



Vision Guidance

Discussion guidelines to help clarify a parish vision

A transforming vision

Having a clear vision for your church's mission and ministry is at the heart of generosity. It creates a firm foundation for allocating resources and inspiring the parish. Vision can transform the parish and the community, and gives a common purpose for which to work and pray.

The challenge for any church is to follow its heart and to be motivated by its sense of mission, rather than the need for money. A clear sense of why your church exists, who and what is it for, and the reasons which lie behind what you do will all help you to work out your vision. Meaningful consideration of the reason, purpose and action behind your vision will help parishioners to link their giving with their faith, play their part and make a difference in sustaining and developing on-going ministry.

Pray

Prayer is central to the vision process. Don't simply make plans for the future of the church and ask God to bless them – but seek His plans and commit to working alongside him. Every step should focus on prayer as the Lord guides and leads. Psalm 127v1 'Unless the lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.'

Take action

Follow the steps in the illustration below to guide your actions. The advice on the following pages will help to guide you through the cycle.



DESIRE: Do we want to join in with God's plans?

Do you want your church to engage effectively in discipleship, mission, growing leaders, and community engagement? Do you want to move away from simply surviving to making a difference and seeing God's Kingdom grow in your church and your community?

If the answer is YES, then continue working through the cycle by taking the next step, below.



REVIEW: Where are we now?

It's important to start from where you are, and ask the right questions.

(1) Purpose and Values:

Ask 'Why does your church exist'? Does it have a clear sense of purpose? [it's always been here.....to share God's love.....to offer support / shelter.....to hold Sunday worship.....to make a difference.....]

What are the core values of your parish? [Caring... welcoming.....loving.....inclusive.....]

It may be useful to write a vision statement that represents your parish and is at the heart of everything you believe. Examples: "*Parish Church Name* is a welcoming Christian Community helping more people to experience and to express the reconciling love of God." / "To know Jesus and make him known." / "Reach, Build, Send."

(2) Undertake a simple SWOT Analysis

- Determine 'Strengths', 'Weaknesses', 'Opportunities', and 'Threats'?
- What is your church really good at and passionate about?
- What resources do you have? Volunteers, finances, leaders, skills?
- What are particular challenges for your church?

A SWOT analysis template is available at www.ireland.anglican.org/parish-resources.

Having a clear and shared sense of why your church exists is vital. When you know what your purpose is, then you can use your strengths, work on your weaknesses, understand the things that stop you from making a difference, and use the opportunities available to plan for the future.

When you understand what you are about, then you can move to discern where God is calling you to go.



DISCERN: Where does God want us to be?

It's important to discern what direction God is leading your church. One of the challenges is how best to combine the discernment by the leadership with the views and contributions of the wider church family and the local community.

(1) Vision

- What do you believe God is calling you to do?
- Does this fit in with the purpose of your church?
- Where do you see the church in 5 years' time? Dream some dreams. What would it look like?

- What would you like your church to have achieved in 1 years' time? Plan small steps; it's important that the plans are realistic, achievable and focused.

A parish survey or a parish away day is a great way of including parishioners in this process. Both help to discover parish priorities, and makes parishioners feel valued, that they belong and are listened to. It also means that the church is moving forward with a common purpose.

(2) Community Audit / Survey

- Will your vision make an impact on the local community, and is it what they need?
- Is anyone else providing this impact?

It may be beneficial for your parish to carry out a community survey / audit to find out about the needs of the community. It could include a simple door-to-door questionnaire, speaking to key community leaders, looking at what other organisations are doing to meet community needs (don't duplicate), and having a look at statistics for the local area (such as age profile, income levels, areas of deprivation etc).

(3) Priorities

Looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the parish, the purpose of the church and the needs of both the church and the local community, the priorities for the future of your ministry should be clearer. What are the things that you want to stop doing? What are the things you want to continue doing? What are the things that you want to start doing?

Set 2 or 3 strategic ministry goals – this is the end result, what you want to work towards, create, achieve, or bring to fruition, and start to plan some specific actions to achieve these goals.



PLAN: How will we achieve these goals?

Now you have prioritised 2 or 3 specific mission and ministry goals, it's time to look at how these can be achieved.

(1) Set key actions for each goal:

Flesh out your priorities and set a key action for each goal.

For example, if the goal is to increase the number of volunteers, then the action could be to run a Network Course (e.g. helping people to discern their spiritual gifts).

Then clearly define what resources are needed for each action, i.e. the What, the Who and the When, as illustrated by the examples in the table below:

Action	What	Who & by When
Run a Network Course	1. Purchase materials	Rector, by Jun.
	2. Identify and train leaders	Rector, by Oct.
	3. Publicise the course	Course support team, by Nov.
	4. Deliver the course	[TBC], by Dec.

It may be helpful to use 'SMART' objectives when setting your goals. Use the following diagram to guide your goal-setting.

'SMART' Objectives:

- S** • **Specific**; use clear language to define the goal. Set out who is involved, what will be done, where, how and why it will be done, constraints, requirements and reason
- M** • **Measurable**; work out how to track progress and measure the outcome; how will you know when the goal is accomplished?
- A** • **Achievable**; is the goal realistic? Do you have the appropriate resources (knowledge, skills, time) to make it happen? It may stretch and challenge but must be attainable.
- R** • **Relevant**; is the goal worthwhile and will it meet your needs? Is each goal consistent with any others set, and does it fit with immediate and long term plans?
- T** • **Timely**; include an overall time limit and a time frame for each step within the goal to help with time management and to ensure you keep making progress.

What are the financial implications and how can you meet these?

This may require you to set some financial goals, such as increasing the planned, sustained giving in your parish, and running some specific fundraising events.

Resources such as The Generous Giving Programme, Parish Giving Profile, and Simple Parish Budget can be found at www.ireland.anglican.org/parish-resources.

(2) Promotion and Communication:

A clear vision is what will encourage people to resource what you want to do, and helps you source the skills and potential support that you need by helping people decide where they can best contribute and make a difference. Be transparent in what you want to do and what finances are needed. Promote your vision for support – the discussion phase is complete.



ACT: Just do it!

Do it and keep going! Just do something! Very few people support and idea! It needs to be put into practice. Take a risk and trust God. Work in partnership with him, believing that he will continue to resource his church. Keep Vision-Focused and not problem-shaped (as there may be obstacles ahead), and continue to cover the process in prayer.

“For I know the plans I have for you”, declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11

Recommendation: Consider using the ‘Vision Checklist’ to keep you on track. It is available at www.ireland.anglican.org/parish-resources

CELEBRATE: Rejoice in what God has done among us!

Remember to always give thanks – thanks to God for beginning to bring his vision to fruition, and thanks to all those who are involved, supporting, and encouraging this important work. This is just the beginning and may not always be easy. Be vision-led and not problem-led. The process will require regular review of progress, on-going evaluation but keep listening to God’s voice and direction, and celebrate what He is doing!