



Leading your Church  
into Growth

# ***Talking about the 'E' Word as we come out of Lockdown***

## **7 steps of how: or the rainbow colours of evangelism.**

Over the past few months thousands of people have been plugging into online services. In addition churches have been visiting, delivering to and helping care for lots of people in our local communities.

During lockdown Leading your Church into Growth produced, 'Talking about the 'E' Word in a time of Lockdown: 7 steps of evangelism' to help people think about using online contacts and those that came about as a result of extra ministry in order to share the Good News. See <https://bit.ly/2U3HF8a>

We are now beginning to move into a time of re-opening our church buildings. The re-opening of our buildings will probably happen over three phases:

- Open for private prayer and funerals
- Open for small gatherings
- Open for larger services and events

Suddenly after weeks of lockdown it is beginning to happen and it is actually coming as a surprise to many of us.

Over the last few days and weeks dioceses have been putting out lots of essential and helpful advice about cleaning and tidying, social distancing, risk assessments and the appointing of responsible and well-equipped 'presence' people. The point of this simple paper is not to repeat this guidance but to look at our gradual re-opening from the perspective of growing our churches. This growth as always needs to be growth of relationship with our local community, spiritual growth of our people and numerical growth of the congregation and membership.

## Optimistic Attitudes

There has been quite a bit of negativity about our buildings. Therefore, perhaps the first and most important move is to establish a positive attitude toward our church buildings. Re-opening and returning to them should be a confident and joyful movement. You might like to pause and reflect on the positive impact our buildings can have:

- They make a strong and well received statement to the local community.
- They offer hospitality to lots of local groups.
- They are still the main place for weddings, baptisms and funerals.
- They are the place where God's people gather and as such they hold lots of good memories.
- They are the principle place for us to worship and praise God.

Of course, buildings are not essential but, in another sense, they are 'our Temple'. As such they hold our pulpit from which the word is preached and the Eucharistic table, the place where we break bread.

Yes, of course, there are problems. We may have too many (on the other hand we may have too few in some places). Many of them are big, cold, dark and forbidding. In the main, however, they are sacred places, gathering points and kingdom mission stations.

With this in mind, we offer you some practical steps. Don't do too many but do do some or at least one.

'Don't you have a saying, "It's still four months until harvest"? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.'

John 4:35



### Develop your contact list.

This list consists of all those people you have been helping, visiting or giving food parcels to and those attending your online services etc. As you reopen your church it is advised that you take contact details of those entering for the purposes of 'track and trace'.

If creating a big contact list is too much for you to handle at the moment then simply sit down at your desk and scribble out a personal list of around 5 contacts you are working with. These are the people you want to help in an evangelising way as your next step and they are also the ones you will want to invite to church as we reopen.



## **Build (or review) 'stepping stones' for those on your contact list.**

At Leading your Church into Growth we talk about the fact that most people do not come to faith overnight but rather do so over a period of time. It's like a person using stepping stones to get from one side of a river to the other.

What would be the next couple of stepping stones you could offer for your 5 warm contacts to help them on their spiritual exploration. Here are a few, some of which are developed below.

- Pray for some or all the contacts on your list
- Ring them up and see how they are doing
- Do a door step visit observing social distancing
- Go for a walk, play golf, tennis or bowls together
- When we are allowed invite them around to your house for drinks or a BBQ
- Invite them to pray in your church once open
- Invite them to your services once they resume.
- See if they would like to attend a START course

Every person is different, so you need to think and pray carefully for each person.

Of course, once you have started to put this into operation yourself, you could encourage some of your church members to do the same.



## **Be visible and available when you re-open your church buildings.**

We don't imagine that the community will be flocking back to church after the lockdown is lifted, but we do expect to see some new faces.

Make it a priority to be present and available in your church when you open the doors for private prayer. This will be a great opportunity to get to know people you have made contact with on line.

In your online services, newsletters and magazines you could let people know when you will be in church if they wish to come for a chat and a prayer.



## **Start planning for 'welcome parties'.**

A lot of churches run 'welcome parties' periodically. These are usually meals, perhaps with a bit of input, that are run for those who are new to the church since the last welcome party. Most of us now have a list of new contacts we have made during lockdown. Inviting them to a party in your house will not be possible for some time, so here are a

few possibilities for different stages as the lockdown is lifted. The secret as always is warmth, food and conversation

- Have smaller parties but more often.
- Invite a small number to a BBQ in your garden so they feel safer.
- Offer to cook them a meal, or buy a takeaway, deliver it to them, then have a brief chat over Zoom.
- Bake a cake, deliver it to them, then have a brief chat on the doorstep and leave them a letter to the next START course.
- You could try a Zoom welcome Party. Invite a few new people with a couple of warm home team group leaders. Their job would be to help keep the conversation going, but not say too much and keep in touch with the group afterwards.
- We have divided our church/community into 15 groups of about 8. Some of these didn't know one another before, but have become firm friends. We could encourage them to have parties and make sure we drop in.



### Continuing to stream some content online once you are back in church buildings.

When church first reopens many of our older, ill, and vulnerable members will not attend. There is some evidence from churches in other countries that others who have got used to the ease of online services may not come to the building for worship. Whatever we might think about this in relation to discipleship it may be a fact we have to adjust to. It will be necessary to have services in the building, but also have something online.

There are lots of variables as to how different churches will be able to do this including: does the church building have Wi-Fi or not (and if not is it worth paying the monthly cost for Wi-Fi?) What is the budget of the church? Can you afford a permanent system especially for streaming live from church? How might that effect Safeguarding issues if children appear in the stream?

If possible, experiment and trial before committing to an expensive solution, and recognise that, if that is beyond your church, there will be a way to do it without Wi-Fi in the church or the need to purchase expensive cameras.

We need to keep making services, sermons, or 'thoughts for the day' available online, keep praying for our new contacts and developing suitable stepping stones for them, until they are ready to attend.



## Opening church buildings for private prayer.

Before there is public worship in our church buildings they will be open for private prayer. Most diocese have guidelines for this, as does the Church of England website.

We need to tap into the relief, thanks and concern as we come out of lockdown, but which will dissipate very quickly. One option is to set up prayer stations around the church. You could ask members of the community if they would like to contribute prayers, poems, jokes, flower arrangements, or to exhibit what they have been doing during lockdown: paintings, crafts etc.

One prayer station could advertise the Start Course (a six-week course for those exploring faith. See <https://bit.ly/30BFMn1>). During lockdown leading your Church into Growth have developed two new versions of Start.

Start for individuals on YouTube (guide here: <https://bit.ly/3cCKyDu>), and Start for small groups via online conferencing (guide here: <https://bit.ly/36X6lig>).



## Make one of your first Sundays where public worship is allowed in our church buildings and evangelistic service.

Make this service accessible, user friendly and not too long. Keep it engaging and with a proclamation of the Good News that invites people to respond. You might like to include a testimony. Keep the intercessions a bit shorter than usual and make the proclamation very relevant to where people are at and their struggles with the future. (This is not preying on people's fears but offering them real hope and light in the darkness).

## Finally

Remember don't do too much. Don't do what someone else is doing. Just do what you can do...

We do all this not because evangelism is part of our job description, something that we ought to do, another thing that we are supposed to do. We share the Good News, or attempt to, because we love God and His church and because we want to serve our and His people.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 9:36