

Creating a Plan for Growth

Incumbent's Guide

Listen | Choose | Plan




Growing in God

Welcome

Thank you for participating in the next phase of Growing in God. This guide is a resource to help you as the Incumbent to create a Benefice Plan for Growth, either building on or revising the priorities you previously identified or creating a Plan for Growth from scratch. Above all, we want your Plan for Growth to be prayerfully discerned and owned by the members of your church communities, seeing what God is doing and discovering how to join in. You are not alone, please involve colleagues and draw on the support being offered by the Diocese.

God is with us, gathering us as Christ-centred communities, calling us to make Christian disciples, sending us in loving service, empowering us by the Holy Spirit.

We discern that God's desire is for us:

Growing in depth

- to deepen our awareness of God with us through prayer and vibrant worship, centring our lives on Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.

Growing in influence

- to participate in God's loving movement towards the world in partnership with other congregations, denominations and people of good will.

Growing in number

- to witness to the person and way of Jesus Christ, in word and worship, in service and daily life, inviting others into the fullness of life found in him.

Growing younger

- to engage all generations, allowing them to shape how we do church and investing in them as present and future ministers of the gospel; to develop our congregations to reflect the age profile of the context in which they are set.

"We believe as Christians we are called to ministries of transformation for individuals, community and wider society, and so we seek to be flourishing congregations making a difference. We want to grow in whatever ways we can, to serve God in the communities where we are placed."



The Rt Revd Martin Seeley
Bishop of St Edmundsbury & Ipswich



Flourishing Congregations Making a Difference



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Why do we need to do this?

The Church of England's research into church growth suggests that "churches that intend to grow, tend to grow".

Creating a Plan for Growth is to help you, as a benefice, flourish in your own unique context.



Creating a Plan for Growth

When thinking about how to develop a Plan for Growth that is owned by the church community, there are some key questions to consider:

1 Where are we trying to get to?

We would like every benefice to have a Plan for Growth. This will be a living document which changes as you work on it, evolving with you as you make progress together.

2 Who will lead the process?

As the Incumbent you have the responsibility to develop the Plan for Growth. However, there may be someone in your benefice who has the skills to oversee and lead this with you.

3 Who else should be involved?

Invite people to be part of a Growing in God Working Group. Your Group members should be representative of your church community, think about how to listen to the voices of younger generations.

4 How long should it take?

It's important not to rush – take time at the discussion stage as this is vital if people are to own what is produced. One way to ensure this will happen is to have a 'Process Agreement' at the start to agree what you will do to explore and agree your priorities (see the resources on the Diocesan website, www.cofesuffolk.org). The aim is for each benefice to have a Plan for Growth by the end of 2022.

5 Is this just another paper exercise?

We are building on our Growing in God strategy and your Plan for Growth will enable us to know how we can support you in your mission.

6 What if we already have a Plan for Growth?

Take the opportunity to review what you are already doing and to focus your priorities.

**Please be in touch if you want to talk this through.
Contact details are on the back cover.**

Your Context - Which One Are You?

In this diocese there are broadly three contexts that we serve:
Rural Multi-Parishes, Market Towns and Larger Towns.
Each of these unique contexts need to be handled differently.

Rural Multi-Parishes



Each parish may want their own Listening Event to explore their priorities. After these events there is an opportunity to come together as a benefice to discuss what each church has discerned, in order to draw the benefice together around a Plan for Growth.

- As a benefice agree three broad themes which you can do better together.
- Across the benefice choose one priority that is specific to each parish church.

Market Towns



You may find that people gather together in larger numbers around the town church, bringing unique missional opportunities. There may be more than one congregation, and there may be links with rural parish churches and/or Lightwave Groups.

- Produce a Plan for Growth and agree three Benefice priorities which you can do better together.
- Have one priority for each congregation/rural church.

Larger Towns



You will want to develop ways that congregations can work together. You may wish to consider what other denominations are doing locally, and if you could partner with them. There may also be opportunities to engage with local government bodies to influence what happens in the town.

- In your Plan for Growth agree three priorities as a benefice.

Three Simple Steps

We have put together a simple three point plan to creating a Plan for Growth for your benefice:

Listen | Choose | Plan

1 Listen - to your communities

We suggest you hold a Listening Event to broaden ownership of the process. This is the church community coming to listen and discern together. Use the Congregation Guide and Growing in God prayer card to encourage people to join in with the process. Use your understanding of your local neighbourhood and networks to inform your decision making.

2 Choose - up to three main priorities

You may need a meeting to gather together the knowledge collected at your Listening Events.

Once you have an idea of what you could focus on for your Plan for Growth, and what you want to prioritise, you need to decide prayerfully which of these you will choose to do. Remember to consider what you could stop doing.

3 Plan - your next steps

Having chosen three main priorities for your benefice, you now need to create the first steps of an implementation plan.



Step 1

Listen - To Your Community

Listen to God

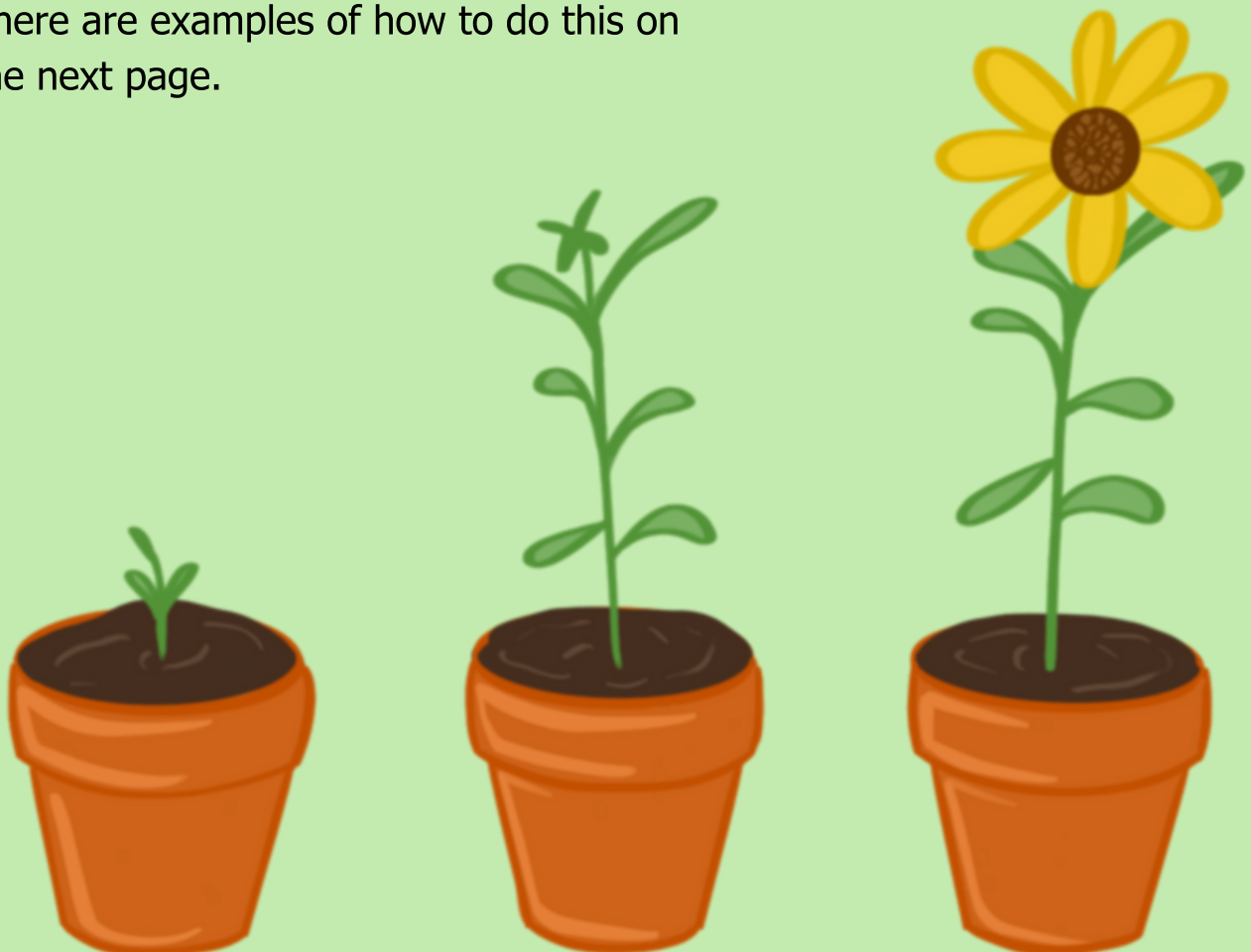
Ensure your Plan for Growth is included in your intercessions, prayer meetings and quiet mornings, whatever is appropriate for your tradition.

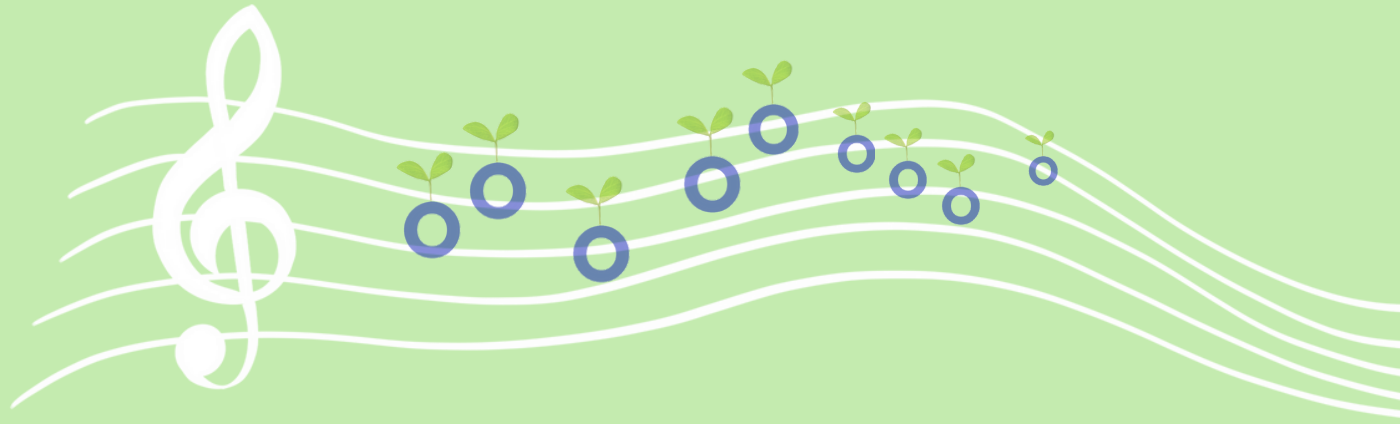
Listen to the community

Look at your Deanery Plan and latest benefice profile. This will help inform your decisions as you go forward.

Listen to one another

Find a way to listen to one another to help broaden ownership of what is being done. There are examples of how to do this on the next page.





Holding a Listening Event

Your Plan for Growth needs to be owned by the congregations of your benefice. Having a Listening Event is a good way of spending time together, discerning what God is already doing around you, and to see the opportunities you have to join in with his kingdom's work. Below are some ways you could organise a Listening Event:

Listening Stations:

Set up a drop-in session in your church which allows people to contribute their thoughts and ideas about what the church is doing well, and what it could do more about. Invite contributions by letter, email or phone.

Listening Morning:

Set aside a Saturday morning for people to contribute ideas together or book one to one meetings. Include refreshments to be inviting and welcoming.

Vision Sermon:

Use the sermon slot in a regular service to find out what the congregation are thinking about using small groups and/or response cards. Encourage people to pray for the process.

Vision Lunch:

Invite people to lunch and a discussion session after a service to give more time to listen and understand each other. This underlines that church is a community at its heart.

Discussion Evening:

Invite the church family to come and participate in an evening discussion about where the church is going and what it should prioritise.

Quiet Morning:

Some will be more at home talking about church priorities in the context of a retreat morning, which starts and ends with corporate prayer/worship.

Step 2

Choose - Up to Three Main Priorities

Once you have held a Listening Event the next step is for your working group to choose three clear objectives.

- 1 Collect the feedback from your Listening Events on Post-it notes or postcards. This should give you enough material to begin to see what God might be calling you to focus on.
- 2 Remove things you are doing already or no longer want to pursue.
- 3 Put on one side those ideas that you know you do not have the resources or capacity to do just yet.
- 4 Look for umbrella themes which could hold together a number of different initiatives - such as a focus on discipleship.
- 5 Consider what activities have had their day and need to stop, to give you capacity to grow.



- What tools do you use to help draw people into faith in Jesus Christ?
- What are you doing to help people grow up in their faith?
- What are you engaged in that seeks to serve the wider community?



Step 3

Plan - Your Next Steps

Having completed the Listening and Choosing stages you now need to set out a plan which shows what first steps you will take.



- Make your plan achievable and realistic in the time scale.
- Consider whether it will help you grow?
- Visit other parishes to get ideas about how you could implement your plan.

- 1 Present your plan to your PCCs for discussion. The Working Group will review the comments and produce a final plan for agreement.
- 2 Create an implementation plan and consider:
 - What first steps can you take?
 - Who needs to take them?
 - When do they need to be completed by?
 - What resources will they need?
- 3 Tell the wider benefice what is happening, what has happened, and what is planned.
- 4 Share your Plan for Growth with us so we can support you. Use the online form provided:
www.cofesuffolk.org/plan-for-growth

There are more resources on the Diocesan website including an example Plan for Growth.





The key is to allow space for the Holy Spirit to open their eyes to what God is already doing and encourage them to join in.

There are other ways of approaching this. Some alternative activities will be found on the Diocesan website.

What help is available?

If you would like help creating your Plan for Growth we would be glad to meet with you and talk through your unique challenges and opportunities.

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THE CHURCH
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