each church to encourage tourists to move from one church to another.

### **Get an Identity**

If your church can become known for a regular event such as a local produce market, cafe and stalls, or a regular music concert series, you will be serving the local community as well as attracting tourists and weekenders.

What is your church's unique selling point?

Whether it is the ancient roof, the fine tombs or the unique wall paintings, learn to tell the story and make sure your local Tourist Information Centre understands its significance.



Angel Roof at St Wendreda's, March

## 11. Planning and Delivering Heritage Activities

*“I can do coffee mornings but this heritage activity thing is doing my head in”*

Churches are really good at running all sorts of activities, but mention running **heritage** activities and volunteers are liable to take fright - even though they might well be doing heritage activities without realising it!

This section of the toolkit is about explaining what’s involved and demystifying heritage activity planning. Before we start, it’s useful to think about what ‘heritage’ actually is. When we are talking about churches, the heritage includes everything from the building, churchyard and setting to the traditions, culture and special natural qualities associated with the community and place.

It’s important to remember that heritage is a living, growing thing and the people in your congregation and community today and tomorrow are as much a part of your heritage as your ancient fabric or long tradition of worship.

### Why Get Involved in Heritage Activities?

There are several reasons to consider more or different heritage activities:

- You have a fabulous historic church and want to share more of your stories and special qualities with those who already come
- You’d like to use the heritage as a way of getting new and different people to cross the threshold
- Sharing your heritage can be a way of unlocking new resources and funding.

Historic church buildings are an important part of the local and national heritage; in some areas they are the oldest building in a village and the only remaining public building. It should be part of the mission of the church to ensure that:

- Heritage is shared
- Heritage is enjoyed
- Heritage is better understood
- People and communities having more fun engaging with and learning about a shared heritage.

The key, therefore, is to regard your heritage as an opportunity rather than a challenge. Your building, treasures and stories can be used to attract and engage new and different people. You can also use the heritage as a springboard for different activities and events e.g. delivering useful computer training sessions in your community focused around digitising your archives and setting up a website to access them.

For you there is also the added dimension of introducing new and different visitors to church with the hope that some may join you in worship.

### Looking for Inspiration

Begin by thinking about the successful heritage events you have run in your church that attracted new and different people. Think about events you have seen run in other places - church or non-church - that have worked really well in terms of helping people engage with, enjoy and understand their heritage better.

Imagine you are planning Heritage Open Day this coming September and you want to do more than simply open the church for the weekend. What would work really well for your church? What would make people come and whilst with you think *“that was really tremendous”* or *‘I never knew that!’* or *‘Can’t wait to come again?’* Try and go beyond ‘look and see’ type events – offer an activity or programme of activities:

- Put on a performance in the church
- Offer costumed guided tours
- Host a storytelling event
- Hold creative workshops e.g. stained glass, wood carving, embroidery, painting, photography
- Hold some special ‘tower tours’ led by an expert
- Host exhibitions by local schools
- Hold musical workshops and performances e.g. organ playing, singing, bell ringing
- Offer heritage walks that start at your church and open with its story
- Hold seasonal family nature days in your churchyard.



St Andrew's, Swavesey

What does success look like?

Still thinking about those events where you've thought "that was a cracking day..."? Let's try and unpack why they were successful:

- You had a good engaging idea
- Successful piggy backing on national events around YOU
- You linked the church to local history in the community
- You used your unique selling point – it could be an exciting story or that your church is a place of peace or on a popular cycle route
- Your event appealed to a wide audience or attracted and engaged new people
- You ran a package of activities that engaged different groups through the day
- You thought about and planned the event well
- People pulled together and shared the load – no-one was burnt out at the end
- The wider community was involved in the planning and shared in the delivery
- A few things were done well rather than a lot on the cheap and badly
- Modest investment in facilitators for your day e.g. actors, artists, storytellers to help share your story
- Volunteers were given the skills through training to welcome visitors
- People want to come back, find out more and recommend your church to their friends

- New volunteers signed up to help care for your church and deliver activities
- You got great publicity that helped raise your profile and spread your stories to an even wider audience.



Duck Race at St Andrew's, Soham

## Planning your Activities

Starting Off - Looking at where you are now:

- Understand what you have got! What are your special qualities, unique features and best artefacts? What stories will grab people?
- Know your church and its current commitment to engaging people & communities.
- Know your audiences - who is engaged now and who could be engaged - potentially anyone and everyone, but try to break down into specific groups of people (children in educational visits, older people, etc).
- Review your activities - what you do now with and for your audiences – what's good?

*Making strategic decisions about engaging people:*

- Where do you want to be or need to be in the future?
- What activities will fit with your vision or project?
- What audiences are you targeting?
- What kind of activities are realistic for you?
- What resources – including the time, skills and energy of your team – are currently available to you?
- Share this planning - Have a small group leading.

## Building your Heritage Activities Plan

- Draw up a list of the activities and events you'd like to run; be open to new and different ideas but be realistic about what you can achieve. Build on the activities you have had success with in the past and include some new activities and events that will reach out to more and different people.

- Create an action plan for all of the activities/events you want to run so that you can keep track of what you want to do, when you want to do it and who you will need to get involved.
  - Prepare a mini project plan to help you think through all the practicalities of each activity. Make sure you have a clear aim and measurable objectives, as well as a breakdown of individual elements and tasks. Make sure you work together to allocate the different tasks to appropriate team members and keep checking that they get done!
  - Be prepared to test your ideas to make sure they work. If you are planning new interpretation, try it out on friends and family first. If you are planning a big event for a lot of people, have a dry run to make sure you have ironed out all the teething problems.
  - Phase your activities and events so you can evaluate your successes, learn from any mistakes and target your resources as you go.
  - Cut your cloth according to numbers you can handle. A small event done well is better than a big event that gets out of hand.
  - Remember that all your efforts will be wasted if you don't tell people what you are doing! Always keep time and resources in hand for your marketing and promotion and be sure to put it in place well in advance.
  - Always gather feedback from your audience and volunteers. Find out what worked well, understand what was less successful, identify any gaps or opportunities and use this to inform your next set of activities.
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## 12. Working with Volunteers

### Recruiting Volunteers

A 'sense of welcome' is one of the top factors appreciated by visitors. It is people that make the difference, so we should not underestimate the value of having a team of welcomers, stewards, ambassadors or whatever other term you wish to use. Such volunteers represent one of the front lines in a church's relationship with visitors and the community. As such, it seems good to give some thought to how we might attract, support and encourage such volunteers.

Many churches are open daily without requiring someone to be there all the time. Others, for various reasons, are only able to open regularly if there are enough volunteers to be present for some or all of the time. It is therefore important to be realistic about your capacity in terms of people and space. How many volunteers can you call upon? How much energy have you got to draw on for this? Can you recruit more volunteers if necessary?

This will help you to determine the kind of activity or event you can deliver well.

### What Sort of Things Can Volunteers Do?

- Welcoming visitors from diverse backgrounds and being prepared to point out key features of interest or tell stories associated with the church.
- Being a heritage guide to offer a more informed tour of the church building and share some of the stories of people, place and faith that it represents.



- Helping to run hands-on learning activities for organised school group visits. Helping to organise an exhibition, family activity event, flower show or other events.
- Conducting an access audit and preparing information to help people with different abilities or access needs.
- Recording and presenting information about monuments, windows and other features in the church and churchyard.
- Being part of a working group to develop new activities and uses that will help to engage the community and give a sustainable future for the church building.
- Creating websites, apps, films or guidebooks as part of a learning project.
- Organising training for fellow volunteers to help make the church and its features of interest more accessible.
- Delivering a church and community history project involving local people and their stories.

As well as looking to engage some of your church members in this, are there others in your wider community who might like to get involved? Does your church have a Friends group? Some members of a local history society, civic society, the WI or a local school might like to contribute ideas or be involved in the visitor welcome team.

### **The Benefits of Being a Volunteer**

The number of organisations relying on volunteers has increased over the years, whilst the way in which people volunteer has changed. People aren't generally looking for roles which come with high levels of commitment and responsibility but are looking for the added benefits. There is much competition out there, so you need to think about what your volunteers gain, particularly those who are not church goers.



Volunteers at St Andrew's, Cherry Hinton

Remember, people who are interested in heritage buildings can volunteer for organisations like the National Trust which can offer all sorts of benefits from membership discounts, to social outings as well as work experience. Think about how you can offer the following:

- Training
- Opportunities to make new friends
- Social events e.g. Summer BBQ, visits to other heritage sites
- Recognition for the contribution made

- A chance to support a project in the local community
- A feeling that people are making a difference by helping to safeguard the heritage for future generations
- Opportunities to learn more about the heritage of the local church and community
- No pressure to join the worshipping community, but still feel like a valued part of the church family.

## What a Church Might Expect of Its Volunteers?

Once upon a time, many organisations were simply grateful for any volunteer support they got and thus would often overlook the quality of it. Today, volunteering is becoming more ‘professional’, an approach which does successfully attract people into roles. Volunteering is, however, still an informal role and should not be treated like a paid job, but by applying a more professional approach, people feel more valued and supported and it is much easier to deal with any issues. Consider the following:

- Does the church have a volunteering policy, role descriptions and a code of conduct?
- Who will co-ordinate the volunteers? For example, a stewarding coordinator could take the lead on arranging briefings, rotas and to be a point of contact to pick up on any successes or problems.
- Who will ensure that risk assessments for tasks involving volunteers are written and kept up to date?
- Check that volunteers, including elderly and young people, are covered by your insurance. (e.g. does Ecclesiastical Insurance cover as a matter of course?)
- Provide an induction day for new volunteers or pre-season briefing event with input from clergy and more experienced volunteers.
- Provide guidance on practical procedures and relevant security and safeguarding matters.
- Provide opportunities to develop skills and confidence in welcoming visitors, explaining points of interest, and sharing stories associated with the church, including the Christian story. This could be via events arranged by or with other churches or organisations.
- Provide a safe and pleasant environment for volunteers, including resolving early any problems and difficulties that might be encountered.
- Provide affirmation and make sure they feel valued. Hold an annual tea party or volunteers’ thanksgiving service to thank them for their efforts!

For more guidance see the volunteering section on the Diocese of Ely’s website or contact your local voluntary and community Service

<http://www.cambridgecvs.org.uk/>

<http://www.communityactionnorfolk.org.uk/sites/>

### 13. Inside and Out - Greening your Church

Churches and churchyards carry special responsibilities of stewardship, not only for the sake of historical heritage but also in terms of our planet and global justice. The world's poor suffers most from damage to the environment.

Community projects can be far more rewarding and sustainable if environmental concerns are moved up the agenda. They can save money too!

Churchyards have been a focus of parish life for centuries. They can tell us about archaeology and the lives of our ancestors. They can be quiet places of reflection and are perfect for summer picnics.



*St Michael & All Angels, Felton – an invitation to help look after the churchyard*

Ancient churchyards have usually escaped the use of modern herbicides and it is vital to conserve them for their wildlife treasures. Managing your churchyard for wildlife rather than routine mowing takes time and effort but local Wildlife Trusts can advise you how to do this in a way that suits your time and resources.

Churchyard Discovery Days such as wildlife surveys or graveyard recording for all ages will encourage the local community to get involved with the churchyard and displaying the evidence is bound to interest visitors from further afield. This could be a good form of heritage activity (see Chapter 11).

Useful websites

<https://www.churchofengland.org/environment>

<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

<https://www.wildlifebcn.org/>

<https://www.norfolkwildlifetrust.org.uk/home>

## 14. Merchandise

Offering visitors the opportunity to buy something to remind them of your church is an important part of visitor welcome, as well as a source of much needed income! It is vital to remember, however, that a church shop exists to *support* the church rather than the other way round.

Look at the space you have available for merchandise and make sure that it complements its environment rather than takes over. Use the same principles you apply to interpreting the church to ensure quality and cohesion. If at all possible try not to site your shop at the entrance; it will be the first thing visitors see - what impression does that give them about the church and its values? Avoid using the backs of pews as they quickly look cluttered and messy; if you only have space for a small table then that's what you should use.

Decide on what merchandise you will sell based on your available space and match the amount of merchandise for sale to the available space. Resist the urge to offer too much; this results in a cluttered space which, ultimately, deters people from buying as it doesn't look attractive or professional.

Try to identify a theme rather than having a collection of random items that people could buy anywhere - you want your offer to be as unique to your church as possible so that people are encouraged to buy. If you have an interesting monument, window or other feature then you could use that as a branding tool. Remember the interpretation rules again here; don't use dark, poorly focussed images - make sure your chosen brand is bright and will attract buyers.

Many communities have local artists or students who might be interested in developing a design that you can use throughout your merchandise. This can be really effective on re-usable shopping bags that your visitors will be proud to carry around. You could even run a competition for school children to come up with a design for items aimed at younger audiences.

### Beyond the Tea Towel

Traditional items like postcards and tea towels are still popular, but people are looking for more inspiring and creative designs that reflect the building/area they have visited. If you do sell tea towels make sure you use at least one in your servery/ at church events. Digital photos can be blown up to A4 size at very little cost, greetings cards are popular but do make sure they use images/drawings from your church and churchyard and aren't generic handmade cards. Some people might like to have a collection of digital photographs of the church, including teachers looking to create their own resources, so it could be an idea to put a collection on a USB stick (these can be branded; you could also make DVDs but not all laptops have DVD drives).

If you have a key historical person, or theme, associated with your church consider selling merchandise linked to them. Budget is always a factor here, but you might stock books linked to your church history. Equally, if you have a churchyard that is rich in wildlife you might consider selling a smaller spotter's guide to wildlife.

Also think about what you might offer children. The key here is to make it affordable, particularly for a school group. Try to offer schools the ability to buy at least 2 items which, together, cost no more than £2.00. Make sure that these are high quality items rather than tat. School children will happily buy pencils, erasers and badges and you can use images from the church on these, which will also serve as a bit of free publicity.

Look at what other sites offer, particularly the National Trust and English Heritage. Notice how they brand their merchandise, how it complements the history of their sites and historical figures and also how they display their merchandise.

The shop might also be the place for an explanatory booklet helping to explain the Christian faith that you could offer for free. Avoid making this a dominant feature though as people tend to judge a shop on just a quick first glance, thus if they are not religious, they may assume the shop is not for them.

Avoid mixing merchandise with free materials - keep the two separate. It is good idea to have a second-hand book box, which asks for donations, but keep it separate from the shop area. Take care not let the books take over and create clutter. Put no more than 20 books out at a time; either on a table or in a neutral coloured plastic box (not tatty cardboard boxes or plastic boxes in primary colours).

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## 15. Promoting Your Church

### Media Matters

You have made your church as welcoming as possible but how will you get people to come?

Offer a sign...

A **welcome sign** clearly visible from the road has the advantage of drawing in genuine visitors while deterring potential criminals who usually prefer a church that looks neglected and forgotten. Consider the location of the sign carefully, whilst you want it to be visible try to avoid sighting it right in the middle of the best photo opportunity of the church exterior. Remember this even when erecting temporary event signage - photographers are a key audience for churches.

A leaflet or flier

See Chapter 7 for detailed advice on producing printed materials.

Remember **DO...**

- Be 'professional'
- Be inspired by great design ideas from leaflets in your local Tourist Information Centre
- Make full use of your digital camera
- Check out local printers for reasonably priced design services
- Find a local person with good publicity / graphic skills
- Consider outdoor banners for regular events ... and make sure you take them down as soon as the event is over
- Persuade local businesses to display your publicity and do the same for them.

Local Media

Don't forget to enter your event on local listings in the local press – paper and internet versions. The local press loves community stories and picture opportunities, but with staff numbers dwindling they are more likely to include your item if you send them all the key text and images.

- Make a list of local press contacts, including radio and TV

- Write a succinct press release using the time-honoured checklist of Who? What? Where? When? How? Follow it up with a phone call a few days later
- Always supply a picture and a quote and provide a photo opportunity
- Cultivate local reporters but don't pester
- Use the diocesan communications team to publicise your events

Online Media - see Chapter 8 for more on this topic.

