

Session 1: Healthy Churches – Leaders' Notes

Resources:

For this session you will need enough printed copies of the course members' materials for everyone in your group (it's worth printing of a couple of spare sets), the Vision 2026 Study Course DVD, a DVD player, TV and pens. You may wish to use music during the prayer reflection at the end of the session so you will need some means of playing music (CD and CD player, MP3 player or similar)

Session Outline:

Welcome
Opening Worship and Prayer including Vision Prayer
Getting Started
Bible Passage
DVD Teaching Input
Garden Exercise
Healthy Church Survey and discussion
Our Priorities
Prayer Reflection
Take it Away Material

Welcome: (4 minutes)



Welcome people to the group and thank them for coming on the course. Encourage people to participate in the way that is most helpful for them; explain that it's okay to contribute to discussions or to listen to the thoughts of others. The course is designed to help stimulate ideas and to help the local church come up with some practical ideas. These ideas will help the local church contribute to Vision 2026 – "Healthy Churches Transforming Communities". As people come up with ideas and suggestions, encourage them to write these down on their handouts. If you find a number of people making a similar suggestion it would be very helpful to pass these ideas on to the Church leadership, PCC and parish priest. Explain that the course is a mixture of group work, discussion, Bible study, input from a short DVD and time for reflection. The session is timed to last between 75-90 minutes. There is a suggested take away activity at the end of the session for people to continue to reflect on the theme of the session.

Opening Worship and Vision Prayer: (3 minutes)



Begin the course in prayer and join together in praying the Diocesan Vision Prayer together.
Heavenly Father,
we embrace Your call for us to make disciples,
to be witnesses and to grow leaders.
Give us the eyes to see Your vision,
ears to hear the prompting of Your Spirit
and courage to follow in the footsteps of Your Son,
our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Getting Started: (5 minutes)



Use the following introduction:

'Health and wellbeing are a focus to modern life; for example eating 5-a-day, exercise, low fat, low salt, stopping smoking and losing weight.'

Then invite people to share their thoughts on the following questions in twos or threes.

- Give an example of someone you would regard as healthy. Why did you choose this person?

- If you were able to make one change to your life to be healthier what would it be?

Bible Passage: Acts 2:42-47 (10 minutes)



Invite someone in the group to read the Bible passage. It's a good idea to choose the person before the session starts so that people who are nervous about reading aloud don't worry that they are going to be asked to read in front of others.

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

As you study the Bible passage you can choose one of two options for exploring the passage further.

Option 1.

Which aspects of this passage encourage you, challenge you, inspire you or confuse you?

Which aspect of the life of the early church would you most like to see developed in the life of your own church?

Option 2

Acts tells the story of how the Gospel of Jesus Christ spread from Jerusalem to Rome. At several key points, and here particularly, the author wants his readers to see what underpins this extraordinary growth of the church in these early years.

1. Acts 2:42 indicates four priorities in the life of the early church. Why did the first Christians focus their devotion and priorities on these four areas?
2. From the text, what was the result of this level of devotion?
3. What are the lessons for a church that wants to be healthy and grow?

DVD Teaching Input: (8 minutes)



Play session 1 Healthy Churches from the DVD

DVD Presenters: Bishop Julian – Bishop of Blackburn, Kat Witham – Diocesan Youth Officer

Garden Exercise: (7 minutes)



Using the picture of a garden on page five of the members' handouts, invite group members to choose a plant which best represents the health of your church?

Encourage them to share their choices in groups of three.

Healthy Church Survey: (25 minutes)



Use the following introduction to the next exercise:

A great deal of research has been done to find ways of assessing church health. These include Natural Church Development, Growing Healthy Churches, Anecdote to Evidence and Leading your Church into Growth. Our diocese has combined all this research and has identified six qualities which make a church healthy. These qualities are Worship, Vision, Strong sense of

Community, Outward looking focus, Leadership and Discipleship.

Using the healthy church survey below, score your church on a scale of A to F by putting a circle around the appropriate letter for each of the health qualities. Scoring A means being very healthy and F means being very unhealthy. Don't try to over analyse the score you give, as a 'gut impression' is often the most honest response.

Write some action points to improve your church health in the box under each of the headings.

1. Worship

A healthy church offers worship which inspires, encourages, has depth and richness, and connects with people and helps them encounter God. A church that has a deep rooted commitment to prayer which is demonstrated in every area of its life.

Score: A B C D E F

(A – very healthy F – very unhealthy)

Actions

2. Vision

A healthy church has a clear sense of purpose and direction, a current Mission Action Plan (or similar), has clear priorities and seeks to build God's Kingdom in its local communities. A church which seeks to find out what God wants and then does it!

Score: A B C D E F

(A – very healthy F – very unhealthy)

Actions

3. Leadership and Collaborative Ministry

A healthy church embraces a positive pattern of Christian leadership, promotes collaborative working and encourages all people to find opportunities to put their faith into action. A church that encourages Christian vocations and encourages people to explore God's call upon their lives.

Score: A B C D E F

(A – very healthy F – very unhealthy)

Actions

4. Active Discipleship

A healthy church actively encourages people of all ages to grow in their relationship with Jesus through prayer, bible study and other devotional activities. A church that actively encourages people of all ages to find expression for their faith in the church and the world.

Score: A B C D E F

(A – very healthy F – very unhealthy)

Actions

5. Strong sense of Community

A healthy church has a church community that is open, warm, caring and supportive, that nurtures a sense of belonging for people of all ages and backgrounds and that is open to new people joining the life of the church. A church that actively reaches out to others and has a warm and positive relationship with the communities it serves.

Score: A B C D E F

(A – very healthy F – very unhealthy)

Actions

6. Outward looking focus

A healthy church seeks to reach out to the local community and further afield with God's love and compassion. It is committed to helping people find faith and seeks to build the Kingdom of God in all situations.

Score: A B C D E F

(A – very healthy F – very unhealthy)

Actions

When you have completed the exercise, share what you have written. Work together as a group to identify two or three priorities that you can focus on to make a difference to the health of your church and which would help grow God's Kingdom in your community.

Make a list of the agreed priorities below and, as a leader of the group, make sure these are fed back to the church leadership, PCC and parish priest.

Our Priorities: (8 minutes)



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Prayer Reflection: (3 minutes)



Read the following reflection slowly, encouraging people to sit quietly and to reflect on the words as you read them. It may be helpful to play some gentle music in the background as you read.

Imagine yourself sitting in church

Think about the people who sit near you.

The friends who you meet there. (Pause)

Remember the people who helped to shape and form your own faith in Jesus - Sunday school teachers, friends, family or colleagues. (Pause)

Think of some of the ways your church serves the local community. (Pause)

Think of a worship service that you attend.

Picture some of the spaces in the pews or some of the empty chairs being filled by people who have recently joined the church. (Pause)

Imagine the church as a healthy vibrant community of faith that makes a difference to those it serves.

Picture a Healthy Church transforming your community. (Pause)

What part could you play in making this happen? (Pause)

Take it Away Material: (2 minutes)



Introduce the take away material and invite people to continue to reflect on the idea of a Healthy Church through the coming week.

Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 1 Corinthians 3:6 (ESV)

Try to memorise this verse or write it down and pin it up in places where you will see it regularly.

We all have a part to play in helping God's Church grow just like Paul and Apollos, but ultimately it is God who brings health and growth.

Each time you see a garden, or plants, repeat the verse and ask God to help your church to be a Healthy Church transforming your community.

