

WHAT WE LEARNT ABOUT HELPING OUR CHURCHES TO GROW

LEADING Your Church Into Growth is a course that has helped church leaders across the country to think differently about parish life to facilitate growth. Here are some of the highlights of what we learnt on our three-day residential course:

1: Our Leadership – being positive leaders in a missionary church

Vision is about keeping our feet on the ground, but our head in the clouds. Do a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) exercise or a mission audit to look at your situation, your people, yourself and your God.

2: Our Focus – committing ourselves to growth

Five values for missionary churches:

- focussed on God the Trinity: worship is central;
- incarnational: relating to its local culture;
- transformational: servant to its local community;
- makes disciples: calls people to faith in Christ;
- relational: welcoming, hospitable, friendship.

C of E report *From Anecdote to Evidence* gives seven characteristics of growing churches:

1. Good leadership;
2. Clear mission and purpose;
3. Willingness to reflect, change, adapt according to circumstances;
4. Involvement of lay members;
5. Being intentional in prioritising growth;
6. Being intentional in chosen style of worship;
7. Being intentional in nurturing disciples.

Big churches have problems sustaining growth. Small churches have advantage of intimacy and unity, and noticing new people.

3: Our Plan – developing a strategy for growth and doing it

Are you intuitive (impulsive) or strategic (proactive)?

Learning to be strategic involves: *Prayer* (for specific growth), *Presence* (build networks), *Proclamation* (big events) and *Persuasion* (one-to-one or small groups).

Need to put more thought into our *contacts* for events (who will we invite?) than our *content* (what will we say or do?)

4: Our Culture – developing a community of invitation, welcome and hospitality

Our 'communities' these days are actually full of lonely people.

We need to establish a family culture in our church, create a good welcoming experience, and prioritise small groups.

Our welcome is ongoing (including follow-up visits, welcome events)

5: Our Priorities – reviewing the lessons learned and priorities suggested so far for our own churches

Changes that lead to church growth, in survey of 1,000 churches:

1. Planting new congregations;
2. Making worship less formal, more relaxed;
3. Better provision for children and young people;
4. Improving welcome and integration;
5. Better quality, more varied, contemporary music;
6. More lay involvement in leadership;
7. Better groups and pastoral care;
8. Improvements to buildings.

Develop mission statement so congregation understand purpose of your church. Where you are now & where do you want to be?

6: Our Calling – Telling our story & helping people meet Jesus

Sharing our own story of faith helps us to understand how others might come to faith.

The word 'evangelist' conjures up a type of person, but the Bible shows different models (Philip, Timothy & Mary Magdalene).

7: Our Journey – Growing & going deeper as followers of Jesus

Individuals can move from being Searcher -> Disciple -> Servant -> Apostle. What are 'stepping stones' in your church that allow that to happen? There are many resources to aid discipleship.

8: Our Heart – Developing worship that helps church to grow

Worship is our main 'shop window' and can turn people on or off. Worship is both sacred and social, offering both mystery of God & relationships with others. And it is more than just Sundays.

9: Our Strategy – what should be our church's ongoing plan for growth?

Keep going! LYCIG is 2-3 year journey that you take with your PCC.



Above left: course leaders the Rev Tim Sledge, from Romsey Abbey, and the Ven Bev Mason, Archdeacon of Richmond and Craven; above centre: the Rev Alice Wood, from Blackmoor and Whitehill, in discussion; above right: the Rev Annie McCabe, from St Luke's and St Peter's Churches, Southsea, listens intently

Three-day conference helps parishes plot church growth

AS the speakers talked about how churches can grow, there were nods of recognition around the ballroom.

Clergy and lay leaders from parishes across our diocese had come to the hotel near Liphook for a three-day conference called Leading Your Church Into Growth (LYCIG).

And as they heard some practical tips on enlarging their congregations and deepening discipleship, the feeling was that this could make a real difference.

More than 100 clergy and key lay people from around 40 parishes had signed up to spend three days at the Old Thorns Hotel. Sessions took place in the Gatsby ballroom, complete with dance floor and revolving glitterball.

Each clergy person had been invited to bring two lay people from their parishes, which allowed them to reflect immediately with fellow worshippers about the practical suggestions that they were hearing.

The Rev Tim Sledge, vicar of Romsey Abbey, led the sessions, with the Ven Bev Mason, Archdeacon of Richmond and Craven, and Dave Elkington, a rural dean in Cornwall. The conference was shared with some delegates from Guildford diocese.

The sessions looked at how to create a vision and strategy for growth, a culture of welcome, and an openness to evangelism in our churches. Delegates were encouraged to think of their own personal stories



Sessions took place in the ballroom at the Old Thorns Hotel in Liphook

of faith and how best to share those stories with others.

"The word 'evangelist' conjures up a certain kind of person and a certain style," said Tim. "We can end up thinking 'that's not my style'."

"But there are different kinds of evangelist in the Bible – Philip was a charismatic person, proclaiming the gospel, whereas Timothy was a steady Eddie, who was thorough and persistent, and Mary Magdalen was a passionate person who shared her personal encounter with Jesus.

"We are all wired differently, so we will all have different ways of

evangelising. Equally, those who we speak to are also all wired differently, and so will respond to different styles of evangelism.

"If you are ordained, you are not an ordinary person. The clerical collar gives you licence to be more direct in your conversations with people. We are not all called to be evangelists, although that is part of the job description of being a vicar. But we are all called to be witnesses.

"We might feel that our own personal story of faith doesn't sound as exciting as other people's stories. But it is still a beautiful story that

God can use."

Our diocese invested in this conference as part of its 'live, pray, serve' strategy, which seeks to find new ways of being church, and to make more traditional parish models more effective.

Clergy and lay leaders from nine other parishes had enjoyed a previous LYCIG conference which acted as a pilot project for our diocese.

LYCIG has been running for 25 years and has a proven track record of inspiring growth in churches and dioceses around the country.

WHAT THE CONFERENCE DELEGATES THOUGHT

"Being part of this community and hearing other people's stories is empowering. It has given us confidence to know that we are doing quite well, but also inspired us to think of ways in which we could improve.

"We'll be taking LYCIG back to our parish and involving our congregation in how to follow this up. For people from our parish to spend time together thinking about faith issues is important.

"We have been focussing on building issues to help with the mission of the Church, and now we need to think about our engagement with those who use our buildings and the wider community."

Colin Hedley, churchwarden, St Faith's Church, Havant

"We've been given lots of ideas. Some are old, some new, but it is encouraging that we don't have to do it all! I love the fact that the speakers have shared their own stories and encouraged us to share ours. It has blended together our individual calling with what we are called to be as a Church. And it is specific and not just theory, rooted in who we are and what other people have done."

The Rev Ruth Schofield, team vicar, Holy Trinity and St Columba, Fareham

"I think we are going to come away with some interesting work to do. It's nice to be informed and to know that some of the things we are doing are the right way to go, albeit



with some improvements. And there are some challenges in terms of reorganising the way we do some things. But it has really helped, and some things have really jumped out at us. I'm glad I'm here, and we'll talk to members of our church about getting on board with us."

Peter Ryan, churchwarden, Christ Church, Totland Bay (pictured above with the Rev James Cook)

"LYCIG is a course well worth going on because it takes as the foundation of thinking where the parish is, the time and talents available to it, and challenging this mix to move forward. Inviting clergy and laity together from each parish gives the parish team time to share, think, talk and laugh together, which is precious time.

"This recent course at Liphook was all the more challenging because of this, with a trio of speakers with many different experiences to bring and share. There was a lot of excellent material, and we got through all the

theory in a lecture style format.

"The time constraints meant we were largely unable to take time to think about the material with the discussions and exercises that the course book envisaged, and would need to be disciplined about doing this back in the busy parish context. With hindsight, some of the 'stories' we listened to could have been replaced by us all being able to 'write' our own during the sessions.

"We, for one, have already, on the next Sunday, started on our action points, so thank you LYCIG."

The Rev Paul Armstead, vicar, St James Church, Milton

"It's put lots of things we had thought about into a coherent package. It's making me think more about the big picture, going into how this affects the things we do as a church and parish. It will draw our different groups and activities together into reaching out more effectively in our community."

The Rev Ian Snares, vicar, St Wilfrid's Church, Cowplain

Our LYCIG journey doesn't end here

THE support for congregations to grow doesn't end with this conference.

Delegates returned to their parishes with resources to help them to grow, including a 'LYCIG Local' process to inspire their PCCs and congregation over the next few months. There will be an evening in each deanery or area of the diocese in January 2017 to help parishes plan their LYCIG follow-up.

There's also some follow-up training. Michael Harvey, who helped to create the Back to Church Sunday initiative, will speak about how to effectively invite people to our churches. You can come on either February 24 at 7pm-9.30pm or February 25, from 10am-2pm, both at St Jude's Church, Southsea.

And the Ven Bob Jackson will speak about ways to make our churches more welcoming, on May 19, from 7pm-9.30pm or May 20, from 10am-2pm, again at St Jude's.

Up to 10 delegates per benefice can come. See www.portsmouth.anglican.org/LYCIG for more details.