Toolkit 1:

TEN TOP TIPS FOR WELCOMING VISITORS TO YOUR CHURCH

This first element of the Divine Inspiration Toolkit acts as a checklist as you begin to explore the way in which your church currently welcomes its visitors. Try to revisit this at regular intervals and use it as you would a health-check to monitor the effectiveness of your welcome to those who visit your church.

The level of what you aim to achieve will depend upon your church’s significance as a heritage building or its proximity to other ‘tourist attractions’ so work out your context in relation to what’s happening around you.

Once you have measured your church’s visitor welcome you can move through the rest of the Divine Inspiration toolkit.

1. **Be Open**

   If you can’t be open all the time agree a timetable for opening up, stick to it and tell people about it. Make sure that instructions regarding key-holders are clearly displayed on your noticeboard. If key-holders are thin on the ground you might think about an automatic locking system.

2. **Be Inviting**

   Use words like ‘WELCOME TO ALL’ and ‘COME IN’, ‘EXPLORE’, ‘FEEL FREE’. Visitors need to know, before they get to the door, that they have permission to come in and that they are allowed to enjoy the space. Make the invitation using warm and unconditional and inclusive language.

3. **Be Hospitable**

   We can’t all be expected to refreshments on a regular basis but a bottle of water and a bowl in the porch for a thirsty dog is a simple, hospitable act that costs nothing. Some churches are happy to have a kettle and a tin of biscuits on a tray for visitors, especially in places where pubs and cafés are few and far between. If you have a WC, say so. If you haven’t, make sure you say where the nearest one is.

4. **Be Communicative**

   Visitors like towards notice-boards. Make sure they are up to date and well organised, showing what your church and your wider community are up to. They will be your first opportunity to connect with your visitor and make a positive first impression. Make sure you have a picture of your smiling vicar and other images of your church life to show that you are a living, healthy place for worship and fellowship and not just for Sundays.

5. **Be Clean and Tidy**

   Visitors will notice what your church smells like. A dust-free, well-presented, fragrant environment says much about you as stewards of your building. Clutter and musty aromas suggest neglect so show that your church is loved and get rid of everything that you don’t use or need.
6. **Be Accommodating**

A space reserved especially for visitors shows that you have thought of their needs. A small, folding table with flowers, information about your church and community and a visitor book inviting comments can be moved away during worship if space in your church is tight. Make sure it’s close to the door so they can’t miss it when they enter the building.

7. **Be Interesting**

Make sure that any leaflet or guide booklet you produce is easy to read, engaging and digestible in ten minutes flat. You may not be able to tell your whole church history in one sitting so be selective. Quirky stories about people and events are far more interesting than a list of the names of the last fifty vicars! Less is definitely more in terms of quantity of text. Make sure you have information available in large print also and in some ‘honey pot’ places a translated leaflet may be useful.

8. **Be Professional**

An in-house style is easy to achieve. Your notice-board, leaflets and signage should show some commonality. Use the same font, colours and themes throughout and this will allow visitors to explore with confidence. Remember, that you will need permission from the DAC if you want to fix permanent signage to walls.

9. **Be Sensitive**

Many visitors will be looking for quiet and a place for reflection. Communicate a ‘power of place’ by using good lighting and creating spaces for stillness, peace and prayer. Welcoming visitors to your church building is less about tourism and more to do with your church’s ministry to strangers. If you can, allow visitors to light a candle and make sure you have some low key, easy to digest resources for prayer or meditation on hand and free of charge.

10. **Be Memorable**

The greatest compliment to you will be a returning visitor or one who tells their friends about their experience at your church. Make sure they take away a positive memory of the time they spent with you and, as they leave, invite them to come and see you again.

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Toolkit 2:

Interpreting your Building for Visitors

Visitors to your church building will encounter you in a variety of ways and for many different reasons. They might be a regular church 'crawler' with prior knowledge of what to expect, or someone for whom church buildings are a complete mystery - they may never even have made a visit to a church building before. You can’t make assumptions about why they come - but you can be ready for them.

Having a plan to welcome those who visit you must be seen as a complementary part of your churches ministry. Welcoming them, unconditionally and ‘in absentia’ is a challenge but getting this right can make a huge difference to the way that visitors understand you and may encourage them to learn more.

Some visitors will just want to enjoy the peace and tranquillity of your church – we know that church buildings can offer a tremendous ‘power of place’ - but others will be thirsty for facts and may be looking for more information. Telling the story of your church will encourage visitors to linger a while longer and will help you to build a relationship with that visitor on a new level.

**Before you start**

Assemble a team of people who understand and enjoy your church’s heritage and who appreciate the importance of welcoming visitors to your church. You might include a member of your local history group who will be able to put the story of your church into a wider, community context. Think about the kinds of people who generally come to your church and how you currently welcome them. You might like to look at the first part of our Toolkit ‘Ten Top Tips for Welcoming Visitors to your Church’ to get you started. The next step is to look at how you interpret your history and heritage. How do you currently do this and how might it be improved? Does it look tired or out of date? Could it do with revamping or updating?

None of this should cost excessive amounts of money. It is not necessary to produce glossy, heavyweight books in order to share your story. It is very simple to produce impressive looking material on a personal computer as long as you follow some simple rules.

**Do some research**

You may already be using a booklet or guide. If so, this may have been written some time ago. You could try this out on an unsuspecting visitor to your church. Ask them what they think of it – tell them they can be as honest as they like! You might like to look at the Diocese of London’s helpful advice on writing a church history [http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/building-on-history-project/resource-guide/church-and-parish-history.htm](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/building-on-history-project/resource-guide/church-and-parish-history.htm)

**Don’t be too long-winded**

Don’t attempt to overwhelm the visitor with too much information. Depending on the size of your building and its significance you may only need a side of A4 to help visitors to navigate themselves around your church. Start by identifying ten noteworthy aspects of your church that deserve attention and concentrate on those. Mix up the historical facts with information about the Christian faith. By drawing attention to the altar you can also explain what an altar is for and what Eucharist is and how it is celebrated, for example.

You can include quirky, intriguing things as well – don’t be tempted to assume that just because something is old it’s automatically fascinating! The picture on the right here is of a leaden casket that contained an unidentified head found in a vault in the 1870s when the church was restored. This is the kind of thing that appeals particularly to small boys!
Don’t overdo the dates

Dates can be dull so don’t use them too much. Using general terms like ‘Norman’ or ‘Medieval’ or ‘post Reformation’ is better but make sure you quantify this. Using a simple time-line along the bottom of a page can help to put history into a context for those who aren’t that great at history.

Do use simple terms

Don’t assume that visitors will understand complex ecclesiastical or architectural language. Most haven’t got a clue what a ‘misericord’ was for or where to find a flying buttress. If you have to refer to things like this you need to explain the term you have used. Remember also that some visitors may not know what the font is used for or why the altar is such an important part of Christian celebration - these are things that you may be taking for granted but they need explanation for those who aren’t as churched as we are!

If your building is particularly significant in terms of its architecture or fabric, and it is the kind of place that people do visit to see something special then you will need to provide more detailed information. Having a file as a reference document can help and those who are interested can refer to that if they need more facts and figures.

Don’t be too high-brow

In terms of writing style try to imagine that you are telling a lively story rather than giving a lecture to your visitors. If your written material is boring they’ll switch off. Try to explain the church history by making connections with the social history that was taking place in your community at the time. People of all ages and abilities enjoy and relate to pictures so use good quality images to help them to interpret your building and to highlight significant features.

Showing your visitors a collection of photographs of the church in days gone by will help to demonstrate that the building has been a witness to many important, life-changing events affecting the community.

Do anticipate questions

By taking some time to be objective about your church you can anticipate some queries that visitors might have. If you have an unusual symbol carved in the stonework or stained glass with puzzling imagery be sure to explain it in simple terms. Use images if necessary where interesting objects or features like carvings are difficult to see. Having a pair of good binoculars available can help where important details deserve to be studied, high up in the roof or in a stained glass window for example.

Remember also that many people visiting churches are looking for information about Births, Marriages and Deaths and may be researching their family history. Pew plans and graveyard plans, like the one on the left, can be useful for visitors too. You may not have a transcription of your parish registers but you can identify where they are kept and advertise the address, contact details and opening times of the local records office. The Diocesan Records will also be kept here and will be a useful place to start your church history research.

Some parish records have been digitally transcribed by volunteers so make sure you know if this is the case where you are and see if you can have a hard copy inside church for visitors to refer to. If your parish is small you might think about a community project to transcribe the registers yourselves – having them available on your website is a very useful way of serving those who visit you and meeting their immediate need.
Do use a floor-plan

By using a footprint map you can help those who may not have been into a church building before to understand the lay-out and the terms we use to describe areas in our church, like the Nave or the Chancel, but keep it very simple. Don’t complicate it unnecessarily with too much text. You can use a numbering system on a floor-plan and this will encourage visitors to move around in your space and navigate rather than lurking just inside the door before leaving. Some church plans, like the one pictured here, are available in Victoria County Histories and accessible on-line, depending on the county.

It’s much easier for visitors to follow a plan like this, as they would a map, than it is to follow written directions especially in a building that uses strange and uncommon words to describe its key areas and features.

Do be inclusive

Remember that the average reading age in this country is 12 years so be aware that people who visit will have different levels of understanding in terms of literacy and could be intimidated by difficult language. This doesn’t mean you have to dumb down your written material – just try to anticipate average needs and abilities and regularly review your written material with that in mind.

Do be consistent

Make sure that all material you produce uses the same font, the same colours and the same in-house style. This can also be carried through to any notice-board based material or signage you use in the building. This consistency helps you to look professional and shows that you have thought about the way you present yourselves.

Do think about the children

Children in the main don’t want to do anything that seems too much like school if they aren’t at school – so activities that include a large volume of reading or writing tend not to be as appealing as more creative offers.

However, to have some material or an activity specifically for children is a very good idea and it doesn’t need to be complicated. A simple I-Spy sheet with stickers or a Treasure Hunt is good. This could also be used when children come to your church for weddings or baptisms. Remember that children really respond to imaginative stories so you could use a character from history from your church to relate an event through their eyes. If your church has an unusual dedication or an interesting saint associated with it they could tell the story of their life and works, for example.

Try putting tiny Lego figures in church in unusual places – up on window sills or in pews - to encourage children to really explore and use their eyes in the building. This is especially good for children who do not read so well.

Identify and talk to people in your church who have experience of working with children, either in the classroom or in other ways. See what they say about the potential that your building might bring to the way in which you welcome and entertain younger visitors.
In summary

- Give some thought to the kinds and types of people who will be visiting you and what they might be looking for.
- Review what you currently offer in terms of interpretation and story-telling and try to be objective about how effective it currently is. If it needs work, make a plan for this.
- Decide what your ten main points of interest will be – you may have less than ten but don’t try to highlight anymore than that unless your building merits it.
- Identify people who can help you to create the interpretation – the content, the style and the way in which you present your material will have a huge impact on its effectiveness.
- Remember to take advantage of opportunities to tell the story of your faith through the building and its contents. Visitors will be interested to hear how the beliefs of the worshipping community have shaped the way in which the building has evolved over the centuries.

Reading List/Helpful Resources

‘The Gate of Heaven – How Church Buildings Speak of God’ Nigel Walter
Grove Books Limited

‘How to Read a Church – Images, symbols and meanings in Churches and Cathedrals’ Richard Taylor
Rider Books
ISBN 184413053-3

‘Exploring Churches’
Churches Conservation Trust
ISBN 1-903649-14-5

‘Churches, Cathedrals and Chapels - A teachers Guide’ Morris/Corbishley
English Heritage

‘Rural Visitors – A Parish Workbook for Welcoming Visitors to the Country Church’ Francis/Martineau
Acora

‘The Church Explorer’s Handbook’ Clive Fewis –
Canterbury Press
1-85311-622-X

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Toolkit 3:
Opening your Church with Confidence

A church locked to keep thieves and vandals out is also a church closed to its community and the people who need it most. Theft and damage to churches is not a modern phenomenon. Over the centuries churches have faced exactly the same issues that we are dealing with today. Locking the door is a natural and understandable reaction to a threat - but it doesn’t have to be the only way to deal with this issue.

**FACT:** A locked church is more vulnerable to theft and vandalism than an open one.

This may seem like a ridiculous statement but more criminals attack locked churches because they are less likely to be disturbed. In an open church anyone may appear at any time.

The following tips will help you to understand this and plan your strategy for being open more regularly. Remember that buildings and ‘stuff’ can be replaced but damage to people is more difficult to handle.

**Your people**

The safety of those volunteers and church workers who may find themselves in vulnerable situations in your building is equally, if not more, important than the security of your building. Flower arrangers, cleaners, musicians and tower captains are examples of those who may be alone in your buildings at certain times of the day. It is a good idea to work out a plan and a set of rules to help those who may find themselves alone in your building to deal with potentially challenging situations. You should take the following into account:

If you are planning to be in church alone remember the following:

**ALWAYS**

- tell someone where you are going and how long you expect to be.
- carry a mobile phone if at all possible.
- trust your instincts and don’t be afraid to get out of a situation you feel threatened by.

**NEVER**

- go into church if you think someone might be inside committing a crime.
- get into an argument or a confrontational situation with anyone in church if you are alone. Walk away and, if necessary, call the police and ask them to deal with the situation.
- give anyone money but be practical in the help you can offer. Have information about available local support in church to give to those who need it so the address of the nearest homeless shelter, for example, or details of other organisations who can offer a hot meal or counselling.
- disturb the scene of a crime and always report it to the police immediately, no matter how small.
Your building

Think like a Criminal
Spend a few hours in and around your church and look at it the way that a vandal or a thief would. This will help you to make a risk assessment. Record what you have that could easily be taken and assess what you have in terms of valuables and replace significant items with those made of wood. Keep a section of your church – the vestry, for example - as a secure area, with a good quality lock.

Tell Others
Once you have made the decision to be open decide who you need to tell. This isn’t just about your congregation taking a collective responsibility for the building. It’s also about those who live near to, or pass by your church, on a regular basis. Think of it as Neighbourhood Watch for Churches. Put flyers through the doors of those closest to your building. Tell them you intend to be open, giving details of the times. Also give telephone numbers of those people who should be contacted in an emergency should they notice anything suspicious. Your local community are the ‘guardian angels’ for your church.

Talk to the Police
Make friends with your local Police Community Support Officers and let them know that you intend to be open regularly. Also contact your insurers and ask for advice. If you are insured with Ecclesiastical your premiums are not likely to increase if you decide to be open. Insurers actively encourage churches to be open as research shows that an open church is less vulnerable than a locked one.

Think about an Alarm system
They aren’t as expensive as you think and the technology is changing all the time. At least think about alarming your vestry and keep this as an extra secure area. Most churches are not alarmed – do some research locally and find out which churches have systems and ask how effective they find them. Alarms have a down side. How many of us hear an alarm going off and ignore it?

Cash
If you have a cash-box in the wall don’t use it. More damage will be caused by a thief trying to prize it away from the stonework. Use a table-top box. If it gets taken, so be it. Make sure that any monies left in church are taken away regularly and say that this is your policy. An evident sign saying ‘No money is left in this building at any time’ will deter a petty thief who is looking for cash. If you do have a theft make sure you tell the police about it and get their help.

Keys
Count up how many people currently hold keys to your church. Do you really know where they all are and who holds them? Having a clear protocol for key management is essential as you may need to create a rota for opening and locking up. Many churches now have automatic timed locking systems that work well.

The above basic information has been put together using the resources endorsed by Ecclesiastical Insurance Group. Their web-site contains extensive downloadable information about Church Security, Personal Security for Church Workers, Volunteers and Clergy.


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Good communication helps church communities on so many levels. If we can engage quickly and effectively with people who are looking for us or who stumble across us, we'll save time and create a great first impression. Getting the messages right at an early stage says positive things about us as a welcoming, hospitable group of people. Churches might be traditionally perceived as Sunday places, where people sing hymns and say prayers, but we know that they can often be places for all kinds of activity and our buildings can be powerful tools for mission and outreach.

Giving strangers and visitors to our buildings easy access to all the information they need will help them to get to know us quickly. Visitors gravitate towards notice-boards. They say much about the kind of people you are and what you have to offer. It is your opportunity to make a great first impression – this is less about what you say and more about how you say it.

There are other powerful ways of getting noticed. The internet is often the first port of call these days for finding out more about anything. Whether you’re planning a holiday or a day out or doing your supermarket shop, the worldwide web is likely to have the answers. Most churches now have their own website and it can be a real asset but only if it’s managed and maintained properly. If you decide to have a website, be prepared to make it work for you.

There are other growing, free or inexpensive technologies that can benefit you too, particularly if you want to share information, some of which are detailed below.

**A Boundary Sign**

You may have different kinds of notice boards, inside and outside of church, and they all have a specific role to play in how you communicate with visitors and tell your story. You will have to be sure that any changes you plan to your signage, inside or out, complies with DAC regulations and you will need to consult your DAC Secretary before you purchase any new boards or move existing signs. Before you plan what it should say consider whether it is in the right place. If you’re thinking about getting a new board does it have to go where the old one was? Is this really the best place for it?

There are many different kinds of boundary signs available and yours may be new or a sign that you have had for years that needs some attention. It might be a ‘top of the range’ model or a very simple board. No matter what it is like it needs to be in good order. No peeling paint or varnish! Ask yourself what the picture below says about the church it represents.

Most importantly, be welcoming! Along with the regular service information try to show that your church is alive and open at other times, not just on Sundays.

Make sure it is easy to read from a safe distance – not too high from the ground - and that the lettering is not too small.

Don’t be tempted to put too much specific information on it, like names and telephone numbers that could date easily – take into
account the fact that your vicar may change and the churchwardens may retire, so think longer-term. It should be easy to get to and access – so not behind an encroaching holly bush or on a slope.

If it has a glass or Perspex section make sure that it is weatherproof. If your church is in a vulnerable area or liable to vandalism, take this into account when planning for a new sign.

If you have space to display posters or flyers make sure they always look fresh and that they are changed frequently to maintain a level of interest. Faded, curling, out of date information can give the wrong impression about you. Obviously, the bigger the board the more information you can include, but if it is small keep the information to a minimum. Less is definitely more, as in the example on the left.

If you’re open to visitors, say so - even if it’s only for a few hours a day. Display and explain contact information for those who may want access out of hours or need more help. If your board is small you may want to signpost them to your porch or inside church itself.

**Temporary Signage**

A-Boards are a great way of saying – ‘We’re Open!’ You can drag them out of church whenever you’re ready to welcome visitors. They should be eye-catching and visible. Just using a statement like

‘Welcome to St. Peter’s! Come inside and explore our beautiful/peaceful/historic/unique church!’

is enough and if you have a notable or interesting feature to share, say so.

‘Welcome to St. John Baptist. Our Peaceful Norman Crypt is open to visitors’

You can always give more information in the porch or inside church itself, but this initial invitation will help entice the visitor to come in and explore further.

**Internal Notice-boards**

Once you have tempted the visitor into church there are more opportunities to use your notice-boards to say good things about what you have to offer.

**Echo the overall look of your boundary board in your internal boards.** Be consistent with colours, fonts, styles to create an in-house format. This gives a sense of uniformity and commonality. You can carry this through to all written material or resources you might offer to the visitor. Laminate as much permanent information as you can, with a matt finish.

**Think about using a stand-alone, double-sided notice-board** that you can rotate – one side for visitor information and the other for Sunday worshippers. Make sure you display lots of photographs of your people enjoying social activity to emphasise that you are a living, breathing place and not a museum. Remember to include a smiling snap of your Vicar and other key workers in your church.
Nominate someone to be your Notice-board Tsar and tell everyone that this person has responsibility for maintaining and managing the space. If anyone wants to display information it has to go through this person who monitors the material and keeps it up to date. It’s always disappointing to see a poster for a church fete held three weekends ago!

**Special Information Space for Visitors**

If you have room try to reserve space on a specific board to welcome your visitors and put this close to the door. Say where the nearest public loo is or where the visitor can get a good lunch. There might be an excellent walk that can be accessed from church so if there is, tell them about it. Make sure you don’t lump this kind of information in with the flower rota or the PCC minutes!

Getting this right suggests to a visitor that you have thought about their needs and that your welcome to them is important to you – your welcome to them is a valuable part of your church’s ministry.

**A Church Website**

Your church website is a repository of information and news about your church, your community and your activities. You’ll need to nominate a webmaster who is responsible for updating and reviewing the site as part of a larger team of three or four if you have the capacity. If you are part of a larger benefice, each church should ideally have a representative to collaborate with the webmaster and forward content and news.

It’s **extremely** important to regularly review the site to check that it’s working for you. Websites are pointless if they are full of outdated news and information so make sure that you regularly review the content to check this. An advert for an event that took place three months ago is off-putting to visitors of the site and reduces their confidence in the content.

You can build a church website from your own desk top PC for very little cost. If you have a confident webmaster who is prepared to build the site for you start with [www.create.net](http://www.create.net) and if you need more help try [www.churchedit.co.uk/](http://www.churchedit.co.uk/) both of which come highly recommended.

**Using QR Codes**

By 2014 there will be more Smart phones on our planet than desktop PCs. We no longer have to depend on static, paper based sources of information. Recent developments in bar-code technology have led to the Quick Response (QR) code being seen everywhere, particularly in newspapers and in advertising where space costs money. They can be created **for free**. A Smartphone user can scan this code with their camera, using software from a downloadable App, and it will take them to the relevant website. You can create a code for your own church website or other web pages that feature information about your church.

You could put the QR code on your church noticeboard or if you have a special events page on your website you could create a code for that and circulate it in the parish newsletter to save space. There might be a parent and toddler group that meet in church, or there may be some pages about your church history on someone else’s web page.

Try this link and create your own [www.the-qrcode-generator.com/](http://www.the-qrcode-generator.com/)
**The power of Wiki**

If you don’t have your own website you can still create a web presence to tell the story of your church and its history by using Wikipedia, the on-line encyclopaedia written entirely by volunteers. Pages are continually being created and updated and it is very easy to edit. A quick internet search is likely to reveal a page about your town or even your church. If it doesn’t, you can create your own by registering on the Wikipedia site.

It’s entirely free and there will be other ‘editors’ out there who will add information, pictures and links to the pages and in some cases even translate it for you. This might be a project that you could explore with your Local History or Civic Society for example.

**PR and Marketing Ideas**

If your church is a large and lively it will be worth having a small team to deal with communications. In smaller churches that may be off the beaten track it is still important to have a communications strategy. If you are planning a high-profile event or need to share good news widely with radio or newspapers you’ll need to write a press release – you can get help with this here from the Diocese of York www.dioceseofyork.org.uk/your-church/communications/writing-a-press-release/

There are excellent publications that may help you also.

‘*How to be Heard in a Noisy World*’ by Phil Creighton  
ISBN 978-1-85078-716-7

‘*100 Ways to get your Church Noticed*’ by Neil Pugmire  

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The majority of church buildings have some green space attached to them. Sometimes, and most particularly in urban areas, the churchyard may be the only green ‘breathing’ space in a bustling locality. There are so many ways in which the churchyard can serve its community.

Many centuries ago, before gravestones were erected to mark burial plots, the churchyard was a very different place to the one we recognise now. It was most definitely a place where the sacred and secular met. The North side of the churchyard was sometimes unconsecrated and this allowed for sports and markets and informal activity – a place where the community socialised and congregated.

These days many visitors to our churches don’t venture as far as the church door so an encounter with the churchyard may be the only contact they have with the church itself. Many visitors will be tending graves or leaving flowers – for them the churchyard is a particularly personal place to be and they feel connected to the churchyard as burial ground. The space has a particular personal resonance for them as a safe haven and a resting place.

Other visitors will be looking for different things. They may be researching their family history so burials of ancestors may have brought them to your church. They may be interested in wildlife or they may simply be looking for a place to sit and enjoy the surroundings, the stillness and peace that most churchyards can offer.

For the church community the act of sharing the space is a simple way of connecting with strangers or visitors. It is an opportunity to be hospitable, to share information, to be inviting, to engage with the community through projects and to be creative in inviting others to learn more about the church, its history and role in the community over the centuries.

**Recording the Stones**

Graveyards and burial grounds are useful places for those researching their family history and it isn’t always easy to interpret the wording or inscriptions on gravestones and memorials. Neither is it always possible to inspect historic registers at churches – visitors may have to be signposted to the local Records Office – so many congregations are
surveying their churchyard in order to provide visitors with really useful information. Once the results have been mapped and collated the document can be left on the visitor table or put on your church’s website as a downloadable resource.

This exercise will also help you to highlight stories of those who have lived and worked in your community and will put flesh on the bones of any story-telling you undertake when you share the story of how your church and parish have evolved and grown over the centuries.

Carrying out a research project like this can involve the whole community and encourage those who have never visited your church before to come along and take part. Talk to your Local History Society and ask them if they would be willing to help with this.


Do take care when investigating the stones themselves by following the guidelines on the Churchcare site at [www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/guidance-advice/looking-after-your-church/churchyards](http://www.churchcare.co.uk/churches/guidance-advice/looking-after-your-church/churchyards)

If in doubt ask your DAC Secretary for advice and, as a rule, take care not to disturb habitat as this could be destructive to wildlife.

‘The Good Gravestone Recording Pack’ from the Churches Conservation Trust is also recommended but not available to download. You can order it for £5 from [www.visitchurches.org.uk](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk)

Even if your church is closed to visitors during the week you could display a graveyard plan on the noticeboard or in the porch.

**Encouraging Biodiversity in the Churchyard**

Not all parishes have a true picture of the biodiversity hidden away in their churchyards. There are native species of plants and wildlife that thrive specifically in these places and many will have been growing or living undisturbed for many years.

‘Caring for God’s Acre’, a Diocese of Hereford initiative, has been helping parishes to understand and share their churchyards. The wildlife, ecology and seasonal changes in your churchyard will appeal to visitors and communities throughout the year and you’ll find tips on how to manage yours and share it with others on the resources page of their website at [http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/](http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/)

Surveying the ground and recording what can be seen at different times of the year will help you to understand the extent of the biodiversity you have in your care as well as highlighting areas where you might improve.
Establishing a wild-life garden

Many congregations have come to realise the value of reserving an area of their churchyard as a wildlife garden. Some are still resistant to this as it can look neglected and ill-cared for. A successful wildlife area needs careful management and a mowing regime has to be established. Committing to a space for wild-life in your churchyard will encourage all kinds of species to make a home.

Many parishes still aspire to and enjoy the sight of a beautifully manicured churchyard—and relatives still need easy access to leave flowers or to tend the plot—but most churchyards can find a dedicated place for encouraging varied species to thrive throughout the year.

Even if your church building is closed to visitors outside of worship times you might consider using the porch as a place to display information about the species that can be found in the churchyard to help with identification. Using a timeline will also help to explain the seasonal nature of the plants and flowers to be found there.

The Birds and the Bees

Over the last 70 years many kinds of bees have become scarce. To help slow this decline you could grow particular species of plants in the churchyard that flower successively throughout the season, like berberis, bluebell, rosemary, lavender and buddleia. A useful book to invest in to help with this would be ‘Wildlife in Church and Churchyard’ by Nigel Cooper ISBN 0-7151-7587-4 £9.95.

To encourage a wider range of birds to the churchyard you might think about introducing bird boxes and planting particular shrubs that provide shelter and food.

Lichens

Good churchyards may have up to 100 different lichens living on the trees and the stonework found in the churchyard. When studied through a powerful magnifying glass they are fascinating and very beautiful.

The British Lichen Society has lots of tools for recording and identifying lichens as do the Natural History Museum.

Community Projects

Your local Wildlife Trust will have a Community Project Officers and they can support you as you develop ideas to share your churchyard with others. They may come along and help you with a Churchyard Discovery Day or plan a diversity survey that your entire community can participate in. Try your local Wildlife Trust website.

Churches we have worked with over the years report a real benefit in holding a ‘Churchyard Discovery Day’ where people of all ages have come together to make and install bird or bat boxes and carry
out surveys. ‘Caring for God’s Acre’ again have excellent resources to help you to plan activities for children and young people. Contact local branches of the RSPB or the Conservation Volunteer network to identify locals with real knowledge who may be able to help you to organise a community project.

**Useful Links and Resources**

The [Conservation Foundation](#) website includes, among other things, details of the Yew Registration Project. The Foundation aims to encourage us all to be more aware of national initiatives and resources.

[Shrinking the Footprint](#) The Church of England’s very own website focussing on environmental issues encouraging us to look at ways in which we all – as individuals and as church communities – can measure our carbon footprint and, more importantly, take action.

[Cherishing your Churchyard](#) is an initiative that takes place every June through the Caring for God’s Acre project.


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Inviting school children into our church buildings to share our story is a positive move. Younger people, who may not have hands-on experience of heritage buildings before will often be overwhelmed by the ‘wow factor’ that your church can offer and a school visit can be a rewarding exercise for everyone involved – children, teachers, helpers, parents and church volunteers all benefit in the short and longer term.

Our church buildings offer huge potential to schools in terms of resources and space. Churches are generally safe places to work and explore, and churchyards in particular are open spaces but well defined and secure.

While RE might be an obvious topic there are other subjects our churches can offer for learning. History, Geography, English, Citizenship, Art and Design, Maths and Science are just a few of the options. More detail of that later in this action guide.

Teachers like the idea of ‘Learning outside the Classroom’ and offering their pupils a different teaching environment. In the present economy, making trips to places of interest on the doorstep can seem like a better option. The most expensive costs associated with school trips tend to be travel and entrance fees, both of which can be taken out of the equation if the school making the visit is only a walking distance away and the church doesn’t make a charge for entry!

‘Divine Inspiration’ has real experience of developing partnerships between church and school and the content of this action guide draws from what we learnt in 2010 through our inclusion as a Landmark project for the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment’s ‘Engaging Places’ initiative. The benefits to all – the school, the church, the children and, subsequently, their families - were immeasurable. Many children we worked with subsequently took their families to visit the churches we introduced them to with confidence, knowing that they would be welcomed warmly and that their visit would be unconditional.

Good preparation made to welcome school groups into your building will reap rewards and this action guide aims to take you through the practical issues you need to consider and introduce you to some creative ideas for sharing your space.

**Working out your ‘offer’**

Ask yourselves some simple questions:

- Do we have a nominated person in our congregation – who may or may not have experience in dealing with young children but who is CRB cleared – who is willing to act as a facilitator between church and school?
- What stories have we got to share with young people? See Ideas for Learning later in this document.
- Is it our building or our churchyard that may be most useful and valuable to a teacher as a learning resource?
• What facilities can we offer that the visitors will need? Toilet facilities, parking, disabled access? If school is next door are these things crucial?
• How many children can we safely accommodate at a time?
• Is our Health and Safety Policy and the Diocesan Safeguarding Policy easy to share electronically? Do we know and understand these documents and what they mean?

Making the Offer

Once you have these things down on paper you can make an approach to your local school. They may already make regular visits to your building and the children may already be familiar with the church, the vicar and the way you do things but if this ‘relationship’ doesn’t exist invite the teachers into the building so they can see for themselves the potential that you have for sharing your space and resources.

Teachers in Key Stages 1 and 2 – that’s Infant and Junior in old money! – will plan their classroom activity well in advance, so don’t expect a visit to take place immediately.

Have ideas ready for a teacher to look at to get the ball rolling. If you spend some time looking at your building with fresh eyes you’ll see all kinds of possibilities. Teachers will see opportunities also so this is where your partnership working really begins. Teachers will be looking for ‘cross curricular’ value in what ever they decide to deliver, so building data collection, for example, into activities will add value to whatever they decide to focus on.

Ideas for Learning

Your church affords opportunities to explore many topics. Try not to be too prescriptive – the school may make one visit or even several visits over the school year, and your role will be in accommodating whatever the school and teacher decide is appropriate for them.

• **Geography and Mapping** - Your churches place in the landscape, its local history and the built environment around it.
• **Science and Data Collection** - Your churchyard has a diversity of wildlife to explore and collate. The churchyard species could be mapped and the details turned into a resource for visitors to use.
• **Maths** - The memorials inside and outside the building will give a teacher plenty of opportunities to explore maths topics using dates and ages.
• **History** - Encourage the children to be church detectives, following clues, noticing the symbols and observing the use of materials and styles of architecture. Preparation of timelines can be an activity to illustrate this.
• **Citizenship** – Simple activities for very young children based on caring for old and precious things e.g. cleaning brasses or dusting. Older children may debate why the church building is such an important place to the community, why it is still functioning as a place of worship and what it means to those who worship.
• **IT** – Developing a map or trail for visitors to use. Collecting data and turning this, through the use of computer software, into a useful tool for navigation or a record of the history of the church.

• **Creative Writing** – Allowing the children to explore the sensory elements of your building, what it feels like, smells like, how the light works in the church in the stained glass, the feel of the materials. Churches can be catalysts for emotional responses.

• **Story Telling** – exploring the stories in the stones and memorials. What kinds of people worshipped here? The important and the ordinary, the rich and the poor. How did the war affect the community? Are there any interesting events that are recorded in church?

• **Art and Design** – the use of patterns and shapes in the building and in the furnishings. How is design linked to function. If you were designing a church now what might you do differently!

### Preparing for the visit

Make sure that the building is tidy, safe and that you are clear about agreed protocol for dealing with emergencies on site. The school will almost certainly provide all the required assistance in terms of staff and supervision of the children.

Welcome the children and introduce, in simple terms, the story of the church and some of its history. Make sure that the person who does this is engaging and isn’t tempted to use too many dates, especially if the children are very young. Don’t presume that a child will be interested in the things you are interested in! Many will not have visited a church before and will have no clue, unless they have had preparation in the classroom, about your building and what it’s for. Make sure that you know how much the children have been told about their visit to your church beforehand. You could also offer to visit the children in their classroom to answer any questions they or their teacher might have about their visit to your church.

Be encouraging and allow the children freedom to explore. This may mean removing some things that could be accidentally damaged. If you plan to take photographs that include children make sure you have permission from the class-teacher. School data collection would normally cover this but ask to be certain.

### Links to Resources

The following are some links and details of books that will assist you as you explore this area of work.

- Writing a risk assessment for your site – top tips from the Health and Safety Executive
  


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