



Future Focus: **THE WAY AHEAD**



**...a handbook for
congregations**



The Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa
Mission & Discipleship Committee

Future Focus: THE WAY AHEAD



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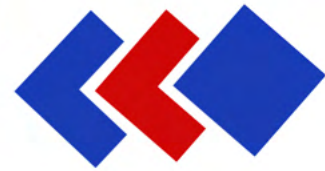
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Message from the Convener



It is no exaggeration to say that right now you are holding a very powerful tool in your hands. One is tempted to use words like “dynamite”, “nuclear” and “fire”, but these are more often seen as destructive rather than constructive. Maybe the correct words are “dynamic”, “transformational” and “igniting”! It would be true, however, to say that the results of **not** using this amazing tool, would be tragic, if not disastrous.

As a Mission and Discipleship Committee, we are acutely aware of the challenges that changing times and contexts present to local congregations. Many congregations find themselves at a critical juncture where they must either adapt or face irrelevance.

Rather than viewing change negatively, we firmly believe that change presents opportunities. Opportunities for vibrant engagement, meaningful community, and faithful alignment with God's purpose for His Church.

This booklet, titled "Future Focus," embodies some of the best principles and processes for transforming congregations, breaking through stagnation, and propelling them to higher levels of engagement and missionality.

Our committee's dream was to place a reliable and practical tool in the hands of our congregations. This dream has come to fruition with the introduction of "Future Focus."

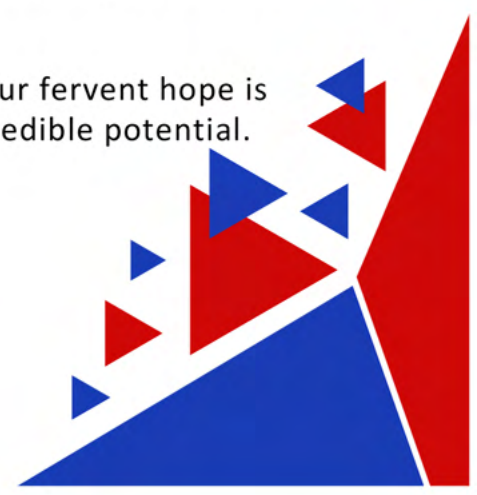
Now, we hope that ministers, sessions, and congregations will embark on a courageous, prayerful, risky, and exciting journey outlined in this booklet. It aims to provide a deeper understanding of themselves, the needs of their community, and the call of God.

We would like to acknowledge a few individuals for their contributions: Firstly, the Church of Scotland, who created this material and generously granted us permission to use and adapt it. Melanie Cook, Stewart Gordon, Theo Groeneveld, and Wayne van Heerden provided valuable contextualization. George Marchinkowski discovered the material, brought it to our attention, and with the considerable and talented assistance of Sascha Marchinkowski, handled the editing and desktop publishing to deliver this beautiful and powerful tool you now hold in your hands.

It is often said that the "local church is the hope of the world." Our fervent hope is that this booklet will empower congregations to realize their incredible potential.

Soli Deo Gloria!

The Rev. Theo Groeneveld



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Introduction



WHAT IS 'FUTURE FOCUS: THE WAY AHEAD?'

'Future Focus: The Way Ahead' is a resource of the Church of Scotland which they allowed the UPCSA to contextualise. It is designed to help congregations to look afresh at their community, to examine their congregational life and to discern what it is that God wants them to be and to do in the next phase of their life and witness. It is being rolled out as part of the UPCSA Going for Growth Programme.

It does this by:

- allowing us to be honest about our strengths and challenges.
- helping us to create a clear profile of our community.
- stimulating theological reflection about fresh ways of being Church.
- asking searching questions about our life together.
- helping us to discern God's calling on our congregation - where to from here?
- delivering clear goals and plans of action for the future.
- encouraging teamwork around these goals and plans.

The Future Focus Programme is designed to be used either by a session or church council itself or with the help of external facilitators working alongside a congregation, exploring the life and future of the church in considerable depth. 'Future Focus: The Way Ahead' is designed to be used by a small 'facilitation team' from within the congregation. This may be sufficient for your congregation's needs, or may provide a useful introduction to the more extensive Future Focus process. It can also be led by external facilitators, if that is more appropriate. 'Facilitation' simply means 'making something easy' and the task of the facilitation team is to make the whole process as easy as possible for the wider congregation. They do this by preparing well, leading the sessions effectively and by recording and reflecting back the outcomes from each session and the whole process.

The publication in your hand includes guidance about who makes a good facilitator, tips on putting together a facilitation team and guidelines for leading congregations through this kind of process. For each session there are clear aims, instructions and a list of all the resources that are required. Any worksheets or handouts that are required are contained in the material. These may be printed and copied freely. There is also a PowerPoint presentation for use alongside this, which is freely downloadable from the Mission and Discipleship Committee's resource site www.upcsa-mad.org.za

WHO MIGHT BENEFIT FROM USING 'FUTURE FOCUS; THE WAY AHEAD'?

Does your congregation need to clarify direction and priorities?

- Have there been significant changes in your community?
- Are you at the beginning of a new ministry – or entering into a new grouping?
- Are you facing the retirement of your minister or significant decline in your membership?
- Are you concerned about groups in your community that are missing from church today?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, then '**Future Focus: The Way Ahead**' can help you to explore the issues and to discern a shared vision for the future.

IS YOUR CHURCH READY TO 'FUTURE FOCUS: THE WAY AHEAD'?

Experience has shown that 'Future Focus: The Way Ahead' can have a positive and even transformational impact on a congregation. However, for this to be the case, certain conditions are necessary.

Firstly, and most importantly, the whole process needs to be embedded within a season of concerted **prayer**.

Secondly, wide **participation** from the whole congregation is vital.

Thirdly, and crucially, there must be **openness within the leadership of the church to embrace and implement change**. This will never be change for its own sake, of course, but change that is agreed to be important and necessary.

So, if your congregation(s) would be committed to prayer, participation and taking forward the directions that emerge, then 'Future Focus: The Way Ahead' promises to be an effective tool for you.

It is not always the right time for a congregation to engage in this kind of process. If your congregation is unable to commit wholeheartedly to the prayer, meeting together and implementation that is required, this may not be the best option for you.



Facilitation



WHAT IS FACILITATION

Facilitation' literally means 'to make something easy'. In the context of Future Focus, it means helping a congregation to work well together in the process of discerning God's vision for them.

Facilitators do this by:

- Putting people at ease.
- Ensuring that healthy group dynamics enable everyone to participate in ways that are comfortable for them
- Helping people to listen actively to others.
- Helping people to share openly with others.
- Helping people to use their unique perspective to enable the group better understand their congregation and its mission.
- Encouraging people to discern what God might be saying through the Bible, through others, and in their own minds and hearts.
- delivering clear goals and plans of action for the future.
- encouraging teamwork around these goals and plans.

Facilitators achieve this through:

- Careful preparation.
- Skilful and sensitive leading of the sessions.
- Diligent analysis and recording of the outcomes of each session.

EXTERNAL OR DIY FACILITATION?

Future Focus resources can be used by a small team of facilitators from within the congregation or by people from outside the congregation. There are benefits and drawbacks with both approaches.

Facilitators from within the congregation will know the people involved and may be able to use that knowledge to manage the group dynamics well. However, an insider may find it difficult to serve the needs of the group without getting involved themselves. Even if they are willing to sacrifice their own input to the discussion in order to enable the rest of the congregation to make a full contribution, they may not be viewed as neutral by others.

Using people from outside the congregation may reduce the likelihood of people feeling that the facilitators may be bringing their own agenda. However, external facilitators will need to work harder to get to know the people and understand how the group functions.

For many congregations, the decision regarding whether to use their own facilitators or someone from outside will come down to whether they have suitable people within the congregation who would be willing to take on this role. If it is preferred to seek external facilitators, contact the Mission and Discipleship Committee who may be able to put you in touch with facilitators, identify and train potential facilitators. The contact details for the Mission and Discipleship Committee may be found by contacting Central Office.

Email: convener.mad@unitingpresbyterian.org

Phone: +27 11 727 3500

WHO CAN BE A FACILITATOR?

For someone to be an effective facilitator, they need to be committed to this process and be able to do the following:

- Plan and prepare the programme carefully.
- Put people at ease and be sensitive to individual needs and the dynamics of groups.
- Communicate clearly – in giving verbal instructions and in writing brief reports.
- Be willing to set aside any agenda of their own and serve the needs of the group.

People who have these skills are often found in congregations, as they are skills that are required in other areas of life and in some jobs.

In addition, for people to facilitate effectively within their own congregation, they need to be well regarded and have the trust of people. Whatever role facilitators normally have within the congregation, they will need to ensure that all involved know that every person's opinion is of equal value. If those in formal leadership positions are to be effective facilitators, they will need to emphasise this.

PUTTING TOGETHER A FACILITATION TEAM

Even in a small congregation, there are multiple benefits in having more than one facilitator.

Firstly, it spreads the workload. Different people can take the lead for different activities. That means less preparation is required by each person. Participants appreciate a variety in presentation style and voice.

Secondly, having more than one facilitator also means that, while one person takes the lead on a particular activity, the other(s) can have their eyes and ears wide open, giving their full attention to how people are responding, observing whether they are understanding instructions and looking out for people who may be struggling to participate or people who might tend to dominate their group.

Another advantage of the team approach is that, while no one person may have all the necessary skills, a small team may feel that, together, they have all the qualities that are needed. For example, one person may be happy to lead sessions, but would prefer not to write reports; someone may be happy to take the role of observing from the edge and gently intervening to guide or support, but be unwilling to take a more upfront role in giving instructions.

In a small congregation, if they have the necessary skills between them, two people will be adequate. In bigger congregations, a larger team may be preferred.

THE OVERALL APPROACH

Effective facilitators give careful attention to each of the following three areas. They have each of them in mind as they plan, as they prepare and as they facilitate.



GIVING INSTRUCTIONS

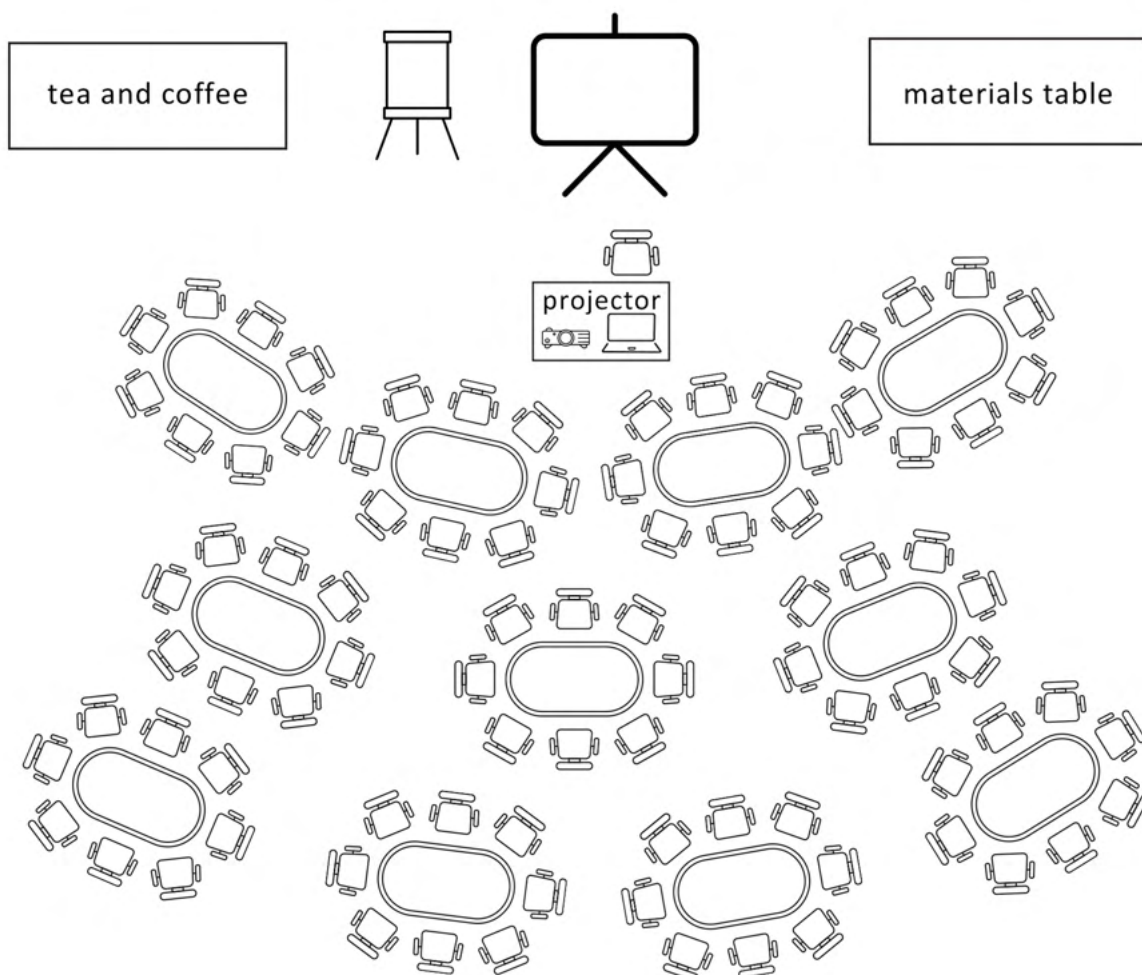
The ability to give clear instructions is a crucial part of facilitation. To do this, the facilitator must be crystal clear about why the particular activity is being undertaken, the intended outcomes and the steps involved. If not, it is unlikely that they will be able to help others understand effectively! Here are a few tips:

- Before leading a session, 'walk through' the whole programme in your mind and ensure that you have clear, helpful instructions in your mind (or written down) for each step.
- Always give one instruction at a time.
- As far as possible, anticipate and answer people's questions before they are asked. (Why?What? How? What if?)
- Check that everyone has understood. This is done by asking, but also by observing facial expressions and body language.
- If an activity does not proceed as intended, move quickly to ensure that it does. If confusion or misunderstanding is widespread, don't hesitate to call for the whole group's attention again. If there is one group or an individual who seem to be stuck or heading in the wrong direction, draw alongside and help – or ensure that one of the facilitation team does.



GETTING THE MOST FROM THE PROCESS

- The facilitator should not be part of a group, but should be available to assist all the groups.
- Groups should comprise five to seven people; if the groups are larger, there will be a few people active and the others feeling bored!
- Groups should comprise people who have a spread of length of time in the congregation(s).
- Are you going to involve children/young people? If so, think about the timing of the event –a weekday evening could end too late for those with school the next day. If children are not involved, it could be useful to arrange crèche facilities to allow parents with young children to attend.
- All the Future Focus exercises will benefit from a room layout like the one in the picture below (Figure 1). Working around tables in this café style (sometimes called banquet style) format is essential, as:
 - Some of the sessions are quite long, and if people are comfortable, they are more able to focus on the discussions and activities at hand.
 - At a talk or a lecture (or when listening to a sermon) most of the input is from the front so it makes sense, for comfort and to enable people to hear, that seating is facing the front. In Future Focus most of the input comes not from the front, but from the participants themselves. This layout means that people are able to face each other comfortably, and to hear and be heard easily.
 - The exercises will all involve recording information in some way. Having a surface to write on is essential.
 - Sitting around a table together means no-one is in charge. Everyone there is equally important to the process.



GROUND RULES

Explain the following 'ground rules' during the introductory part of each session (fully during the first session, with a reminder during the following sessions):

- **Respect** – everyone has a unique perspective based on their unique set of experiences. We must all respect each other's contributions.
- **Active listening** – not only do we listen to each other, but we listen intently, eagerly seeking to understand what the other person is communicating. It is a privilege to listen to another person.
- **Only one person in a group speaks at any one time** – there should not be side conversations.
- **Everybody should have an opportunity to contribute** – if necessary, the facilitator may insist on a 'nobody speaks twice until everybody speaks once' rule. If this is used, it is important to emphasise that nobody should feel 'put on the spot' or forced to speak when they would rather remain silent. Ensure that people know that they can say 'I have nothing to say at this point' without embarrassment.
- **Switch off mobile phones** – unless people really need to have them on in case of a possible emergency call, in which case they may be able to put them onto a vibration only mode.

It can be helpful to list these on a flipchart sheet, which remains visible throughout the session. It is important that everyone is comfortable with these from the outset, and some time should be given to allow amendments or additions to be made (eg an agreed finish time, etc). Although this may seem to take up valuable time, it helps ensure smooth running of the sessions and can actually be a time saver.

A PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY

People who have been involved in facilitating Future Focus often say that they have felt privileged to be part of discerning God's purposes. It is challenging and yet, usually, encouraging. Guiding a congregation through this process is certainly a serious responsibility but, by adopting the principles above and preparing prayerfully and carefully, experience has demonstrated that it is almost always a positive experience for all involved. Indeed, for some congregations, it has been transformative, leading them into an exciting new phase of life and mission.



Timeline

A Panoramic View

SESSION 1



Total Time Needed: 60mins

*"Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards."
Søren Kierkegaard*



AIMS OF THIS SESSION

God has been at work in the church and continues to be at work in this church. God's story is woven into yours as the Lord's people in this place. It is good to begin our focus on the future by recognising and celebrating God's presence and work in the church throughout the years.

Often we only understand life events better when we look back and consider the past. This exercise will help the congregation to look back on their shared history and reflect, in order to plan better for the future. What can we celebrate about the past? What do we look back at as a struggle?

The aim is to record people's experience of church, not necessarily to create a historically accurate record. This can be lots of fun and can include children and young people.

In this exercise we will...

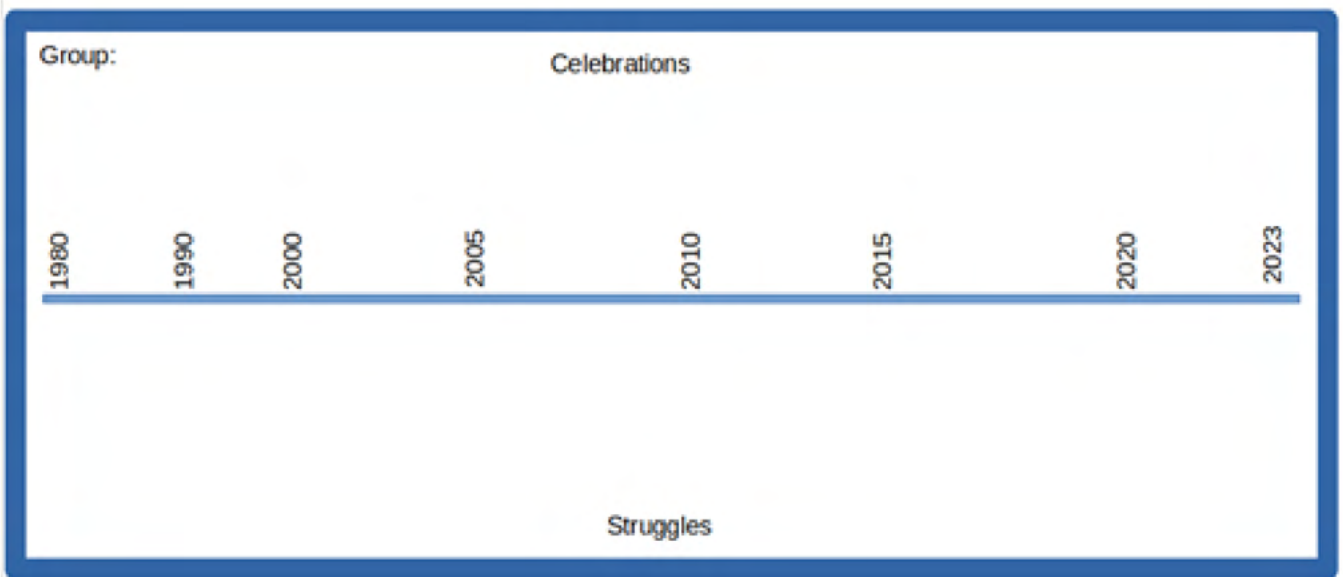
- **Create** a timeline of congregational life, in order to
- **Discover** the congregation's story, identity and dreams and
- **Reflect** on the factors that influence church and community.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Pens/Pencils
Selection of coloured markers
Large rolls of paper
Post-It Notes
Prestik

PREPARATION - Prepare the Timeline

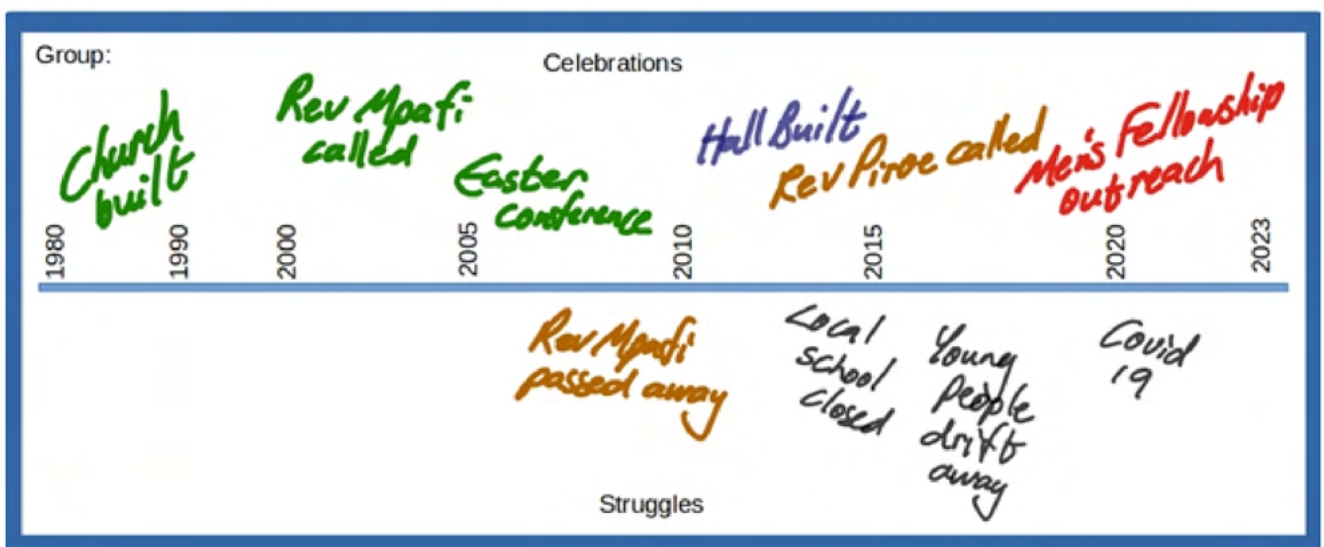
- For each group, prepare a length of paper about 700cm high and 3m long
- Fold 1m of the length underneath the other 2m.
- Write the Group Name in the top left corner.
- Draw a horizontal line down the middle of the paper
- Divide that line into sections based on the age of the congregation. If the congregation is older than 20 years, make the older sections smaller and the more recent sections larger.
- At the top centre write "Celebrations" and at the bottom centre write "Stuggles"
- At the top of the section that is folded under, write 'Visions, Hopes, Dreams'.



STEP 1

DRAWING THE TIMELINE - 30 MINUTES

- Spread the prepared sheets of paper on the tables.
- Form groups round each table. Ask them to write their group/table number on their piece of paper.
- People can either write on the paper or use Post-its. Begin with the current decade and work backwards, noting down key events/happenings that have had an influence/impact on the congregation.
- Encourage people to think beyond the local situation. Some comments may reflect the effect of denominational, national or international events that have affected the life of the church, eg Covid 19, the 2021 riots, the closure of a factory or school or the opening of a mall.
- You may also wish to record trends that have taken place over a longer period of time, e.g. an increase or decline in something.
- Where there are differing opinions within a group about where things should be placed, they can put on more than one Post-it, eg some people may see a particular event as a celebration while others see it as a struggle; allow people to bring their personal reflections. It is perfectly fine to record the same event on both sides of the line.
- The more information added the better. *Richness of experience is more important than accuracy of dates.*



- Alternatively: You could create one big timeline on the wall and break people into groups to make lists of key events and then move into a “marketplace” scenario where everyone gathers around the big timeline and people take turns to add events to the calendar motivating their choices.

STEP 2

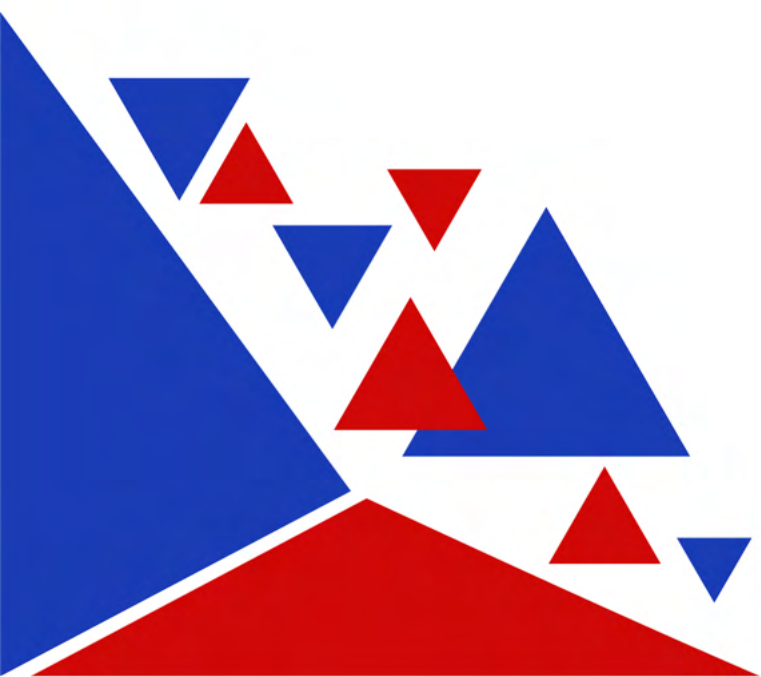
TIMELINE COMMENTARY - 20/30 MINUTES

- If each group did their own timeline, give time for each to visit the others' timelines and let the conversation flow. What similarities or differences are there? (If you did one timeline then go to the next bullet)
- Highlight the best moments and ask how people feel about the struggles or difficulties.
- Are there patterns to be seen?
- The facilitator takes note on the flipchart of trends or themes, different perceptions of the same event etc, which you may want to include in the final report.
- You should allow more time if there are a large number of groups, as it is important that people are heard.
- Highlight any things that are signs of God at work – where are the key changes, and what led to these?

STEP 3

AT THE END

- Leave the timeline(s) on display for the duration of the whole event if you are going on to do other sessions on the same day.
- If doing other sessions at a later date, pack them carefully meantime.
- It is important that all the information here is kept carefully, as it will be needed for the 'Vision in a Day' session.



Mapping

Picturing the Landscape



Total Time Needed: 60mins



AIMS OF THIS SESSION

Whether your church is in a township, suburb or in the middle of a city, we are called to love our communities, celebrate and understand them. In every congregation there are people who have a real passion for the community on the doorstep and want to see the church being salt and light in the area and others who may not know the community so well.

It was Michael Nazir-Ali who said “A faithful Church is continually shaped by its inner dynamic: the flow of Apostolic Tradition, with Scripture as its norm... The Church is, however, also shaped by the kind of world in which it finds itself. This must mean a constant receiving of the Gospel into our particular context” (Future Shapes of the Church, House of Bishops paper, 2001.)

Many churches have a significant number of people in walking distance of the church, who are not yet members of any church. The exercises in this section may open up our eyes to issues we have not seen, affecting our community. Our mission begins by being alongside people and being community focused, whether we meet them within the local church or through work, education, leisure, or other activities.

Two of the key shapers of Church Without Walls are that ‘the church is shaped by the local’ and ‘friendship’ – in what way is the church a friend to the community?

In this exercise we will...

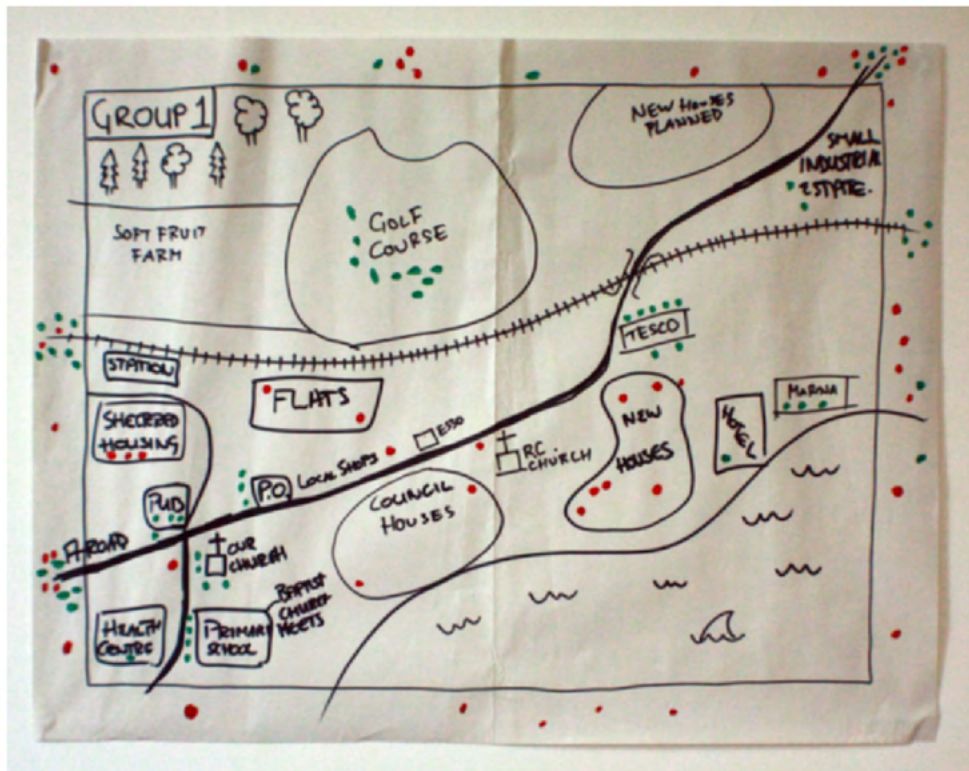
- **Make** a map of the area, in order to...
- **Explore** people’s perception of their locality, then...
- **Reflect** on key features and relationships of their community.

PREPARATION - Prepare the Map

- On the sheet of paper for each group, draw a margin roughly 5cm inside the edge of the paper (see image below).

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 3 Marker pens (Black, Green & Red) for each group
- Large sheets of paper (eg Flipchart) for each group
- Flipchart pad to record the results
- Prestik



STEP 1 PHYSICAL MAPPING - 30 MINUTES

Prepare tables, one for each group, with a large sheet of paper and a black marker pen. Invite people to draw a rough map of their community within the frame, highlighting significant features, eg:

- main roads and natural boundaries.
- key buildings or special features.
- residential areas.
- social gathering points.
- other churches or religious centres.
- vulnerable groups in the community.
- community facilities.
- open spaces.
- planned developments (housing, retail, commercial).

STEP 2 WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE - 15 MINUTES

Give groups the red and green pens.

- Ask them to mark a dot with the red pen to indicate where they live.
- With the green pen, ask them to mark where they have significant friendships.
- Anything outside of the church boundary should be marked in the margin.

If there is more than one group, invite the different groups to look at the other maps.

- What are the common features?
- What is different?

Invite conversation in the groups around:

- What are the main centres of community life?
- Where does the church building sit in relation to the main centres of the community?
- How does the physical make-up of the community shape its life and affect the life of the church?
- What sectors of the community are untouched by the church?
- What is missing from the community?

STEP 3



MAP COMMENTARY - 15 MINUTES

Display the maps on a wall or lay them out on the floor, and allow everyone to view them. Ask people for feedback on what they see in the map. There will be some repeat of the discussion that has already taken place in the small groups, but this allows everyone to note where viewpoints have differed or coincided. Note the points on a flipchart, eg:

- Are there any patterns that emerge from the placement of the dots?
- What do they notice about the distribution of the dots?
- What features are common to the maps?
- Is there anything that is missing?
- Where does the church have most presence?
- Where does the church have least presence? What opportunities for mission might this present?
- What difference does it make to the community that the church is present?
- Would the community miss the church if it wasn't there?

STEP 4



AT THE END

- Keep the maps on display or retain for future reference.
- If doing other sessions at a later date, pack them carefully in the meantime.
- It is important that all the information here is kept carefully, as it will be needed for the 'Vision in a Day' session.
- Keep a note of the feedback from Step 3, for inclusion in the final report.



Healthy Church

A Self Portrait

SESSION 3



Total Time Needed: 2 hours

(This exercise is based on the Church Without Walls Report of the Church of Scotland, Appendix 3.)

“Health is found at least as much in the seeking as in the finding.”
Robert Warren



AIMS OF THIS SESSION

A church's success shouldn't be measured in terms of numerical size, but rather that it is a healthy local expression of church. It is understandable, however, that a healthy church is likely to be one that grows in numbers, too! The 2001 Church Without Walls (CWW) Report identified Six Characteristics of a Healthy Church. We will be using these for measuring the health of your church.

In this exercise we will...

- **Reflect** on these Six Characteristics in the life of your church, in order to...
- **Discover** your congregation's strengths and weaknesses, and...
- **Produce** action points for your congregation.

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Flipchart paper and marker pens, and/or digital projector and laptop, pens/pencils.

Handouts (enough for each participant. All handouts are found at the end of this Section, pages 25-29): Handout 1: 'Six Characteristics of a Healthy Church' (or use PowerPoint presentation slides 13-18). Handout 2: Healthy Church Check Scoring Guide Handout 3: Healthy Church Check Individual Score Sheet Handout 4: Healthy Church Check Group Summary (one for each group).

Prepared flipchart (Figure 4) or PowerPoint outline of 'Healthy Church Profile Facilitator's Score Sheet' (slide 19: Total Scores).

Handout 5: Healthy Church Action List – enough for one per group.

You may require a pocket calculator to help speed up the process of totalling scores!

The Healthy Church Profile Facilitator's Score Sheet

Characteristic	Very Weak (0)	Weak (1)	Strong (2)	Very Strong (3)	TOTAL
Integrity					
Body & Soul					
Open House					
Growth					
Local					
Love & Care					

NOTE:

This can be quite a daunting exercise for some. It is the first time in this process that they are asked to make a quality judgement about some aspect of the church. It is therefore vital that there is an individual rather than a group response, and that all responses are anonymous.

Please note that this is a subjective exercise – it is not to become a definitive profile of your church, but simply to be used as an indicator. The conversations generated by the exercise are every bit as important as the scores.



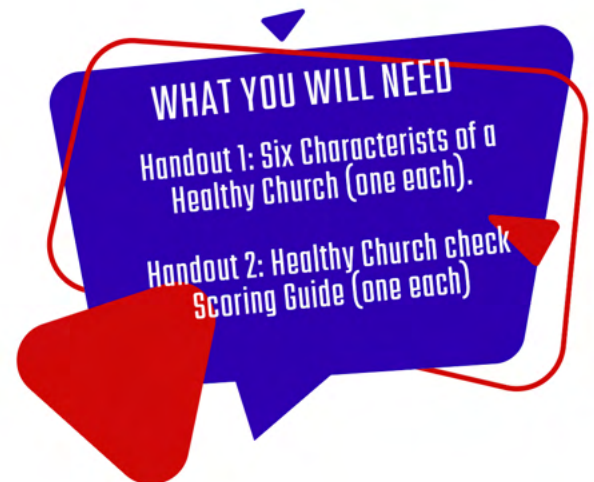
IN ADVANCE

Handout 1 contains an abbreviated description of the characteristics' descriptions (which is the information in the bullet points below). The paragraphs following the bullet points below are a fuller explanation, which the facilitator may wish to read out. Some people will struggle more than others with these ideas, so allow time for participants to refer to their handouts or to look at the PowerPoint slides to remind themselves of the characteristics. Read the fuller descriptions aloud at least twice.

- Enough spare pens for those without them.
- Read over the descriptions of the Six Characteristics (in Step 2 below). Make sure you are familiar with the concepts there.
- Prepare the score chart:
- Using flipchart paper and taking care not to remove from the pad (allowing for display on a flipchart easel), mark out a large score grid based on Figure 4.
 - Below 'Very Weak' put '0', below 'Weak' put '1', 'Strong' '2' and 'Very Strong' '3'. (These are the 'multipliers' that will give a final score for each characteristic).
 - Alternatively, you may use the PowerPoint presentation that accompanies this. Make sure that someone will be available to read out the scores to you, as you 'tally' them onto the score chart, during the break.

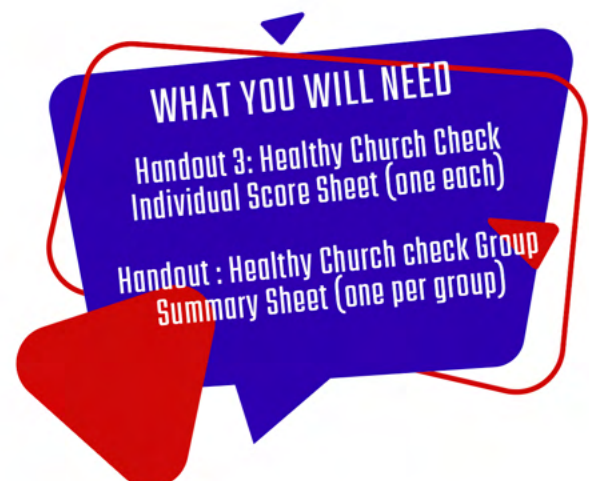
STEP 1 INTRODUCING THE TOPIC - 10 MINUTES

Briefly explain the process for the session and that you will introduce the characteristics one by one. With no fewer than six different characteristics, it would be advisable to introduce them individually, so that people have time to digest them. The main headings can be displayed on a flipchart or screen, whilst the sub points are covered quickly to give the idea of what is included under the heading. Reading from the 'crib sheet' will help to explain the characteristics more clearly.



STEP 2 SCORING THE SIX CHARACTERISTICS - 30 MINUTES

Ask people not to fill in the scoring sheet until you have explained the terms – some people tend to rush ahead. Referring to sheets previously given out, hand out the score sheet and then explain each characteristic in turn.



Before beginning, appoint someone – or ask the groups to designate one of their members – to tally up the scores for their group at the end of the scoring exercise. This will save time in collating the scores later, particularly if there is a large number of participants.

Before moving on to the next characteristic, allow a few moments for everybody to reflect and then score the current characteristic on their sheets. (Reassure everyone that their scores will be anonymous, so they are not to put their names on the sheets!) The clearest way of scoring will be to tick (✓) in the box required. (There is an example on the PowerPoint slide presentation). Do not allow too much time, though – encourage people to record their gut reaction, and not to get bogged down in some minor details.

EXPLAINING CHARACTERISTIC 1 - 'INTEGRITY'

- Jesus at the core.
- He is the beginning, middle and end of our story.
- We remember our Church's experience covers thousands of years.
- What we say is consistent with what we do.

A healthy church has integrity with the Gospel story. There is no contradiction between the teaching of Jesus and practice of this church, both within the church and in its engagement with the wider world. As the body of Christ, this church realises that there is continuity between the story of Jesus and that of his church.

Our sense of identity is closely linked to what we know and believe about Jesus. We are deeply aware that our story as Christians begins and ends with him.

We are conscious that we are part of something bigger than just this congregation: a world- wide church and a tradition that spans two thousand years. As part of a Presbyterian tradition, we remember that we are part of the UPCSA doing our part, on our own and in partnership with others, in the church's wider mission to the whole of Southern Africa and beyond.

What we say matches what we do. The principles that Jesus taught are foundational to our planning and decision-making.



EXPLAINING CHARACTERISTIC 2 - 'BODY & SOUL'

- We strive for a lasting face-to-face encounter with God.
- We involve the whole person and the whole people of God.
- The quality of our worship and devotion is vital.
- The whole of life is our concern.

A healthy church strives for a lasting faith which involves our minds, bodies and emotions, and which infuses every part of our lives.

Worship in growing churches engages with God, the world, life and the whole person. It moves head, heart and hands. That is to say, it is informative and relates to the whole life of worshippers, not just the religious part. It is inspiring and moves people with various emotions, and it is relevant in helping them to apply their faith in the ordinary world.

Prayer is a priority in this church, which is specific and relevant.

We are concerned with the whole of life – not just church on a Sunday. We are interested in what people do, their hopes and fears, and are concerned for their welfare, their work and leisure – there is no part of life to which our faith and our God is irrelevant.

EXPLAINING CHARACTERISTIC 3 - 'OPEN HOUSE'

- We welcome all with open doors and open arms.
- We go out to find the uninvited.
- We make our home among the needy.
- We listen and we speak.

We remember that Jesus welcomed all who came to him. He also lived among those who were the most marginalised and despised in the community. Similarly, the healthy church welcomes all with open doors and open arms, just as they are.

It also goes out and makes itself at home with those who are least like us.

We listen to their stories, and share ours with them.



EXPLAINING CHARACTERISTIC 4 - 'GROWTH'

- We are trainees learning skills.
- We are followers on the road.
- Seeds have to be nurtured before they will bear fruit.
- God adds to our number.

We are trainees learning skills – we understand that none of us has 'arrived' – that none of us knows everything we need to know about following Jesus.

Everyone in the church is given the opportunity to learn, and encouraged to grow in their faith and abilities. We are a safe place for people to learn and develop their gifts, and this is done with patience, allowing time to grow and develop – not expecting instant returns. We can all learn from one another.

We help each individual understand their unique role within the body, and make room for them. People are not protective and exclusive regarding territory! God adds to our number – not just through the Sunday services, but in the wider life of the church.

EXPLAINING CHARACTERISTIC 5 - 'LOCAL'

- The global good news needs to be spoken in a local accent or language.
- We choose to be real rather than virtual.
- We value every locality.

A healthy church communicates the Christian story in a way that is relevant, meaningful and that can be understood by the people in its community.

We value every locality, believing that everyone, regardless of status, nationality, age, gender, tribe, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc, has the right to hear the Gospel in a way they can understand.

We are a part of the community, rather than apart from the community.

EXPLAINING CHARACTERISTIC 6 - 'LOVE & CARE'

- Our community will only be satisfied with Christ-like relationships.
- We put our hands to work.

Jesus said that it is by our love for one another that the world will know that we are his disciples. A healthy church therefore is known for the loving and caring relationships within the congregation and in the wider community – caring for people as Jesus would have done. A healthy church is aware and informed of where need exists and takes practical steps to meet those needs. Not only do we warmly invite people in, we also go out to befriend them.

Once everyone has completed their score sheet, the designated person from each group should add the scores and complete the Group Summary Sheet.

STEP 3 COLLATING THE SCORES - 10 MINUTES

(20 minutes – Includes tea/coffee break. If more than one session is being run on the same day, a lunch break may be a useful time to collate the scores).

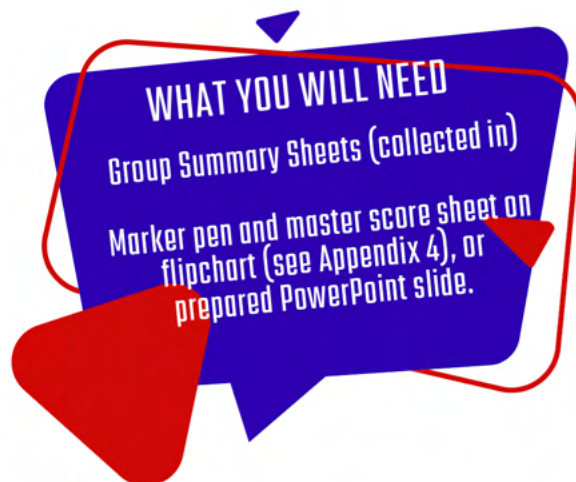
Tea/coffee or lunch break

During the break, have a volunteer read out the scores to you as you ‘tally’ them on the master score sheet. So, for example, a total of four ticks in a ‘Strong’ category (4x2) would score 8.

Then total them all up, being sure to check that the number of tally marks, reading across, is the same as the number of participants.

It might be helpful to ask someone to bring you your tea or coffee, as you will have little time for a break yourself!

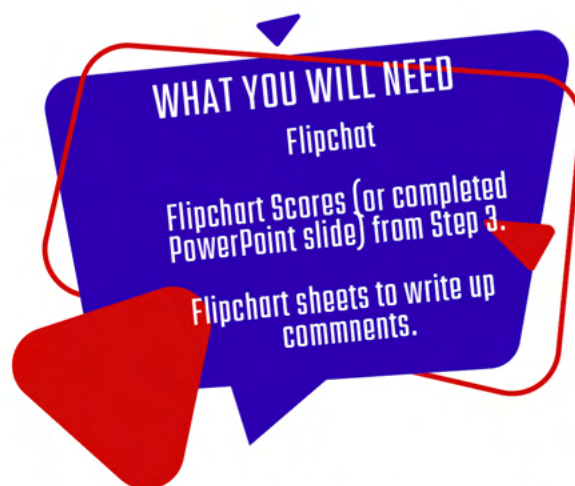
You may wish to copy the scores onto PowerPoint so they can be projected for all to see after the break. For smaller attendances, the flipchart may easily suffice.



STEP 4 REFLECTING ON THE SCORES - 25 MINUTES

Once people have cleared away their cups, they will be keen to know the results and it may create a good touch of anticipation to cover the flipchart, by folding back over the cover sheet (or just turn the easel around). Likewise, if PowerPoint is being used, simply take off the revealing slide (pressing ‘B’ on the most laptops will blank the screen – ‘W’ brings the picture back on).

As a plenary, firstly, reveal the scores and also let people see the range of opinions by revealing the tick tally pattern. You may wish to explain what the minimum and maximum scores could have been, based on the number present. This will help them to see if the scores are generally low or high. So, for example, if 30 people are participating, the minimum score for a characteristic would be 0 and the maximum would be 90. Do not dwell on this, however, as the key aspect of the scoring is to see how the characteristics have compared with each other.



Secondly, ask the following questions and note the comments:

- Which characteristic/s stand out as a key strength/s?
- Can we share examples of how the strength/s is/are seen?
- Where are we seeing things differently? (Note any high and low scores in same sections.)
- Which characteristic/s is/are holding us back?
- What is contributing to this/these 'challenge/s'?

STEP 5



WHAT NEEDS WORKING ON? - 30 MINUTES

In the small groups, ask people to identify one key strength that can be built upon and one key challenge that needs working on. Then invite the groups to agree on three action points for each (i.e. three measures to build on the strength and three measures to address the challenge). In most cases, this will involve the highest and lowest scoring characteristics, but allow the small groups to identify their own, as opinions can vary from group to group. (Note: although this means four sections on the worksheet will remain blank, all characteristics are equally valid and will be covered in the 'Vision in a Day' session.)

Invite a spokesperson from each group to share their action points and write these up on the flipchart. To save time, try to encourage people to be brief and only to share points not previously shared by another group.



STEP 6



AT THE END

- Keep the master score sheet, the flipchart with people's reflections, and the action sheets.
- It is important that all the information here is kept carefully, as it will be needed for the 'Vision in a Day' session and in the final report.





Handout 1

Six Characteristics of a Healthy Church

1. INTEGRITY

- Jesus at the Core
- He is the beginning, middle and end of our story.
- We remember our Church's experience covers thousands of years.
- What we say is consistent with what we do.

2. BODY AND SOUL

- We strive for a lasting face-to-face encounter with God.
- We involve the whole person and the whole people of God.
- The quality of our worship and devotion are vital.
- The whole of life is our concern.

3. OPEN HOUSE

- We welcome all with open doors and open arms.
- We go out to find the uninvited.
- We make our home among the needy.
- We listen and we speak.

4. GROWTH

- We are trainees learning skills.
- We are followers on the road.
- Seeds have to be nurtured before they will bear fruit.
- God adds to our number.

5. LOCAL

- The global good news needs to be spoken in a local accent.
- We choose to be real rather than virtual.
- We value every locality.

6. LOVE AND CARE

- Our Community will only be satisfied with Christ-like relationships.
- We put our hands to work.

Handout 2

Healthy Church Check Scoring Guide

On your score sheet, circle the number that best describes what you see happening in your church for each of the six criteria, according to the guide below:

VERY WEAK

The description of this characteristic of a healthy church is not in evidence in the life of the church.

WEAK

There may be a few aspects of this characteristic in evidence in the life of the church, or seen only occasionally but, on the whole, this is not how I would describe this congregation.

STRONG

Although not matching the experience of this congregation in all respects, many of the aspects of this characteristic can be seen in the life of the church. It may not be clearly seen every day, but there is evidence throughout the year that the church is strong in this area.

VERY STRONG

The description of this characteristic of a healthy church very closely matches this congregation.

Almost every aspect of this characteristic is seen or experienced week by week in the life of the church.

Handout 3

The Healthy Church Check Individual Score Sheet

(Please tick the box that best describes what you see happening in your church)

Characteristic	Very Weak	Weak	Strong	Very Strong
Integrity				
Body & Soul				
Open House				
Growth				
Local				
Love & Care				



Handout 4

The Healthy Church Check Group Summary

Group No. _____

Characteristic	Very Weak	Weak	Strong	Very Strong
Integrity				
Body & Soul				
Open House				
Growth				
Local				
Love & Care				

Handout 5

The Healthy Church Action List

Within your group, agree on what you believe are your church's strongest and weakest characteristics, marking them with an 'S' and 'W', then list three action points for each:

1. INTEGRITY

2. BODY AND SOUL

3. OPEN HOUSE

4. GROWTH

5. LOCAL

6. LOVE AND CARE

SESSION 4

Vision in a Day

Developing a Picture of the Future



Total Time Needed: 5 -6 hours (including a meal & refreshment breaks)

"Where there is no vision, the people perish"
Proverbs 29:18



AIMS OF THIS SESSION

Our journey so far has been spiritual process. We've tried to listen to the congregation, the community and God. Now we must bring the work we have done in the three previous sessions together to discern our priorities and develop a short and medium term plan.

Today we will:

- **Identify** key priorities for action in this church today.
- **Agree** on three dreams or hopes for each priority.
- **Decide** what steps are needed for each priority.
- **Record** these decisions for the body that will take this forward.

PREPARATION

Ideally this session should not be rushed. You need 5 or 6 hours with time for refreshments and a comfortable space that is conducive to group discussion. You'll need flipcharts, pens etc or a data projector and laptop to capture inputs.

You'll need copies of handout 6 (1 per group)

You also need to have the information generated by the previous sessions (Maps, timelines, etc) available. The timeline sheets are important and should be on each group's table from the outset.

STEP 1

WHERE ARE WE NOW? (THE STORY WE WANT TO BE PART OF) - 40 MINUTES

In your groups, summarise your findings from the first three sessions by reflecting on these three questions:

1. What has been our most significant development in the past two years?
2. In what ways has this helped us become a healthier church?
3. Imagine a newcomer to the congregation...
 - What helps him/her engage with this aspect of the church's life?
 - What hinders her/him from engaging with it?

Note your insights down on your flipchart



STEP 2

FEEDBACK- 30 MINUTES

Let the groups take turns to share their findings in the plenary.

STEP 3

THE STORY WE WANT TO BE PART OF - 30 MINUTES

In your groups share your dreams or hopes for the church's future.

- Don't limit people's input – quantity is good.
- We need as many ideas as possible, especially individual responses.
- Write each idea/dream on a separate post-it note.
- Don't filter out any idea.

You could also use these questions to spark off ideas:

- In two years' time, building on our strengths, what would we like to see?
- In two years' time, how would we like the church to be known in this community, not just by church members, but by those who currently have no connection with the church?



STEP 4**PRIORITISING - 30 MINUTES**

In each group get everyone to sort and cluster their post-it notes ideas.
Group similar ideas together.

- Big clusters *could* represent a priority, but don't underestimate "minority voices". Some of the important priorities are not always immediately evident.
- If a cluster has a number of similar ideas – it might be helpful to stick a post-it on top with a phrase that pulls together the core-elements of the dream.
- Then, as a group, identify the top three clusters of ideas and reformulate the various ideas into one coherent dream. Write these on to post-it notes.
- Unfold the "future" section of your timeline and paste your "top 3" there.

TAKE A BREAK**STEP 5****GROUP SHARING - 40 MINUTES**

Let each group present their top 3 dreams.
Stick these onto a new sheet of paper.
Group similar ideas together.

- Big clusters *could* represent a priority, but don't underestimate "minority voices". Some of the important priorities are not always immediately evident.
- If a cluster has a number of similar ideas – it might be helpful to stick a post-it on top with a phrase that pulls together the core-elements of the dream.

Now prioritise the dream clusters starting with the greatest priority as #1.



STEP 6**GETTING FROM HERE TO THERE - 40 MINUTES**

In groups use Handout 6

- Choose one of the three most important dreams identified in step 5 (It doesn't have to be one your group came up with.) (It doesn't matter if groups choose the same dreams.)
- Write the dream and a short description in the future part of your timeline.
- List at least one action to take that would be a first step towards achieving that dream. (First steps can include training, research and surveys, as well as actions that implement the idea.)



For as long as your time permits repeat this for the other dreams on the list.

STEP 7**AT THE END - 15 MINUTES**

In each Collect all the relevant documents:

- The group Timelines
- The sheet with clustered dream priorities (Step 5)
- Worksheet 6 from each group (Step 6)

These documents need to be passed on to the team that will now action them.

Spend some time in worship and prayer noting the promise in Philippians 2:13

***..it is God who works in you
to will and to act
according to his good purpose.***



Handout 6

Please give a brief description of hope or dream 1

First steps to realise this dream

1 _____

2 _____

Please give a brief description of hope or dream 2

First steps to realise this dream

1 _____

2 _____

Please give a brief description of hope or dream 3

First steps to realise this dream

1 _____

2 _____

What next?



TURNING DREAMS INTO REALITY

By the end of the Vision Day, there should be a sense of future direction, some action points and priorities. Some of these may be expressed with clarity and be backed by a broad consensus; others will be vague ideas or glimpses of what might be. The purpose of this section is to help change these good intentions into reality.

CLARIFICATION AND AFFIRMATION

If your congregation has completed the sessions as explained in the previous pages, then it means that the leadership team of the church (probably the Session/Church Council or some sub group) has wisely decided to involve as many as possible in the congregation in this process of prayerful review and envisioning. When the outcomes of the Vision Day are a genuine reflection of how the congregation is discerning the way ahead, these are of the utmost value to those with responsibility to lead the church. They must, therefore, be treated with the value and respect that they deserve.

The role of those in leadership, then, is to affirm the outcomes of the process, clarify them and do what is needed to turn vision into reality. In practice, this will mean planning: deciding the how, when, by whom, with what resources etc that are necessary if ideas are not to remain just ideas

It is vital that everyone involved in the Future Focus process (and those in the congregation who were not involved) hear, very soon after the Vision Day, that the outcomes have been considered by those with leadership responsibilities, have been affirmed and that steps are being taken towards implementation. The rest of this section is intended to help those in leadership to ensure that the move from dream to reality, from vision to implementation, is as smooth and as effective as possible.

EXTERNAL OR DIY FACILITATION?

Too many excellent decisions are never implemented; too many sound ideas never progress from the drawing board to actuality; too many sound plans fail, or create unnecessary problems, because of a lack of wisdom in how they are put into practice. The outcomes of the Vision Day will inevitably involve change, which may be minor or major in scale. It may involve initiating something new, stopping something existing, or making adjustments to something current. Understanding some principles about human nature and how congregations behave in relation to change is helpful in creating consensus and commitment – and avoiding unnecessary misunderstanding and conflict.

Change, even when it may seem a very minor change to some, will have an emotional impact. When changes occur – to what we do as a congregation, how we do things, or physical changes are made to buildings – different people will respond in different ways. For some, a particular change will be like embarking on a fresh and exciting journey, something that they anticipate with eager excitement. For others, the very same change may cause anxiety and a sense of loss; they may strongly disagree with the proposed change. Any change will bring with it an experience of ‘transition’ as individuals, groups and the congregation as a whole come to terms with the change and what it means for them.

In many ways, ‘change’ is the easy bit. ‘Transition’, the psychological process people go through to come to terms with change, is the difficult part. For most people, change is perceived as a loss before it is experienced as a gain. We cannot initiate a process of change without creating a grief reaction in people – however irrational this may sometimes seem.

Those in leadership need to understand, therefore, that how they implement change will have a significant impact on people’s experience of transition. How we manage change and transition pastorally will shape the culture of the congregation into the future. The following insights and tips will help to introduce change while avoiding unnecessary pain and struggle.

COMMUNICATION

The single most important piece of advice about introducing any kind of change, whether small or huge is this:

Communicate, communicate, communicate ... and when you think that you have communicated enough, communicate some more!

Communicate a picture of the future (vision); communicate the purpose of change and the reasons for change; communicate clearly regarding the part that people have to play; communicate in every possible way and many times. Do not just include a note in a bulletin sheet and think that everyone will read it and understand. Use every means possible to communicate – clearly – several times.

If changes are planned that are in any way complex, controversial or expected to be difficult for some people, it is a good idea to have people specially assigned to the task of communication, including having time to spend with people individually when that is necessary.





THE CHANGE FORMULA

Experts in managing change in commercial and charitable organisations have observed that, for change to take root and be fruitful, certain conditions need to be present. The same is true in the context of churches. David Cormack expressed these in what is known as ‘the change formula’¹:

$$C = D + V + FS + E > \text{COST}$$

To translate into everyday language, it means:

Change = Discontent + Vision + First Steps + Energy

The Energy required must be perceived to be greater than the Cost involved, or put another way, the resulting changes must be worth the cost and effort.

THE CHANGE FORMULA

Before embarking on a particular change it is worth reflecting on these factors:

- Is there sufficient discontent with the current situation to make change worthwhile?
- And/or is there really a commitment to the vision for this?
- Is there clarity around the first steps that will be necessary?
- Is there the energy to carry it forward?
- Will the cost be justified?

The ‘cost’ may include time, money, emotional costs, closing the door on other alternatives, etc.

UNDERSTANDING REACTIONS TO CHANGE

In a group of people like a church congregation, it is usual to find that, in regard to any particular change, there will be a spectrum of reactions. At one end of the spectrum, there will be a few people who are passionate advocates for the change. There will be others who respond almost immediately once they have understood the change that is being proposed. At the other end of the spectrum, there will often be some who will remain intractably opposed to any change.

The majority is usually found between these two extremes. They will embrace the change if it seems to be the right way forward and is well communicated. They will reject the change if they fail to see its benefit, do not understand it, or sense that it is harming individuals or the congregation.

A key to introducing change, then, is to communicate effectively with the majority rather than rush ahead with the enthusiastic few.

It is worth noting that it is at either end of the spectrum that the volume level tends to be highest. It is important not to be intimidated by those who are loudest. They are operating out of strong emotions and intuitions. The people in the middle tend to be relatively quiet and respond to careful and reasonable explanation: what? why? how? when? who? how long? and how much? Effective implementation of change requires patience in winning the quieter, reasonable majority. Once a course is plotted, we need to be entirely consistent with that new direction. However, the pace at which we advance needs to be sensitively managed to encourage those not yet committed to get on board and to avoid unnecessary stress.

QUICK WINS

Through the Future Focus process, many from the congregation have invested their time and shared their perspectives and opinions. It is important, then, that everyone can see some tangible outcomes as soon as possible. There is a lot to be said for analysing the outcomes of the process in terms of their expected impact and the inputs required. (In fact, if there is time, using the matrix below to evaluate the outcomes is a valuable addition to the Vision Day.)

<p>High Impact Low cost <i>Quick win</i></p>	<p>High Impact High cost <i>Strategic</i></p>
<p>Low Impact Low cost <i>Debatable</i></p>	<p>Low Impact High cost <i>Avoid</i></p>

Obviously, changes that are perceived as having a low impact will need to be debated carefully. If they require a lot of input, whether in time, money or any other resource, then it is probably best to avoid them altogether. Many long-term, high impact changes will require considerable resources. These are the big, strategic changes that are going to take time and other resources. Often, though, there are some changes which, although they are perceived as high impact, actually require relatively little in terms of time and other resources: these are the 'quick wins' – changes that should be implemented promptly. As people see these things becoming reality, it will encourage them that change is possible, that the Future Focus process is bearing fruit and that those in leadership are committed to seeing things through.

UNDERSTANDING REACTIONS TO CHANGE

Most major changes will have their advocates and their opponents. However, many opponents are unsupportive because they are genuinely unconvinced about the suggested benefits. Many, although they will resist commitment to a plan they feel is unwise, will not be averse to trying something for a limited period or on a small scale in order to see whether the hoped-for benefits materialise or not. There is, therefore, much to commend the idea of time-limited experiments or trials.

SENDING OUT THE SPIES

It is unlikely that any of the ideas that have emerged from the Future Focus process in your congregation have never been implemented or considered by other churches. There can be considerable benefit in doing some detective work to find other churches that have tried something similar and then going and seeing for yourself. Just as Moses sent out the spies to investigate the Promised Land (Numbers 13), you may be able to send a team to visit a church where similar things are being done. Include a mix of people in the team: men and women of different generations, and not just the enthusiastic advocates of what has been suggested. Then, after the visit, get the team to feed back their findings. The Mission & Discipleship Committee will probably be able to help you contact churches that might be helpful to visit. You can contact them via the Central Office

Email: convener.mad@presbyterian.org

Phone: +27 11 727 3500

BEYOND 'THE FUTURE FOCUS: THE WAY AHEAD'

The process your congregation has undertaken takes a snapshot of the community and congregation and seeks to help discern God's vision for the future. Hopefully it will have been an encouraging and stimulating process for all involved. You may want to undertake further facilitated activities to look in more detail at particular aspects of the life and mission of the congregation. Further Future Focus materials are available and are particularly designed to be used with an external facilitator. For more details, contact the Mission & Discipleship Committee via the contact details above.



Appendix 1

Additional Resources



There are many books and other resources related to congregational health, mission planning and managing transition. The following are recommended:

BOOKS

The Healthy Churches Handbook by Robert Warren, Church House Publishing, 2012.

Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches by Christian A Schwarz, Churchsmart Resources, 1996. Available from www.ncd-international.org

The Purpose Driven Church by Rick Warren, Zondervan, 1996.

Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, The Alban Institute, 2003.

Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change by William Bridges, Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2009.

How to do Mission Action Planning by Mike Chew and Mark Ireland, SPCK, 2009.

OTHER RESOURCES

'Imagine' Project from London Institute of Contemporary Christianity (LICC) www.licc.org.uk/imagine/

The Church of Scotland's 'Statistics for Mission' project provides invaluable information about the demographics of every parish in Scotland.²

Community and church audit packs are available as PDF downloads from www.faithworks.info

A wealth of information and resources related to new forms of church is available from www.freshexpressions.org.uk

41 ² This is expected to be available from Autumn 2013. Contact the Mission and Discipleship Council for details at mandd@cofscotland.org.uk

Appendix 2



Suggestions for Worship and Devotionals

For some participants, Future Focus can sometimes feel uncomfortably like a business process. However, the exercises are merely tools to aid a process of spiritual discernment. The elements of prayer and worship are therefore at least as important as any of the exercises found in this material.

In this section, you will find some suggestions for opening and closing devotions for each of the sessions. In addition to this, there are resources such as *Pray Now*, produced annually, and *More than Words: 400 Pray Now Daily Devotions*³, an anthology of *Pray Now* devotions from a number of years.

SESSIONS 1 AND 2: TIMELINE AND MAPPING

BIBLE READINGS

2 Timothy 3: 14-17

Micah 6: 6-8

In the first passage, we are reminded of the legacy of teaching passed down the generations and, indeed, of those saints who brought us the Gospel. The authority of God's Word is underlined and thus the responsibility of passing on His teaching to current and future generations. In this session, as we look to our past, may we be thankful for all those who have gone before us and have faithfully taught and passed on His Word.

In the second passage, we are reminded of what is required of us, as we live out our faith in this community. If we 'act justly', 'love mercy' and 'walk humbly with our God', then we will not fail to make a positive impact on our community. Later, as we come to draw maps of our locality, we may be made aware of where we are not making such an impact.



SUGGESTED PRAYERS (BY ALL)

Lord, let us rejoice
that today and tomorrow
are in your hands.
Enable us to be bold
and claim your promises;
for as you have brought us here,
may you go before us
and may your Spirit guide us where we go.

Amen

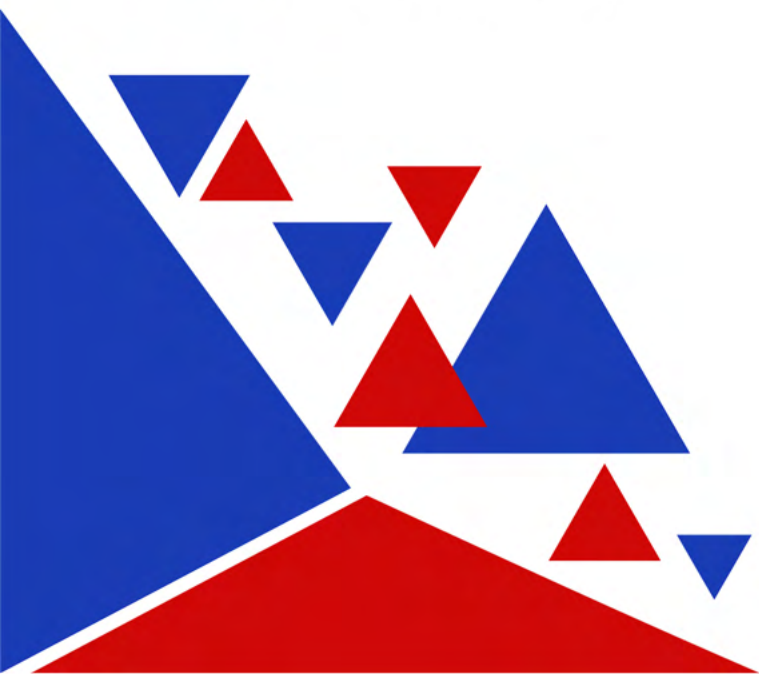
OR

Living and loving Lord,
we thank you for our church,
we thank you for its founders,
we thank you for its story,
we thank you for our parish,
we thank you for our community.
Inspire us to rejoice in the good things,
help us to recognise the challenges,
direct us to respond to your leading
as we open our hearts and minds.

Amen

SUGGESTED HYMNS

Lord, for the years	SOF 892 (also Mission Praise 428)
O God, our help in ages past	SOF 415
O Lord the clouds are gathering	SOF 429 (also Mission Praise 509)



SESSIONS 3: HEALTHY CHURCH

BIBLE READINGS

Psalm 139

This psalm is one of David's better known, mainly for its expression of God's omniscience and omnipresence, along with its reference to being 'knit together' in the womb.

The key verses for us here are the first two and the last two (23-24). We celebrate the fact that God knows everything there is to know about us, but more in a way of assurance (verse 10), rather than in a way of inspection. That said, David then asks the Lord to use such all-seeing knowledge to examine his heart and to put him on the right path.

As we examine the life of our church, we should be expressing similar sentiments. We need to be honest about ourselves and be open to what God wants to reveal to us. Then, as verse 24 implores, we ask Him to 'lead us'.

SUGGESTED PRAYER (WITH RESPONSES)

Leader: Almighty God, we do not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future and we give thanks that you are sovereign and in control. We come to you now, seeking your guidance, as you reveal to us what we should be celebrating over and what we should be challenged with.

All: Lord, help us to see.

Leader: We humbly ask that you enable us to be attentive to what you are saying to your people here in this place, in this situation and at this time.

All: Lord, help us to listen.

Leader: We know, Father that you have so much you want to teach us as we journey together. May your Holy Spirit speak clearly to us and gently lead us in all our thinking.

All: Lord, help us to learn.

Leader: We ask all of this in the name of your son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

All: Amen

SUGGESTED HYMNS

Dear Lord and Father of mankind *SOF 79 (also Mission Praise 111)*

Spirit of the living God *SOF 510*

Make me a channel of your peace *SOF 381 (also Mission Praise 456)*

SESSION 3 CLOSING DEVOTIONS (5 MINUTES)

Suggested Prayer

Almighty, loving God, we thank you for guiding us through this session. We thank you for enabling us to see those things that are strong areas of our ministry. We praise you for them and ask that you enable us to develop them further for your purpose and glory. We also thank you for giving us the discernment to recognise those areas that challenge and concern us. We humbly ask that you will provide guidance and inspiration as we seek ways to address them and turn them into strengths so that we can be more effective in our witness to the community around us.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

BIBLE READING

Ephesians 3: 16-21 may be read as a prayer of blessing on the people.



SESSION 4: VISION IN A DAY

BIBLE READINGS

Matthew 28: 18-20

Often referred to as 'The Great Commission', this passage is central to missional thinking. It highlights three main points we should consider as we start to plan ahead today.

The first point is that Jesus utters the word 'go' and not 'sit back and expect people to come to you'. The command to 'go' implies an outwardly direction. It is pro-active and not reactive. It is dynamic, not static. We need to think about how we move church into our community, more than how the community needs to come to our church.

The second point is, Jesus says 'Make disciples'. Our thinking today needs to focus on growing in depth as well as width. We need to invest in people, helping them to grow in their faith. Over time, many of them will, in turn, reach and help others do the same.

The third point is simple: Jesus says 'I will be with you always' and this should surely encourage us in our planning. He does not just send us out, wishing us good luck! He comes with us and, furthermore, he will continue to travel with us every single step of the way. That includes the forthcoming journey into the future. That journey really begins today and Jesus is already with us!

PRAYER

Leader: Heavenly Father, give us the courage to reach out lovingly to our community with the good news of your Gospel.

All: Lord, equip us for this, your work.

Leader: Give us the grace to accept the sacrifices we may have to make, whatever they may be, as we seek to extend your kingdom.

All: Lord, equip us for this, your work.

Leader: Give us the wisdom to know what we may need to change, what we may need to lose and what we may need to start anew.

All: Lord, equip us for this, your work.

Leader: We ask all these things through the name of the one who promises He will always be with us, our Saviour Jesus Christ,

All: Amen

SUGGESTED HYMNS

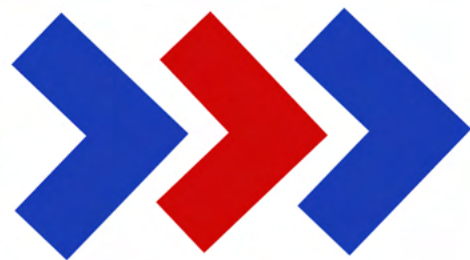
<i>Be thou my Vision</i>	<i>SOF 42</i>
<i>I, the Lord of sea and sky</i>	<i>SOF 830</i>
<i>Father, hear the prayer we offer</i>	<i>SOF 1229</i>





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