

The Pathway to Becoming a Festival Church

A Festival Church is a church building which is not used for weekly worship, but is still an open church, a local icon and a community asset.

Although nationally there are more examples of rural churches becoming Festival Churches, many city/urban/sub-urban parishes are experiencing significant demographic change where becoming a Festival Church may be a suitable approach to renewal and mission.

The Diocese of Leicester sees becoming a Festival Church as a positive and proactive option which may work for some churches providing that there is a clear plan.

This document comprises of three sections, each of which will enable conversations about becoming a Festival Church:

1. **Key steps to becoming a Festival Church**
2. **A guide to writing to the Bishop**
Including exploration prompts to help PCCs/DCCs explore becoming a Festival Church in their context, to articulate their hopes for becoming a Festival Church and to consider how it will work.
3. **Making your Festival Church sustainable**

Section I: Key steps to becoming a Festival Church

Step 1: Stop & Re-imagine

To begin the process, your PCC/DCC & congregation must agree that the current way of doing things is not working, be really open to doing things differently and want to explore becoming a Festival Church. There needs to be real enthusiasm for actively exploring this!

Inform your Minister Community Oversight Minister or Area Dean and Archdeacon of your intention to explore becoming a Festival Church. They may well refer you to the most appropriate person within the Diocesan Team who will be able to support you.

Step 2: Explore the idea

Once the church itself agrees to explore festival status, this next step is holding a wider conversation and consultation with the local community.

This needs to be appropriate for your community, but would normally include three basic steps:

I. Community Engagement

Remind your local community the church is their asset too.

Start communicating with key stakeholders in the local community. Explain what the plans are – actively engage their support; ask them what they need from the church.

Where present engage with local schools, identifying how they might engage with or use the church.

The main purpose of this engagement is to raise the profile of the church and to plant the idea that the church needs to make some changes and is considering its options for the future. Engagement should be personal where possible, writing or speaking to individuals or community groups, attending events in the community. The most important thing is to keep this engagement as positive as possible.

Be prepared to amend your plans in response to community need and interest!

II. Consultation

Undertake a more formal consultation exercise to gather data around how people feel about the church and why it's important to them, how they would like to see the building used, what sort of things they might support and how.

Download: [A Guide to Community Engagement and Consultation - Diocese of Ely](#)

III. Community Meeting

Hold an open meeting, ideally in the church.

Key aims of the meeting:

- Church reps to commit to doing things differently; doing less to do it better – but needs to in partnership with the community.
- Seek to enter into a **new covenant** with the community, explaining what the parish need from them to keep the church going.
- Identify individuals who wish to help, and what they can offer

Report the findings of the consultation:

- What does the community want or need from its church?
- What activities would the community welcome or support?
- What help does the church need in order to respond to that?

During the meeting, provide the opportunity for people to offer their support and describe what that support could be. Don't put people on the spot.

Another short-written survey could be taken at the meeting:

Download: [How to Write a Survey - Diocese of Exeter](#)

Step 3: Plan

a. Take a lead from the evidence gathered in Step One:

- Does the response to the consultation give a clear picture of what the community wants and needs from its church building?
- Which events or festivals are likely to be popular with the local community?
- Choose which ones to take forward – but be careful not to overdo it
- Have people offered to help and with what?
- What enthusiasm or skills are on offer?
- Are there organisations wishing to partner?
- **Be positive!** – Focus on what you are going to do NOT on what you are going to stop

b. Consider the most appropriate management model for the future which enables a wider range of people to participate.

- New members come forward to join the PCC
 - The PCC seeks to amend its constitution to enable wider membership
 - People offer to help in an informal action group working as a sub-committee of the PCC but would not join the PCC
- Download:** [Forming a PCC Sub-Committee - Template Terms of Reference](#)
- People offer to form a separately constituted charity to work alongside the PCC (*A temple is available for setting up a Friends Group as a separate charity*)

c. Gather your team and start setting things down on paper

- Use the information and questions in the Guide Letter (*Section 2 below*) to help develop your ideas and your plan.

Step 4: Establish wider support for your proposal

Having developed your plan, make sure you have thought about how it relates to other local churches and their mission, and spoken to them about this.

This may include other churches in your benefice, deanery or Minster Community

Step 5: Write, agree and submit your letter to The Bishop's Office, cc Archdeacon for approval

See Section 2 for full details.

Step 6: Live with the joys and challenges of being a Festival Church!

See Section 3 for tips on how to make it sustainable in the longer term.

Step 7: Review periodically & share experiences with others

The process described above is primarily based upon work done by the Diocese of Ely and we are grateful for sharing their learning and resources.

Resources available to support the steps on the Pathway

There are some excellent resources produced by other dioceses to support the steps outlined above:

The Diocese of Ely:

- [A guide to community engagement and consultation](#)
- [Guidance on forming a PCC sub-committee \(including a template terms of reference\)](#)
- [Guidance on setting up a Friends Group \(including a template for setting up a Friends Group as a separate charity\)](#)

The Diocese of Exeter

- [Growing the Rural Church \(webpage\)](#)
- [A guide to consulting your community](#)
- [How to Write a Survey](#)
- [Setting up a Friends Group \(webpage\)](#)

Section 2: A guide to writing to the Bishop for a proposal to become a Festival Church

This guide is designed to help you to frame the letter to the Bishop following the PCC passing a resolution to seek to become a Festival Church.

The PCC resolution will be the outcome of travelling a journey of exploration with their local community and wider church family, so the areas covered below are hopefully those which will have been considered on the way. The answers do not need to be long!

1. Current reality

- *Provide a short overview of the current situation, the context and the particular challenges that have prompted consideration of becoming a festival church.*

2. Engagement with the local community

Key to making a Festival Church work is to engage with the local community and undertake a community consultation with the aim of forming a **New Covenant** to partner with them in the life of the Festival Church.

Where present, work with schools to explore how they wish to use the church to celebrate festivals, including those that fall in the school year such as Leavers Services.

- *Briefly describe your process of engagement and consultation with the local community and outcome of this process to demonstrate the level of support for this proposal.*

3. Ministry & mission opportunity

Becoming a Festival Church is a pro-active and positive decision.

The journey to becoming a Festival Church is an opportunity to recognise the current way of doing things is not working and enables PCC/DCCs to **stop and re-imagine** what church can be.

- *What is the PCC/DCC praying and hoping for by becoming a Festival Church?*
- *What mission opportunities are opened up through operating as Festival Church?*
- *...Or how will adopting this model fit within the parish/ benefice/ Minster Community in terms of the 3 Key Questions:*
 - 1. How are you growing and enabling others to grow in the depth of their discipleship?*
 - 2. How are you enabling growth in the numbers of disciples of Jesus?*
 - 3. How are you serving your community, and enabling others to love and serve those around them?*

4. Festivals & worship

A Festival Church is a church which is open for worship and used for at least six planned services a year.

These services may include the Major Festivals of the Church (around Christmas, Easter and Harvest Festival) but also it can be local festivals, Mothers' Day, Remembrance Sunday, Rogation Days, etc.) or other types of service. The services do not have to take place on a Sunday.

The church is also open for occasional services that mark Rites of Passage (Baptisms, Weddings & Funerals).

- *Based upon the engagement and consultation with the local community, which festivals will be celebrated at this building? How will you partner with the local community to make them valued community events?*

Canon Law states that the Eucharist must be celebrated on a weekly basis in at least one church within the benefice.

- *Please can you briefly explain the Eucharistic service pattern within your benefice.*

Although the National Church's definition of a Festival Church includes the expectation that the building should be open every day for visitors and for private prayer, this is not a requirement of becoming a Festival Church within our diocese. However, there does need to be a proper conversation about the feasibility of having it open every day because otherwise it is not in keeping with the intention of it being a place for the local community.

- *What the arrangements are there for accessing the church when there are no planned events?*

5. Discipleship

Becoming a Festival Church needs to sit within the mission plan of the benefice/group/Minster Community so that opportunities are provided elsewhere for learning more about the Christian faith, worship etc. For example, displaying notices explaining services that are taking place in other churches and identifying where discipleship courses are taking place locally. Consider both in-person and virtual opportunities.

- *What opportunities are there for people to learn more about the Christian faith and how is this communicated?*

6. People resources

Ministry

Becoming a Festival Church does not mean that all services need to be led by clergy.

- *What role will the incumbent/minister play in mission and worship and are there named people to enable worship at the Festival Church?*

Governance & increasing capacity

It is really important that there is good governance in place to enable the Festival Church to work. If this not the case and there are concerns then these need to be raised with the Archdeacons' office. These need to be resolved during the process towards becoming a Festival Church.

One of the reasons for becoming a Festival Church is to enable PCCs to review and adapt their governance structures to enable anyone with an interest in the building to take on an active role in its care and management, regardless of whether they are regular worshippers at the church.

If this is the case then there are various ways in which people can be involved. The responsibilities of sub-committees or separate Friends Groups need to be set out in written documents and agreed with the PCC. Template documents are available.

- *Is the governance good enough? Are the responsibilities clearly defined and agreed?*

DCC / PCC and wider support:

- *Please tell us when the PCC passed a resolution demonstrating that they have travelled the pathway in exploring becoming a Festival Church and are now seeking to become one.*

A Festival Church is part of a wider landscape and is more likely to succeed if there is wider support.

- *Who else has been consulted and can offer support? (For example: incumbent, Area Dean, other churches in the Benefices, Minster Community Oversight Minister, other churches in the wider Minster Community (if in place).*

8. Care of the building:

There are a few 'myths' around Festival churches, particularly regarding the care of buildings and Finance. Becoming a Festival Church does not automatically address concerns over ongoing responsibility for repairs, maintenance and insurance. Unless these are also addressed as part of the plan, there is a risk of storing up problems for the long term.

- *Is the PCC aware of this ongoing responsibility and have they explored opportunities to enable members of the local community to get involved in care of the building?*

9. Finance

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.

Parish Contribution is the way that the parishes support the cost of ministry across the whole diocese. Regardless of size, the responsibility of sharing this cost lies with each church in the diocese, in the expectation that, working together, we can support each other and grow the Kingdom of God in Leicestershire. As a Festival Church is still an open church it will still need and benefit from the support that diocese provides and therefore still has a responsibility to contribute towards the cost of ministry and other central support.

- *Are the PCC aware that becoming a Festival Church does not remove these financial responsibilities?*

10. Safeguarding

A Festival Church is an open church so all PCC members will be expected to comply with the most basic requirements for safeguarding which is completion of the Basic Awareness and Foundation online training modules. These are accessed via the portal: [Safeguarding: Training Portal](#). Louise Warner can arrange to come out and deliver face to face training if they find that impossible to arrange Louise.Warner@LeicesterCofE.org Tel: 0116 2615383.

If the Festival Church is still providing regulated activities aimed at U18's (children's groups) or vulnerable adults (hands on pastoral support, assistance with shopping, handling money, providing

transport to medical appointments for the sick and the elderly) – those providing these ministries will all need to complete enhanced DBS checks. For more information contact Louise.

- *Are the PCC aware of their safeguarding responsibilities?*

11. Review

As you are aware, Festival Churches is an emerging area within our diocese. We will aim to keep a record of Festival Churches operating within the diocese and gradually build up a network to support them and share learning.

Adopting Festival status is easily reversible. This is because the legal status of the church does not need to change – it can legally remain a parish church while operating on the Festival model. Therefore, in the future, should needs change, the way the church is run can revert to the traditional parish church model.

- *When will you review how things are going?*
- *Will you be open to sharing your experiences with others across the diocese?*

12. Sign off

Your letter to the bishop should name those involved in its preparation as follows:

- *Proposal prepared by:*

Signatures and role held:

Date:

Please email your proposal letter to the Bishop's Office (cc your Archdeacon)

Section 3: Making your Festival Church sustainable

Here are some of the things that the PCC and others involved in the running of the church should think about in order for your Festival Church to be sustainable,

Missional sustainability

- Festival churches need to collaborate with others within benefices, wider church groupings & Minster Community
- Festival churches should be integrated within the wider strategic planning undertaken by the benefice and Minster Community
- Developing strong relationships with local schools

People sustainability

- Maintain ongoing communications with the wider community
- Keeping the church building as open, accessible and welcoming as possible, using signage to publicise this.
- Inclusivity: considering the range of representation from the community, identifying any groups who aren't represented and considering why that might be and if anything could be done to change that.
- Keep an open mind about the management structure. If it seems to be preventing people from getting involved, think about changing it.
- Volunteer succession planning
- Discern Locally Authorised Ministries

Financial sustainability

Money to support the church could come from:

- Electronic card readers, which can be permanently installed in the church, or passed round the congregation during festival services.
- The Parish Giving service run by Church House provides the most tax-efficient and inflation proof way of accepting donations from people who simply want to give a small amount of money on a regular basis to support your church.
- Community events can bring in income, but they should also be a service for the community.
- Performance or arts events
- Commercial partnerships work in some places where a longer-term relationship is created. This sort of arrangement may require a formal licence to be drawn up.
- Social Enterprise – perhaps with the support of Grant Funding
- Social action services, e.g. visits from Citizens advice, NHS, debt advice, youth and young people's services...
- Heritage and Tourism provides opportunities for churches in popular tourist areas, or churches which are popular with visitors as historic sites, to make some income through sales of merchandise and guidebooks.

Even if your church does really well at one of these things, consider exploring something different to help diversify your income.