**CREATING CONNECTIONS TOOLKIT***Connecting with God | Connecting with Each Other | Connecting with our Communities*

**ONE } Words of introduction to this toolkit**

We want every parish to be able to explore what our ‘Creating connections’ vision looks like in the context of your own church community. This toolkit is designed to help your church explore your engagement with, and response to, these Diocesan themes under which we are now united and connected.

The toolkit is designed for a PCC to discuss and work through, and should lead to the development of a response. This toolkit document will also signpost you to other resources, guides and toolkits that can help you to explore specific issues raised in more detail and more depth should you find this helpful.

Our hope is that your discussions and responses to the questions we pose will support the development of the ministry, mission and outreach of your parish.

**How to do it! [Turn this into a nice flow chart type diagram]**Start by reading through this toolkit and the ‘Creating Connections: Vision, Identity and Purpose’ leaflet.
Allocate some agenda time at your next PCC meeting to work through this toolkit as a group.
Prior to the meeting:
 Distribute copies of the ‘Creating Connections: Vision, Identity and Purpose’ leaflet to all members.
 Having read through this toolkit, consider what scale of engagement is most appropriate for your situation.
At the PCC meeting, work through the questions in section 5, making notes as you discuss.
You may need to discuss this across at more than one PCC meeting, in order to have enough time to work through the six question topics – this is fine. Please do not rush; this is not a box ticking exercise.
Appoint someone to write up these notes in to a draft response (Section 6)
Spend time at the subsequent PCC meeting discussing this draft response and suggesting any amendments to it.
Finalise the response and then send it to the Bishops. (Section 7)
Make it happen and review it regularly. (Section 8)

**TWO } Helpful background reading before you start (optional)***How to do Mission Action Planning* by Mike Chew and Mark Ireland
A significant and growing number of churches are using the principles of MAP to produce high quality plans for effective mission activity. A book published by SPCK.

*Five Marks of Mission*
The Five Marks of Mission are an important statement on mission which expresses the Anglican Communion’s common commitment to, and understanding of, God’s holistic/integral mission.
[www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/marks-of-mission.aspx](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/marks-of-mission.aspx)

*The Healthy Churches Handbook* by Robert Warren
This practical guide helps churches identify their strengths and weaknesses and discover what action to take in order to develop the health of their church. The focus is on the quality of the church’s life, rather than just the numbers attending.

*From Anecdote to Evidence* and *From Evidence to Action
From Evidence to Action* has been developed using and building on the findings of the Church Growth Research Programme which was summarised in *From Anecdote to Evidence*, published in January 2014. The evidence provides an opportunity for the Church at all levels to respond and to consider what action may be needed to encourage growth.

On the website you can find a guide to the findings and working materials based around some common factors which were found to be linked with growth. All the material is designed to help those who want to reflect and act on these findings.
<http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report>
<http://www.fromevidencetoaction.org.uk/>

*How to develop a mission strategy* A Grove Booklet by Capt Jim Currin
Mission flows from a desire to share God's love and an openness to the Spirit's leading. The New Testament shows us that it also requires some planning and preparation - but where do we start?
This 'how to' booklet describes how ordinary churches have done some planning about mission and evangelism.

*How to listen to and involve children and young people*This ‘How to…’ guide written by Dan Jones, the Diocesan Children and Youth Advisor, equips parishes, PCCs and clergy to listen to the voice of young people and involve them in the life of your parish. When considering how you will respond to the Creating Connections challenges, it is important to consider the voice of children and young people.

*SWOT and SMART*Much has been written about these two acronyms and a quick search on the internet will tell you all you need to know.

*When evaluating and looking at the life of your parish it can be helpful to explore these four topics:*Strengths: Characteristics of the church that may give it an advantage over others;
Weaknesses: Characteristics of the church that may be a disadvantage as related to others;
Opportunities: Conditions outside the church that could potentially increase attendance or revenues;
Threats: Conditions outside the church that could create problems for the church.

*When writing goals or aims you should ensure that these are:*Specific: Is the goal specific enough for clarity?
Measurable: Is there a way to measure the success of the goal?
Achievable: Is the goal truly achievable?
Relevant: Is the goal aligned with your overall plan?
Timely: Is there a timeline associated to the goal to ensure a completion date?

**THREE } Optional Places to Start:**You may find it helpful to begin by exploring some of these additional Diocese of Bristol toolkits to build up a more comprehensive response to Creating connections.

*‘How to…’ Carry out a community profile*It is vitally important to understand the community to which we are seeking to witness. We cannot simply assume we know our community and what they think of the Church and want the Church to be. We need to move from being a church that *supplies* what we *think* people want, to being a church that engages effectively from a place of understanding. This toolkit will help you to do that.

*‘How to…’ Carry out a parish audit*Understanding the story, resources and opportunities within your parish is important if we are going to be able to use them effectively for the growth of God’s Kingdom. This toolkit will help you to review the activity and resources available to you.

*How to … Carry out a gifts and skills audit in your congregation*This toolkit will show you how to work with your congregation to help people explore their gifts and strengths, and how they can use them in the service of God’s church.

**FOUR } Creating Connections**

CONNECTING WITH GOD
*For Christians, to be connected with God is primarily about being, as St Paul would have put it, “in Christ”. This new relationship shapes and empowers our lives and our faith. We journey towards God in worship, through the Scriptures and in prayer. We follow and learn from Jesus’s teaching and example, and can be changed by the Holy Spirit, to become more like Him.*

Q. In what ways does your parish help people to connect with God and experience the Gospel, both within the church community and outside it?

Q. What things would you like to do to enable people within your church congregation to grow in their relationship with God and their discipleship In the coming 12-24 months?
Q. How will you achieve this?

Q. What things would you like to do in the coming 12-24 months to enable people who do not yet know Christ to connect with God and experience & encounter the good news of Jesus Christ?
Q. How will you achieve this?

CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER
*To be connected with each other means to reflect the unity and the diversity of the Holy Trinity within the Body of Christ. This unity in diversity can be experienced at every level within the Church.*

*St Paul tells us that we have to work at this: “Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:2). An important characteristic of being an Anglican is that we are a part of something bigger – a diocese, the Church of England, the worldwide and catholic Church – and form a new community which supports and challenges each another.*

Q. In what ways does your parish help people to build strong relationships with each other in fellowship?

Q. In what ways does your parish connect with other parishes within the Diocese or ecumenically with other churches?

Q. What things would you like to do, in the coming 12-24 months, to build a stronger life of fellowship within your church?
Q. How will you achieve this?

Q. In what ways could your connect with and work in partnership with other parishes and local churches in the coming 12-24 months?
Q. How will you achieve this?

CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES
*To be connected with our communities is to be an incarnational Church. This means we have to start with people where they are, not where we might like them to be. In a post Christendom context this is challenging for us.*

*We participate in the mission of God by being planted and rooted in our local contexts. The call of the Church of England is to proclaim the Good News afresh in each generation and to be a sign of God’s Kingdom in in every community. We must move to develop a proper understanding of the communities that we are seeking to serve. Without research and consideration we will not be able to move from being inherently inward focused as a church, to become a church that connects effectively with the communities we serve in a way which is demand, not supplier, driven.*

Q. In what ways does your parish connect with your local community and the different groups within it?

Q. What things would you like to do in the coming 12-24 months to further connect with your local community?
How will you achieve this?

Priority 1. GREATER COMMITMENT TO FOLLOWING JESUS

*Why is this a challenge we are not meeting? What would it mean for the Church and our Church schools to be salt and light in the world? Sometimes we speak of being distinctively Christian - what might this look like?*

Q. What are your plans for encouraging deeper discipleship in the coming 12-24 months?

Priority 2. GROWING AND NUTURING, SERVANT HEARTED SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP.
*Leaders make a difference. The only ship that doesn’t need a captain is anchored in the harbour. We need to be intentional about rearing the right kind of leaders, lay and ordained, who are fit for the challenge of re-connecting in a post Christian context.*

Q. What are your plans for encouraging and enabling people to serve as leaders within your parish in the coming 12-24 months?

Q. How will you build up, support and invest in those who serve as leaders?

Priority 3. CONNECTING WITH YOUNGER GENERATIONS
*Over the last 30 years, many of our churches have grown old together. We have not been good at discipling children through their youth into adulthood. In too many churches there is a serious dearth of young adults. Now is the time to seed and invest in children, youth and young adults. We have a dedicated advisor for children’s, youth and families ministry within the Diocese who can support us all as we explore this priority together.*

Q. In what ways will you seek to support, disciple and reach out to younger generations in the coming 12-24 months?

**FIVE } Creating a Response**We would now like you to take your responses to the questions above and formulate them into a Vision/Strategy/Action Plan document for your parish.

You should describe what your parish is currently doing under each heading; what you would like to do in the coming months; and how you will achieve this. This then forms the basis of your Creating connections response – a statement of celebration of what God is doing in and through your parish, and also your God-given plans and dreams for the future.

We suggest that you circulate your draft plan to key members of your congregation to get their feedback, comments and suggestions. You should then bring this feedback to a PCC meeting and discuss the draft response. Following this, any amendments can be made before it is finalised and shared.

**SIX } Sharing your Response**Your response to our new Diocesan Vision, Identity and Purpose should be a living document and not something that you now simply file in a drawer. What you have discovered, discerned and decided through the discussions you have had in response to this toolkit should now inform the life and activity of your parish.

The Bishops would like you to send them the response that you have created:
“We would like to hear about your plans for the mission entrusted to you by Christ for your locality as identified through this discernment process. We have no blueprint for mission or ministry to impose. We simply want to understand, support, pray for and bless all that you are seeking to be and do in Christ’s name.”

We would also like you to send us **3 photos** that represent your church and the life of your parish. Please make sure you only send us photos that you, and the people in them, are happy for us to publish and put online. These photos will enable us to produce a collage and album of photos that depict the essence of the statement ‘We are the Diocese of Bristol – connected to each other, creating communities of wholeness with Christ at the centre’.

**SEVEN } Taking Action**Your response should take the form of a report and as such will require action!
We recommend that you keep your action plan as a standing item on your PCC agenda and that you appoint someone to be responsible for championing the plan and making sure that it remains a useful, living document and not simply something that gathers dust on a digital bookshelf. Over time, as you review your progress, or the changing situation in which you ministry, you may make changes or updates to your plan to ensure that it continues to be a useful influence over the life of your parish.

**EIGHT } Additional tools and support that may be helpful**If your discussions resulting from use of this toolkit have led to further thinking, then you may find some of these additional resources helpful:
1. *How to … Use your building effectively* – A Diocese of Bristol How to… Guide.
2. *The ‘How to…’ series of help sheets* that are available on the Diocesan website: www.bristol.anglican.org/how-to
3. *Support from our specialist advisors* – Youth and Children’s Ministry, Ecumenical partnerships, Communications, Safeguarding, Finance, Ministry development, Vocations, Governance, Property, HR, Schools, and Accessibility.
4. *Diocesan Training Opportunities* – a wide range of training opportunities are available to you and these are listed in our Training Opportunities Brochures on the Diocesan website: www.bristol.anglican.org/training

**NINE } Additional Support**If you would like to speak to anyone about this toolkit, the process, or how to complete it, please contact Chris Priddy, Head of Parish and External Relations, at the Diocesan Office.