



The Church of England  
in Essex and East London  
Diocese of Chelmsford

## Serving with Accountability

The 'Transforming Presence' vision makes spirituality and evangelism two clear priorities in the life of the church, along with the need to re-imagine ministry. However there needs to be some means whereby this is joined together. How do we *serve with accountability*?

Is there a set of ingredients that constitute a faithful healthy Christian community? Is there a set of ministries and activities that we should expect to find in every Christian community, whatever its context and circumstance, and about which we should hold ourselves accountable? And in what ways can Archdeacons help the parishes to develop the mission and ministry of the local church?

In Acts 2:42–47, we read

*“They met constantly to hear the apostles teach, and to share the common life, to break bread and to pray. A sense of awe was everywhere, and many marvels and signs were brought about through the apostles. All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common: they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution as the need of each required. With one mind they kept up their daily attendance at the temple, and, breaking bread in private houses, shared their meals with unaffected joy, as they praised God and enjoyed the favour of the whole people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those whom he was saving.”*

This is a community which is faithful to Christ. It is a community that is growing as the Lord adds more people to its number. It is a life of clarity, integrity and mutual accountability. The apostles' teaching, fellowship with each other, their life of prayer and breaking bread together constitute and characterise the life they have in Christ.

From Transforming Presence the following questions are raised, which form the criteria for each church being seen to be a part of the whole Body of Christ:

1. **Worship**

What are you doing to make worship the central focus of the life of the Church?

2. **Spirituality**

What are you doing to teach people to pray?

3. **Nurture**

What are you doing to teach people the faith and help them in their discipleship?

4. **Evangelism**

What are you doing to share faith with others and what have the results been in the past year? Does your Church have a place of nurture?

5. **Vocation**

What are you doing to nurture and develop the ministry of the whole people of God including enabling people to come forward for authorised lay and ordained ministry?

6. **Service**

How is your Church a blessing to the community you serve?  
And how is it witnessing to God's kingdom of justice and peace?

7. **Hospitality**

What are you doing to ensure that your church is a place of safety and welcome for all ages and for people of all backgrounds?

8. **Interdependence**

How are you working in partnership with other Christian communities in your locality and at diocesan, national and global levels?

9. **Generosity**

What are you doing to ensure that your Church is showing signs of generosity towards the wider church and community as well as becoming financially secure?

All of these criteria can be discerned from the New Testament and most can be identified in the Acts 2:42-47 passage already referred to. Further texts to consider could include: John 4:24; the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7); Ephesians 4:11-16; Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 12; Luke 6.38 and I Corinthians 16:1-3.

Just as worship is expressed in a huge variety of ways, so these ministries will also be expressed differently according to the circumstances, context, personality and ethos of each community – and we certainly don't want to develop a tick box exercise or some form of ecclesiastical OFSTED! However, some form of self- evaluation, taking into account the particular circumstances of each parish, seems an appropriate way in which a church can remain accountable to those it serves. The hope is that the exercise will work both ways – with parishes also holding Archdeacons accountable in the way we can offer help and support.

For the 2015 Articles of Enquiry, we have sent a much shorter set of questions that simply pick up on the basic information that Churchwardens must provide, together with the audited accounts.

Instead of the usual second set of questions that ask about the broader issues concerning, for instance, mission and evangelism, safeguarding, and schools, etc., we would like each PCC to respond to the set of questions based on the nine criteria listed above. This is not for the Churchwardens to complete on their own but for a discussion with the PCC and ministry team, if not the whole congregation. It could even form part of the agenda at the APCM.

Notes from these discussions should then be passed on to your Archdeacon who, together with the Area Dean and Lay Chair, may work with the individual churches in order to address any issues raised and to encourage further thinking on how best we can live out the gospel. Of course, it may well be that your parish has already undertaken a similar exercise, in which case please feel free to attach any relevant notes in addition.

In future, we hope there will be a review of the previous year's response by the church concerned in order that progress can be celebrated and new challenges identified.

An in-depth analysis and response to each of the nine questions would obviously be a major task, and it is not intended that PCCs should cover all nine. It has often been said that we should play to our strengths, and it may well be that the PCC wishes to look at the two or three areas where the church is doing well and see how things can be developed further. On the other hand, in some situations, looking at weaknesses can be a more urgent priority. If you have a broken leg, it's no use carrying on using only the stronger one - you really do need to attend to the injury! In some cases, a PCC may identify particular weaknesses in the church that are felt to be a significant hindrance and that need to be addressed before the 'strengths' can be used to full effect.

Whichever way the PCC chooses to address the questions, we do not expect the church to try to tackle all nine areas at the same time.

Our hope is that each PCC will...

- Have a wide discussion about the general health of the church.
- Identify where you think things are working well and where there are any weaknesses.
- Agree which of these areas you want to address over the coming year (only two or three at most).
- Draw up plans that will help you achieve this, including the possibility of asking for help from outside the parish.
- Let the Archdeacon have notes/minutes from these discussions, as well as any comments you have regarding the whole process outlined above – *before the 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2015.*

We've not done this before, and recognise that you may have some good suggestions for improving what we're trying to achieve - we are keen to develop the process in a way that helps rather than adds to your burdens.

The Ven. Elwin Cockett - Archdeacon of West Ham  
The Ven. Annette Cooper - Archdeacon of Colchester  
The Ven. Robin King - Archdeacon of Stansted  
The Ven. David Lowman - Archdeacon of Chelmsford  
The Ven. Dr John Perumbalath - Archdeacon of Barking  
The Ven. Mina Smallman - Archdeacon of Southend  
The Ven. Martin Webster - Archdeacon of Harlow