

From Evidence to Action: One Year On

By the staff of the Resource Strategy & Development Unit

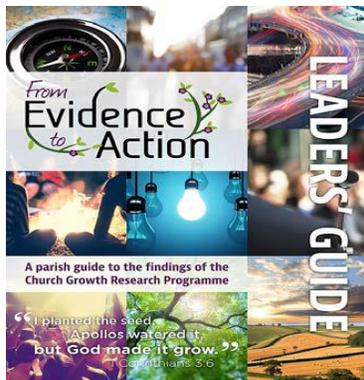
Church Growth – From Evidence to Action

February 2015 saw the launch of From Evidence to Action, a toolkit to help parishes reflect on the findings of the Church Growth Research Programme, published in January 2014 in the summary report *From Anecdote to Evidence*. Since then over 4,000 toolkits have been distributed in response to requests from parishes and diocesan teams (with more copies downloaded from the website). This note re-caps the tool kit's key features and gives examples of how dioceses and parishes have used it.

What does the toolkit aim to do?

The toolkit provides churches and church leaders with accessible summaries of the key research findings and tools to help reflect and act upon those findings. It includes resources and materials to help prompt those seeking to make new disciples of Jesus Christ to consider the factors linked to numerical growth and how they can be applied in their own contexts. It does not claim to provide easy answers, but aids reflection. It is designed to complement other planning tools such as 'Mission Action Planning.'

What does it contain?



The core materials of the toolkit are available in printed form.

They include:

- A guide book for leaders (lay or ordained) explaining ways to use the toolkit.
- Worksheets structured around the key factors linked to growing churches.

These core materials are also available at www.fromevidencetaction.org which also contains the following additional resources which form part of the toolkit:

- Sermon plans and audio files of sermons on church growth and the research findings.
- Bible studies for groups to use alongside the worksheets.
- Case studies of churches in different contexts.
- Less structured worksheets for groups who prefer more flexibility
- Interactive exercises

- Slide presentations and graphs – containing the key findings and figures from the Church Growth Research Programme
- Links to *From Anecdote to Evidence* and the full research reports.
- Suggestions of (and links to) resources to inform and help parishes in applying different aspects of the findings to their own contexts.
- A chance to contribute to the on-going conversation about church growth.

How are the materials structured?

The website and worksheets are structured around eight common factors associated with growth. The research suggested that a growing church is likely to:

- have a clear mission and purpose and clergy and congregations who are intentional about growth;
- understand its context, actively engage with it and with those who might not currently go to church;
- be willing to self-reflect, change and adapt according to its context;
- be welcoming and build on-going relationships with people;
- have lay people as well as ordained clergy active in leadership and other roles;
- actively engage children and young people;
- nurture disciples (encouraging people to explore and deepen their faith and live it out in their daily lives).



How can the toolkit be used?

The toolkit is designed for use by leadership teams, small groups or PCCs. These working materials encourage churches and leaders to:

- **Review** where they are currently;
- **Choose** priorities based on where they would like to be;
- **Plan** what needs to be done next;
- **Act** on those priorities (setting a date when action will be complete and a date to review again).

Each worksheet presents a factor linked with growth and a few key facts from the research relating to that factor. Questions and conversation starters are then suggested to stimulate discussions and provide a framework for prayerful consideration and planning.

Groups can work through all the worksheets one by one or focus on those which are particularly relevant to their context.

Some examples of how the toolkit has been used

Guildford diocese's Parish Development and Evangelism Team, led by the Revd Alan Hulme, has been encouraging parishes to make use of the toolkit. Alan and his team promoted the toolkit (and the wider range of services that his team offers) through a series of roadshows in different parts of the diocese. A number of parishes have been using the toolkit with their PCC's.

Whilst it is too early to measure the toolkit's impact, Alan comments that *'it has been a very helpful tool in focusing parishes on the right issues'*. His team has encouraged parishes to use the toolkit in two ways:

- As a 'tow in the water', an easy way for parishes to begin the process of prayerful strategic planning. This can then lead on to a more full scale vision development process.
- Parishes that are specifically working on their Mission Action Plans on issues relating to those on the cards are encouraged to use the cards for PCC discussion.

The Guildford team are also working on extensions to the tool kit to provide more resources on prayer and to develop the material on working with children and young people. The tool has encouraged parishes to ask Alan's consultancy team for help.

Peterborough diocese are also planning to promote the toolkit as part of a series of roadshows that they are running. The Revd Canon Miles Baker, Director of Mission, describes the tool as *'a wonderful resource for PCCs and Church Leaders...helping us to maintain focus on mission and church growth'*. A section on the toolkit has been included on the diocesan website¹.

¹ www.peterborough-diocese.org.uk/mission-shaped-ministry/mission-shaped-ministry

The Priest-in-Charge of Christ Church, Northampton (and Area Dean for Northampton) Canon David Wiseman says that Miles Baker had worked with the PCC on one of the themes in the toolkit: being willing to change and adapt. After the initial meeting focusing on that theme they decided to focus on a different theme at each PCC meeting. At the next meeting, they tackled the theme of creating a welcoming culture. Canon Wiseman commented that *'a few weeks later we had a visit from a Mystery Worshipper writing on the Ship of Fools website and we had put in place one or two ideas from that meeting...the good thing is that [From Evidence to Action] is keeping growth on the PCC agenda. It allows us to take small steps without feeling overwhelmed and it offers the opportunity to review what we have achieved'*.

Another parish exploring the usefulness of the tool is St Luke's, Prittlewell, near Southend in Chelmsford diocese. The parish priest, Fr James McCluskey, says: *'personally I think the report is one of the best aids to action towards Church growth for many years...the strategy is proving a blessing with regards to actively engaging children and young people. We are, it seems, experiencing a growth in attendance of families/single parents bringing their children to church on Sundays. Average attendance of children aged under 16 has gone from 10 to 20-25 per week. This is because we have done some work on self-reflect, change and adapt according to the context of our Anglo-Catholic tradition.'*

We welcome feedback from parishes who have used this tool and additional relevant resources to expand the toolkit. Please contact Isabel.White@churchofengland.org

Finding out more

Copies of From Evidence to Action, a parish guide to the findings of the Church Growth Research Programme, can be obtained from Isabel.White@churchofengland.org

The guidebook and the wider resources can be downloaded from www.fromevidencetoaction.org.uk

The popular summary of the findings from the Church Growth Research Programme – From Anecdote to Evidence www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report

The full research reports are available at www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/progress_findings_reports