

a process  
for revitalizing  
your church



# The Healthy Churches' Handbook

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# Foreword

Many congregations around Britain have already benefited from *Growing Healthy Churches*. It is good that this material has now been conveniently gathered together for wider circulation in this handbook. Here, churches are enabled 'to take a snapshot' of their life together, measure it against seven well-proven marks of a healthy congregation, and act on their conclusions. In some ways, it provides for parish development what the *Emmaus* programme does for individual spiritual growth. However, anyone seeking a quick fix for ailing churches will be disappointed. These signposts on the journey towards a greater corporate Christ-likeness will take time, honesty and commitment to work through together.

Bishops often refer to this journey when instituting a new parish priest, but it is not always clear how the hopes raised at such a time can be realized in practice. Congregations are not always good in assessing their strengths and weaknesses. Some churches all too easily focus on the things they cannot do, and in their discouragement find it difficult to recognize and celebrate what is good about their life together. In others, able women and men possessing the highest motives can be broken by an unwillingness to move on from entrenched attitudes having deep roots in past history. Hence the importance given in this handbook to appointing an external facilitator to help the process along.

The materials here are amazingly adaptable. They can be used with whole congregations, leadership groups and with home groups, with churches of any size and location, at any stage in the life of a parish. There are ideas here for teaching, discussion and meditation. The unusual 'angel' material turns good theology into an imaginative tool that will particularly help those who think visually to make their full contribution towards the next steps in fulfilling the vocation of their church. In the Rochester Diocese, this programme has so far touched nearly two-thirds of the benefices. It appeals to every style of church – and to Archdeacons as well! Our hope and prayer is that it will bless your congregation as we have seen it bless many others.

Carol Kitchener, Parish Development Officer  
Michael Howard, Bishop's Officer for Mission  
Diocese of Rochester



# How the book works

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.

Churches are helped to assess themselves against seven marks of a healthy church. The goal is not easy solutions, but rather encountering the reality of God's presence in and through the life of each church.

The seven marks of a healthy church are:

1. Energized by faith
2. Outward-looking focus
3. Seeks to find out what God wants
4. Faces the cost of change and growth
5. Operates as a community
6. Makes room for all
7. Does a few things and does them well

## Part 1 – Exploring the marks of healthy churches

<i>Chapter 1 – Discovering healthy churches</i>		The story of how the 'model' of seven marks of a healthy church was developed
<i>Chapter 2 – Living the two great commandments</i>	Unpacking Marks 1 & 2	What it means to be energized by faith and to develop an outward looking focus
<i>Chapter 3 – Costly calling</i>	Unpacking Marks 3 & 4	What is involved in seeking to find out what God wants, and in facing the cost of change and growth
<i>Chapter 4 – Sign of the kingdom</i>	Unpacking Marks 5, 6 & 7	What it means to operate as a community, make room for all and do a few things well

## Part 2 – Growing healthy churches

<i>Chapter 5 – Embarking on the healthy journey</i>	Doing the Church Profile Exercise
<i>Chapter 6 – Developing healthy churches</i>	Taking action
<i>Chapter 7 – Facilitating healthy churches</i>	Using a facilitator to aid the process

## Part 3 – Seeing the whole picture

Chapter 8 – What is church?	Unpacking what we mean by church
Chapter 9 – The angel of the church	Developing a Church Profile from an intuitive and imaginative angle

## Part 4 – Healthy churches exercises

<i>Chapter 10 – Preparing for the Church Profile Exercise</i>	Practical materials for doing <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the Church Profile Exercise and</li><li>• the Angel of the Church Exercises</li></ul>
<i>Chapter 11 – The Church Profile Exercise</i>	
<i>Chapter 12 – Angel of the Church Exercises</i>	

Handouts for all the exercises may be photocopied from the Appendices. They may also be downloaded from the web: go to [www.chpublishing.co.uk/healthychurches](http://www.chpublishing.co.uk/healthychurches)



# Introduction

This book is for anyone who cares about the well-being of the Church.

In the changed and changing world in which we live that well-being can easily come under threat and shift from an experienced reality into what feels like an unattainable dream. The good news is that there are answers – not easy ones or neat ones – rather, ones that have to be hammered out on the anvil of the local church’s experience. But churches, across the country and beyond, are finding that it is possible to plot the health of a church, identify actions to address areas of weakness and embark on a journey to greater wholeness.

That is what this book is about. It is designed as much for lay members of the church as it is clergy. Not least since it is often lay members of churches who first raise questions about the health of the church and prompt the use of material such as is contained in this book.

It is called a *Handbook* because it is not intended simply to be an outline of a theory but a practical guide to help churches identify where work needs to be done to enrich their health – then take action. So stories, exercises and explanation are all included in this book.

## A journey of discovery

What is offered here represents the fruit of over ten years of research and reflection on how the Church can best express its faith and life in today’s setting.

In the first of those years, whilst working at the Church of England’s Board of Mission, based in Church House, Westminster, I wrote *Building Missionary Congregations*.<sup>1</sup> That fifty-five page booklet looked at why the Church needs to reshape its life in today’s largely post-Christendom context. It traced an outline of what that reshaping might look like. Having written the booklet, I then found myself involved with a fascinating, diverse and stimulating number of people and churches who were seeking to express, in the reality of actual local church life, some of the things I had written about.

That involvement continued when, in 1998, I moved to work full-time with *Springboard*, a small team set up by the Archbishops of Canterbury and

York as an Initiative for Evangelism. During its life (1991–2003), that team has sought to help the Church find appropriate ways to communicate its faith, accompany the great number of people today who are on a journey to faith, and enable each church so to order its life that it becomes translucent of the gospel.

One person with whom I worked while in both these posts has been Dr Janet Hodgson, the Adviser in Local Mission in the Durham Diocese (1994–2002). It was she who invited me to meet with representatives from churches in that diocese that had experienced significant growth in the first half of the 1990s. It looked like, and proved to be, a most stimulating day. What neither of us had imagined was quite what would result from that. It was the start of a journey of discovery.

## ***Part 1: Exploring the marks of a healthy church***

That initial day in Durham, and the subsequent reflections on it, yielded a number of insights, not least that these churches shared common characteristics. They were subsequently developed as *the seven marks of a healthy church*. The story of how this came into being is told in Chapter 1, *Discovering healthy churches*. The following three chapters (Chapter 2, *Living the two great commandments*, Chapter 3, *Costly calling*, Chapter 4, *Sign of the kingdom*) explore these marks in detail. They contain descriptions and stories of how these marks work out in practice in a wide range of church settings, sizes and traditions. A summary page of all the marks follows at the end of Part 1.

An intriguing question in this whole process has been ‘*why these marks?*’ Why are *these* the characteristics of a healthy church? This is explored further in the text, but here it needs to be said that the marks are a good description of the values that Christ himself expressed in his life and which the disciple today is called upon to live out.

So these marks of a healthy church are not some management tool for running the church more efficiently and effectively (though they can doubtless have those positive effects), but are signposts on the journey of faith. The journey towards health for a church is along the path of expressing the life of Christ. Healthy churches are on pilgrimage.

## ***Part 2: Growing healthy churches***

It quickly became clear that, for all the churches involved, the present good state of health was the result of a long journey of discipleship and discovery. Indeed, a commitment to making that journey towards health was not only a distinguishing mark of these churches but also an important

signpost for others seeking to strengthen the life of their church. Making a long-term commitment to develop the quality and vitality of a church is the key to health. The nature and implications of this commitment are explored in Chapter 5, *Embarking on the healthy journey*.

Setting out on that journey begins, like all journeys, with a single step. In this case the step is doing what is called the Church Profile Exercise. Done with a leadership group, such as a church council, or with a 'whole church group', this exercise introduces people to the seven marks of a healthy church. Participants are then asked to score their church on all these marks. The individual scores are transcribed onto a single, large (flipchart sized) sheet. This gives an immediate profile of the church. From it can be read off strengths and weaknesses and other indicators. Out of reflection on this it is usually possible to identify where action is needed.

Chapters 10 and 11 describe the Church Profile Exercise and give guidance about how to conduct it as part of the practical material in the last part of the book.

Managing both the Church Profile Exercise and the consequent process of identifying where action is needed and setting about taking that action and monitoring it are covered in Chapter 6, *Developing healthy churches*. Chapter 7 (*Facilitating healthy churches*) explores the value of drawing on external help in this whole process, together with an outline of the task of achieving these goals.

### ***Part 3: Seeing the whole picture***

Because of the way that the marks of a healthy church have been developed, they do not constrain churches into one mould, but rather open doors to new expressions and to surprising developments. They also provoke questions about the very nature of the Church.

One of the most fundamental questions raised in this work with churches is addressed in Chapter 8, *What is church?* The issues surrounding this question provoke us to see the Church as a whole organization or 'system', with its own discernible ethos, identity and spirit.

Having begun to address that more fundamental question of what church is, we stumbled across the strange subject of the angel of the church. This is a phrase taken from the letters of the risen Christ addressed to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Engaging with this concept opened up a whole new dimension to working with churches, for it comes at the subject from an intuitive and imaginative angle rather than from the analytical approach of working with the marks of a healthy church.

How we came across this approach and the use and value of this way of seeing church are explored in Chapter 9, *The angel of the church*.

Experience suggests that working with this concept of the angel of the church can help churches hear and respond to the call of God on their corporate life and thus reflect more of the divine wholeness and salvation that Christ came to bring.

### **Part 4: Healthy churches exercises**

The last section of the book is devoted to practical materials churches can work with. First comes material about the Church Profile Exercise. Chapter 10 (*Preparing for the Church Profile Exercise*) is designed to equip anyone seeking to carry out the exercise. The programme for that exercise is set out in Chapter 11 (*The Church Profile Exercise*). Chapter 12 (*Angel of the Church Exercises*) gives a number of suggestions about how churches can explore the subject of the angel of the church and use that material to gain insights about their church and the call of Christ to it today. Finally, the *Resources for healthy churches* section gives a list of courses, books, websites and other resources that can help in working on each of the marks of a healthy church.

## **To those who are familiar with Growing Healthy Churches**

The initial research was published by *Springboard* in a booklet entitled *Growing Healthy Churches*. That booklet was distributed to all clergy as part of the *Restoring Hope in our Church* resource, in 2003. To those familiar with that booklet and those who have already done a Church Profile Exercise (previously called the *Church Checklist*) it is worth pointing out what new material is contained in this Handbook. It contains a good deal of material and insights gained since the publication of *Growing Healthy Churches* as well as much that could not be included in a twelve-page booklet. Additionally available in this book are:

- A much enlarged and updated exploration of the marks of a healthy church, together with stories of how they are being expressed in a great variety of churches. This material is set out in Part 1.
- Materials needed to conduct the Church Profile Exercise and to help churches identify where action is needed. It is also designed to help plan and take action to enrich its health. The aim here is to make this Handbook an accessible resource for developing the life and health of a church. This material is set out in Part 2.

- Resources and guidance for addressing the underlying questions that are often raised about what we mean by 'church'. It also includes an introduction to the subject of the angel of a church with help as to how to use this approach. This is contained in Part 3.
- Matters concerning the use of an external facilitator, including guidance about how to be one, are addressed in Chapter 7, *Facilitating healthy churches*.
- A guide to a wide range of resources likely to help churches develop any of the marks.

The practical nature of the exercises is what make this a *Handbook* for churches wanting to develop their health and give expression to the life of Christ in and through the life of the church. It contains the material to *do* what the book is talking about.

## Natural Church Development

Not long after the material on which this book is based had been developed and was being used around the country, *Natural Church Development*,<sup>2</sup> by Christian Schwarz was published in England. It resonates with much contained in this book, not least in its emphasis on the nurturing of the qualitative side of church life, rather than majoring on numerical growth. It has helped in the development of *Growing Healthy Churches* at a number of points, which are referred to in the text.

However, there are differences. They are not primarily about where the approach of this book conflicts with *Natural Church Development*; but rather about approaches that, though different, are complementary. Among those differences are the following points:

- The key difference, explained more fully in the text, is that the marks of a healthy church identified here are expressed in terms of values, goals and characteristics (e.g. 'operates as a community') whereas in *Natural Church Development* they are expressed in terms of activities ('holistic small groups').
- The *Healthy Churches* material is a lighter structure, enabling a church to take a 'health check' in one three-hour session.
- *Healthy Churches* has a much lower 'doctrine of numbers' and sees any statistics as a helpful guide rather than in any sense an

accurate measure of where a church is at. For example, *Natural Church Development* can talk in terms of the leadership of a church being rated as '64.6%'. The *Healthy Churches* material does not provide any such quantifiable measure; though it does help churches identify strengths, weaknesses and issues needing to be addressed.

## Tested material

This material has, in one way or another, been extensively used across the Church of England in the last seven years. Several dioceses, in a range of different ways, have taken up the material and used it.

*Durham* Diocese was where it all began. Although it was never used in any systematic way across the diocese, it was used by the Mission Enablers to help churches reflect on their life together and by archdeacons, who used it as a basis for parts of their annual visitation returns.

*Coventry* Diocese was the first to make use of it as a whole diocesan process. Their involvement was of great value in the way that they were willing to try out, and to adapt, the material offered. It continues to be the basis for much of the resourcing of the churches in the diocese.

That was followed by *Rochester* Diocese, whose use of the material is the most long term and extensive to date. It has become the central framework of reference for its mission and parish development work. Their involvement has greatly contributed to the development of the work, not least in the use of facilitators.

Next came the *Carlisle* Diocese, where the material has been used quite differently. Every church was asked to do the Church Profile Exercise as part of a programme in which every parish was to be visited by a member of the bishop's staff team. Those staff team members then went to churches and listened to their answers to the questions 'what did you learn from doing this exercise?', 'what action are you now planning to take?' and 'how can the diocese help you with that?' A diocesan strategy document is now being developed out of that extensive process of listening to churches.

The *York* Diocese has used the material on an area and deanery basis rather than as a whole diocese. It has proved another fruitful area of learning for all concerned, particularly as the focus there has been on small, sometimes isolated, rural churches.

*Chichester* Diocese has more recently started working with the material and developed an extensive and long-term programme for its use in the diocese. The process, ably led by the Diocesan Missioner, the Revd John Twisleton, involves training and deployment of facilitators. The material is also being used in the diocese as a way of helping churches during a vacancy to think about the life of the church and so identify the sort of leadership they need for the next phase of the church's life.

The recently appointed Canon Missioner of *Bradford* Diocese, the Revd David Brierley, has developed a process of working with churches using the *Healthy Churches* material as the framework. Inevitably, where there is just one person working, the rate of coverage of the diocese is slower, yet it has the advantage of being rooted long term in the whole process of nurturing the life of churches.

Similarly, the Revd John Gooding, Parish Development Officer in the *Guildford* Diocese, has been using this material as the primary tool for his engagement with churches and has tested the material extensively and added to the insights of this book.

In a number of dioceses it is used to help churches during a vacancy to reflect on their life together and the needed future direction. This forms the backdrop to considering what sort of new leader is needed. In other dioceses, new incumbents are encouraged to use it a year or two into the ministry as a way of taking stock and mapping future direction once they have become familiar with the situation.

Apart from all these group and area uses, this material has been used by an unknown number of individual churches across the country.

Although this material emerged from the Church of England, it has also been used in several other denominations. *The Healthy Churches' Handbook* is not restricted in its relevance to the Church of England. It has certainly proved of value and is fully accessible to Baptist, Methodist and URC churches. It has also been used in chaplaincy situations in Europe and in several dioceses in Australia.

## **An accompanied journey**

Though the itinerant ministry is often a lonely one, this has been anything but a journey on my own. So many have been a support, stimulus and challenge on the way, as well as those from whom I have learned much during these years.

Dr Janet Hodgson has been especially crucial in keeping me on the straight and narrow. Or is it getting me off it? It was she who got us both into the *Healthy Churches* material, quite unintentionally, as the reader will discover. She has been with me on the whole journey, working on the initial marks, writing it up in the *Springboard* Resource Paper, *Growing Healthy Churches*, presenting the material, particularly in the Coventry and (early part of the engagement with) the Rochester Dioceses. Since she retired to her homeland of South Africa we have continued to correspond and she has been a marvellous 'critical friend', reliving her academic past by marking my frequent texts. In a very real sense this material is ours rather than just mine, though I accept full responsibility for what follows.

More recently, the Revd Alison White (who happened to be Janet's predecessor as Adviser in Local Mission in the Durham Diocese) has shared with me in presenting, shaping and refining, the material now being offered to the wider Church. Alison has been a wonderful colleague, able to pick up and run with material that was already well formed. Part of what I think I have to offer, because of my particular temperament and personality, is seeing patterns that can give churches 'a track to run on'. Alison's gift, and mission, has been to deconstruct all patterns and structures and to open up me, and the material, to as much messiness as she could smuggle in! It has helped in large measure, I hope, to avoid what follows being over-tidy, restrictive, or too narrowly programmatic. There is certainly no desire or intention to try to conform every church to a single expression. My sincere hope is that *The Healthy Churches' Handbook* will open up, rather than close down, options and possibilities.

The Revd Canon Mavis Wilson, now Rector of Frimley, but previously one of the longest serving Diocesan Missioners (in her case, in the Guildford Diocese) has also been of enormous help to me in developing this material. She has been 'facilitator-in-chief' and run a number of training sessions for those involved in various ways in helping churches to do the Church Profile Exercise and to develop plans to enrich the health of the church. I came as a novice to the work of facilitation and owe Mavis an enormous amount for teaching me at least the rudiments of that discipline. How much easier it is to tell others what to think and do rather than help them work that out for themselves!

There are so many others who have helped on the way. The Revd Paul Simmonds did sterling work in enabling the material to be used for the first time in a whole diocese (Coventry). He would not let us rest until engaging with children and young people was firmly part of the material.

The Revd Canon Michael Howard and the Revd Carol Kitchener from the Rochester Diocese have been brilliant at taking our material and integrating



it into the mission agenda, and beyond, of the whole diocese. They also edited a fine series of home studies on the material for the *Church of England Newspaper* during Lent 2003. Alison and I, who have worked with them the most, have been so impressed, and instructed, by the way they have taken, developed, and 'translated' the material and then done a masterly job of finding, training, deploying and supporting facilitators of healthy churches. They really have grasped the long-term nature of this process and helped to draw something like 70 per cent of the churches in the diocese to engage in some measure with the material.

The Revd John Gooding, Parish Development Officer in the Guildford Diocese, has probably done more work with local churches using both *Building Missionary Congregations* and *Growing Healthy Churches*, than anyone else in the country (certainly more than me). I have greatly valued his quiet, perceptive and practical observations, as well as his consistent encouragement to press on.

Both Bishop Colin Bennetts of Coventry and Bishop Graham Dow of Carlisle have, by inviting me and others to work with the whole of their respective dioceses, enabled us to test the material with hundreds of churches in quite different settings. It has resulted in learning much and gaining insight from many, with whom it has been a privilege to work.

At the heart of this whole project has been the conviction and prayer that the Church of Jesus Christ might be just that: a church that gives expression to the life of Christ in all that it is and does. This is the prayer and vision that have sustained and undergirded all that has been done. This book is offered with the same prayerful desire of the apostle Paul when he expressed his vision for the Church as leading to the time when:

*... all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.<sup>3</sup>*

May God in his goodness use this book to assist in that holy journey of the Church which, by his Spirit, he has brought into being.



Part 1:  
Exploring the marks  
of healthy churches



## Chapter 1

# Discovering healthy churches

The processes outlined in this book for strengthening the vitality of a church did not happen by design or as the result of some splendid theory. They have grown out of what was planned as a single day event in one diocese. The story of that day and what resulted from it is worth recounting.

In 1996, the observant Adviser in Local Mission, Dr Janet Hodgson, had been looking through the attendance figures for the diocese from 1990 to 1995. She noted two highly contrasting figures. Overall, the Sunday attendance figures for the diocese showed a 16 per cent decline in these five years, hardly a sign of health in the first half of the Decade of Evangelism.

Yet more striking was another figure. Of the 260 churches in the diocese, *25 had grown by over 16 per cent during the same period.* So these churches had 'bucked the trend' by a remarkable 32 per cent divergence from the overall picture. A further group of churches had grown by between 1 per cent and 15 per cent, but it was decided to focus on those that had mirrored the overall decline by their growth. This was both because 25 churches were quite enough to be working with and also because 16 per cent was a big enough figure to ensure that we were not dealing with statistical error rather than church growth.

Not surprisingly, Dr Janet Hodgson started to ask 'why'? Some of the more common explanations just did not fit. Were they all the larger churches? Were they all charismatic/evangelical 'church growth enthusiasts'? Were they all the comfortable middle-class churches in the leafy suburbs? Were they Urban Priority Area (UPA) parishes generously funded by the Church Urban Fund? Were they all churches led by the youngest, most visionary, enthusiastic and able clergy? The answer was 'no' in every case.

The most obvious thing about these churches was their sheer variety. Between them they represented 15 of the 16 deaneries in the diocese. They represented all social settings: urban, suburban, inner city, rural, ex-mining communities. Every social setting in the diocese was represented by at least one of these churches. A full range of church traditions was represented with no one tradition having an unusually large contingent. All church sizes were equally represented.

These churches were being led by a good cross section of clergy. The whole age spread was represented by the clergy present. As far as could be judged, a wide range of personality types and leadership styles was

represented too. There were enthusiasts and more reflective types. Some were very clear and confident of their faith whilst others were of a quieter and more questioning disposition.

Even before the day took place, this striking range of types and settings of churches and their leadership was seen as seriously good news. No context, no size of church, no church tradition, no leadership style seemed closed to the possibility of significant growth. So what was the secret of their varied stories? It was hoped that a day spent with them would begin to unlock some answers to that intriguing question.

## **Making sense of what was heard**

One hundred people from these 25 churches came to the day. It was a most stimulating and energizing experience for all concerned, which left a mass of anecdotes, impressions, facts and feelings to assimilate.

One of the first things that stood out was that none of the churches seemed to have been majoring on being *growing* churches. Numbers were not a big issue for them. Much more typical was the sense that these churches were seeking to 'be the church better'. What they were doing was taking their faith seriously and seeking to be church to the very best of their ability. So describing them as growing churches did not capture the essence of their story. Their attention was on quality rather than quantity. This is why *healthy* seemed a truer description of what was going on than *growing*. Indeed, some had to be persuaded that they were growing and should come to the day. So none of them were making growth in numbers attending church a major part of their strategy. The growth had much more to do with the principle of nature that growth is one of the more obvious signs of a healthy organism.

The churches in this initial day had been invited simply because their numbers had increased. The reason for that was that it is the most accessible way to identify good things going on in a church. In fact, they had identified themselves simply as a result of someone looking at the diocesan attendance figures. Finding out how far a church is healthy is a much more difficult and complex matter. Indeed, this whole book is devoted to that process.

## **Defining terms**

The words 'growing' and 'healthy' have already been used in relation to churches, so it is good to define what is meant by those terms.

The normal understanding of the words 'grow' and 'growth' in connection with the life of the church is in terms of numerical growth. However, in the phrase *growing healthy churches*, 'growing' describes our task of nurturing the life of the church as in growing a healthy rose bush.

When it comes to the use of the words 'health' and 'healthy', we must recognize that we live in a culture that has an unhealthy attitude to health. Our culture sees health as a right that should be ours. It is thought of in terms of freedom from pain and – often – freedom from the ageing process. So to be healthy is thought to be synonymous with being fit, good looking, young and fully in control of our mental faculties. But is that a healthy view of health?

The particular way in which health is understood throughout this book is as a translation of the biblical concept of salvation, namely wholeness, balance and harmony with God and all creation. Christ frequently said to people whom he healed, 'your faith has saved you'. This is variously translated 'made you well', 'made you whole'. So a healthy church is one that has been touched and energized by the presence of God so it reflects something of the good news of the wholeness made possible through the knowledge of God as revealed in Christ, by the Holy Spirit.

### ***Marks or activities?***

When it came to expressing the insights gained from the churches involved in this day it was clear that a choice had to be made. In *Natural Church Development*<sup>1</sup> the approach is to describe roles and activities such as *empowering leadership* and *inspiring worship services*.

It was decided not to follow this approach, for two reasons. First, it did not do justice to what we were seeing, which was more about an attitude or a value rather than primarily about particular activities. Second, it was judged important, because of the sheer diversity of the ways that these churches expressed their life, not to suggest that particular activities were necessarily the key.

One of the clearest illustrations of this point concerned small groups. Most of the churches whose story we heard did have small groups that played an important part in their growth. But not all had such groups. In any case, there was something more important underlying those groups. These churches operated as a community with an openness in personal relationships that took the church well beyond operating simply as organization. Our observation was that these churches were loving communities that usually found small groups a helpful way of giving expression to that. The goal, however, was to be a loving community.

Small groups were simply one of the most usual ways of giving expression to that goal.

All of this resulted in the marks of a healthy church being formulated in terms of goals, characteristics, values and aspirations, rather than activities.

This is also valuable in view of the emerging new ways of being church. It was thought important not to constrain churches into any particular organizational shape. So, for example, some new ways of expressing the life of a church may have worship built into how they operate rather than as an activity as such. Thinking in terms of values and goals means that a growing variety of expressions of church life can all connect with these marks.

## **Establishing common characteristics**

The initial Durham day had been conceived as a one-off. Having done it, and seen so many striking overlaps in the emphasis of widely different churches, it became clear that a list of common themes would be worth producing. Over the years they have evolved a little and been sharpened up but are essentially the same as originally seen. That evolution is due to a similar exercise having been repeated in four other dioceses.

Those repeated themes, now called 'marks', can be summarized as follows.

*Energized by faith* seems to be a foundational characteristic. At the heart of these churches and their members is a reality about their awareness of the presence, goodness and love of God. Faith is the fuel on which these churches run.

*Outward-looking focus.* These churches were typified not by concentrating on their own life and concerns but by a practical care for the local context, the whole of life and the world in which we live. They are marked by a capacity to enjoy life and feel the pain of the struggles in our world.

*Seeks to find out what God wants.* There is a sharpness of focus and seriousness of purpose about such churches, which are carried forward by a sense of divine vocation rather than stuck in a dull repetition of past assumptions and patterns. Prayerfully they are on the move.

*Faces the cost of change and growth.* Individuals and groups are regularly faced with hard choices and testing circumstances. These churches evidenced the courage to face hard and painful truths and to be prepared to make real changes that were often costly.



*Operates as a community.* It is not just faith in God that sustains these churches but the reality and strength of generous and honest relationships that makes church 'family' for all who participate and draws out each person's gifts and contribution.

*Makes room for all.* Though they greatly value what they have, not least in their support of one another, these churches have found ways of making others not just welcome at services but part of the life of the church. Generosity permeates the life of these churches.

*Does a few things and does them well.* One of the most surprising characteristics of these churches, which results from a sense of responding to God's call on their time and effort, is the quiet purposefulness of their life. They are not rushing around madly but enjoying what they do and seeing the positive results of doing a quality job.

## **The journey on**

Once having established the marks it was then possible to develop ways for other churches to use them to reflect on their own church life. A grid was produced that enabled each person to 'score' their church and so develop a corporate profile.

How this can be used is explained later, but first it is necessary to explore these marks in greater detail. That now follows in the next three chapters.

# Appendix 1

## Church Scores Sheet

circle the number you consider most appropriate

1. *energized by faith*  
rather than just keeping things going or trying to survive

low      1      2      3      4      5      6      high

2. *outward-looking focus*  
with a 'whole life' rather than 'church life' concern

low      1      2      3      4      5      6      high

3. *seeks to find out what God wants*  
discerning the Spirit's leading rather than trying to please everyone

low      1      2      3      4      5      6      high

4. *faces the cost of change and growth*  
rather than resisting change and fearing failure

low      1      2      3      4      5      6      high

5. *operates as a community*  
rather than functioning as a club or religious organization

low      1      2      3      4      5      6      high

6. *makes room for all*  
being inclusive rather than exclusive

low      1      2      3      4      5      6      high

7. *does a few things and does them well*  
focused rather than frenetic

low      1      2      3      4      5      6      high

# Scoring Guide

## Scoring Guide

Circle the number that best describes what *you* see is happening in your church

1. weak and holding us back
2. only a few signs
3. some evidence of this
4. making progress
5. evidence of much of this
6. this is a strength

Appendix 3

# Church Profile Sheet

<i>Mark</i>	<b>1 low</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6 high</b>	<b>Total</b>
1. Energized by faith							
2. Outward-looking focus							
3. Seeks to find out what God wants							
4. Faces the cost of change and growth							
5. Operates as a community							
6. Makes room for all							
7. Does a few things and does them well							

## Appendix 4

# Seven Marks Summary Sheet

### Mark 1: energized by faith

*rather than just keeping things going or trying to survive*

- *worship and sacramental life*: move people to experience God's love
- *motivation*: energy comes from a desire to serve God and one another
- *engages with Scripture*: in creative ways that connect with life
- *nurtures faith in Christ*: helping people to grow in, and share, their faith.

### Mark 2: outward-looking focus

*with a 'whole life' rather than a 'church life' concern*

- deeply rooted in the *local community*, working in partnership with other denominations, faiths, secular groups and networks
- passionate and prophetic about *justice and peace*, locally and globally
- makes connections between *faith and daily living*
- responds to human need by *loving service*.

### Mark 3: seeks to find out what God wants

*discerning the Spirit's leading rather than trying to please everyone*

- *vocation*: seeks to explore what God wants it to be and do
- *vision*: develops and communicates a shared sense of where it is going
- *mission priorities*: consciously sets both immediate and long-term goals
- able to call for, and make, *sacrifices*, personal and corporate, in bringing about the above and living out the faith.

### Mark 4: faces the cost of change and growth

*rather than resisting change and fearing failure*

- while embracing the past, it dares to take on *new ways of doing things*

- *takes risks*: admits when things are not working, and learns from experience
- *crises*: responds creatively to challenges that face the church and community
- *positive experiences of change*: however small, are affirmed and built on.

## **Mark 5: operates as a community**

*rather than functioning as a club or religious organization*

- *relationships*: are nurtured, often in small groups, so that people feel accepted and are helped to grow in faith and service
- *leadership*: lay and ordained work as a team to develop locally appropriate expressions of all seven marks of a healthy church
- *lay ministry*: the different gifts, experiences and faith journeys of all are valued and given expression in and beyond the life of the church.

## **Mark 6: makes room for all**

*being inclusive rather than exclusive*

- *welcome*: works to include newcomers into the life of the church
- *children and young people*: are helped to belong, contribute and be nurtured in their faith
- *enquirers* are encouraged to explore and experience faith in Christ
- *diversities*: different social and ethnic backgrounds, mental and physical abilities, and ages, are seen as a strength.

## **Mark 7: does a few things and does them well**

*focused rather than frenetic*

- *does the basics well*: especially public worship, pastoral care, stewardship and administration
- *occasional offices*: make sense of life and communicate faith
- *being good news* as a church in its attitudes and ways of working
- *enjoys what it does* and is relaxed about what is not being done.

# Appendix 5

## Action Lists

1. *energized by faith*

what needs working on.....  
.....

2. *outward-looking focus*

what needs working on.....  
.....

3. *seeks to find out what God wants*

what needs working on.....  
.....

4. *faces the cost of change and growth*

what needs working on.....  
.....

5. *operates as a community*

what needs working on.....  
.....

6. *makes room for all*

what needs working on.....  
.....

7. *does a few things and does them well*

what needs working on.....  
.....

Appendix 6

# Naming the Angel of the Church

The colour of our church is (church *life*, not *building*)  
.....  
because .....  
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.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Our church building says  
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The local context/culture can best be described as (e.g. *fragmented, comfortable, friendly, frantic ...*)  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

The history of this church is a story of .....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



What we are trying to do here is

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The clergy/lay relationship can best be described as

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What is missing in this church is

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The best thing about this church is

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The angel or personality of this church can best be described in terms of

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