

A theological reflection on what it means to be a Festival Church in The Diocese of Leicester

Festival Church is one model within ‘the mixed ecology’ of different models of church.

In the Diocese of Leicester, the identity of ‘A Festival Church’ is considered to be a model intended to support parishes to **‘stop and re-imagine’** their mission and worship, and to engage positively with the local community. It is a positive, proactive approach to doing less, giving the opportunity to do what is done better. It is NOT a step on the road to closure.

A Festival Church is an open church, which will still have financial obligations to meet, such as insurance, heating, lighting, parish contribution, and maintenance, but it will be better placed to rely on wider community support to meet these costs. A key part is community consultation with the aim of forming **‘a New Covenant’** with the community.

Theological Reflection

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds

(Ecclesiastes

3:1,9-11)

Churches that have stood for a long time have experienced a number of ‘seasons’ in their history; these seasons can be considered by looking back over the generations and may include extensive re-building and or restoration works. The move towards a Festival Church model is seen within the context of everything having its season. Rather than a mothballing or slow closure this is a positive step towards a next season in the life of the church; an opportunity to explore a new future season for the church in this place. As Ecclesiastes reminds us, God makes “everything suitable for its time” and the DCC/PCC can explore moving to becoming a Festival Church with a sense of how God “has put a sense of past and future into their minds.”

You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you. (Exodus 31:14)

In the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord. (Leviticus 25:4)

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you.

(Leviticus 25:10)

The Sabbath is a God given gift and pattern for creation; Sabbath enables rest, recovery, and above all renewal. Festival Church can be seen as an opportunity for ‘Jubilee’, a complete resetting of the Church in this location allowing a period of reset leading to a renewal of mission and ministry in that location and community. In Biblical terms, both Sabbath and

Jubilee are opportunities to look to the future, looking for growth, fruitfulness and increased harvest. Festival Church is likewise an opportunity to identify the potential for the future (short and long term) for mission, growth, deepening of discipleship and renewal of the church. Festival Church provides opportunity to discover what springs from the village or community naturally, to release the church members to rediscover the gifts and talents that may be brought to local mission and ministry and to remember that God's mission (Missio Dei) is already there; as Rowan Williams famously said, "Mission is finding out what God is doing and joining in."

"The Church of England: A Christian presence in every community" (Church of England 2021)

The official strapline of the Church of England is "a Christian presence in every community." and the C of E website says, "A Festival Church is a church building which is not used for weekly worship, but is valued and required by the community for local events and for Festivals of the Church and for Rites of Passage." In moving towards becoming a Festival Church the DCC/PCC is keen to maintain a distinctly Christian presence in their local community by proposing a series of festival celebrations, building on those already established and developing others whilst also remaining open and available for celebration and marking of life events.

In resetting the pattern of worship and community engagement it enables the DCC/PCC to identify how the village/community expresses and receives the Christian faith. Learning how the Christian faith and presence can best be expressed and shared in the local context.