

Use this simple quiz to explore how your local congregational life must keep evolving – or else it will decay!

Churchgoing can easily become little more than a routine, a congenial habit. Consumer surveys list it as ‘a leisure pursuit’ on a par with stamp collecting. Churchgoers who enjoy each other’s company may well not notice the passage of time; their congregations ‘grow old gracefully’. They may notice the slow decline in numbers but never mind, they say, “It’ll see me out!”

And yet, throughout our lifetimes local congregational life has changed dramatically – no more so than in the last twenty years as England tries to come to terms with being a multi-faith and/or ‘secular’ society.

Talk is now of a ‘mixed economy’ within the Churches. *‘Inherited church’*: i.e. the local congregation caught up in the institutional structures of parish, deanery and diocese – is contrasted with *‘Emerging church’*: i.e. that whole plethora of ways, sometimes called “Fresh Expressions”, through which a new generation is trying to develop its Christian discipleship.

However, the contrast is misleading. It is wrong to assume that the inherited church is somehow static. If your congregation, however wedded to its traditions, is not also part of ‘the emerging church’, it will die.

The clue may be that we are all participants in *communities of Christ’s disciples* - whether in ‘inherited’ or ‘emerging’ mode. Just to say “I am a churchgoer” no longer counts for very much.

## STAGES OF RENEWAL - A QUIZ

This quiz can be tackled individually or in a congregational group. Participants are invited to choose what they judge to be the most appropriate answers to four multiple choice questions, and to note the scores for their answers.

### QUESTION ONE:

***Do most members of your congregation see themselves primarily as:***

- Local people who attend church  
**Score 1**
- Those who appreciate the Vicar’s (minister’s) ministry, and/or what happens in church  
**Score 3**
- People chosen out of the locality to be the people of God  
**Score 4**
- Part of a wider fellowship of Christ’s disciples who are called to serve God in this locality  
**Score 5**

### QUESTION TWO:

***Do most members of your congregation understand ‘church’ to mean primarily***

- The Church Building - and they are its custodians  
**Score 1**
- The Vicar/minister - as in the phrase “going into the church”  
**Score 2**
- Bishops, synods etc - “Them at the Diocese”  
**Score 2**
- Themselves - making them different from their neighbours  
**Score 4**
- A world-wide fellowship of Christ’s disciples  
**Score 5**

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### QUESTION THREE:

*How do most members of your congregation understand 'ministry'?*

- We only need a minister for services (and weddings and funerals) **Score 1**
- We are those who are ministered to **Score 2**
- We help the minister in his(her) ministry **Score 3**
- We share ministry with the Vicar/minister **Score 4**
- The Vicar/minister enables us to exercise our ministry **Score 5**

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### QUESTION FOUR:

*How does your church derive the bulk of its income?*

- Public appeals to maintain the building **Score 1**
- Fund-raising events involving members of the congregation **Score 2**
- Regular giving schemes - weekly envelopes etc **Score 3**
- Regular, stewardly, costly giving by members of the congregation but mainly for the needs of the church **Score 4**
- As part of regular, stewardly and costly giving by members of the congregation in sheer gratitude to God **Score 5**

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### STAGES OF RENEWAL - TOTAL SCORES

<b>4 – 6</b>	Stage One	"The Building is the Church"
<b>7 - 9</b>	Stage Two	"The Vicar is the Church"
<b>10 - 13</b>	Stage Three	"We help the Vicar to be the Church"
<b>14 – 17</b>	Stage Four	"We are the Church"
<b>18 – 20</b>	Stage Five	"We are part of God's Church"

Participants in the quiz add up their individual scores and note which 'stage' is suggested by their total score as listed below left.

When the quiz is used in a group, find out the dominant perception amongst those participating by checking how many have voted for each stage.

### WHERE THE HOLY SPIRIT IS LEADING US

*Interpreting the results:*

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#### "THE BUILDING IS THE CHURCH" (STAGE ONE)

This is what people understand by the word 'church', once they notice that the building is there at all. It is an accepted starting-point in many villages where the church "is ours" even if we never go near it.

If those who worship in the church are not obviously representative of the rest of us, they are suspected of being 'interlopers' - worse still if they start wanting to change anything inside the building!

A symbolic communication runs between Church and the local population, often quite powerfully, not so much of the glory of God but of a sense of place, a sense of belonging.

In this state of mind the Church belongs to us, not we to the Church. Whether either 'we or 'the Church' belong to God is a very interesting question.

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#### "THE VICAR IS THE CHURCH" (STAGE TWO)

When people start to say this, it is a moment of spiritual growth. It is the point reached in many suburban settings. People recognise and judge 'the Church' on the basis of what the Vicar does for them at the crematorium when they're marking the death of Aunty Flo.

They may also connect the Vicar with a church building for happier occasions such as weddings and baptisms – but the pattern of communication is much the same as with local government: Church

buildings and clergy are “ours” in a very loose and disinterested way. They are there when needed.

The Vicar’s ministry may be very greatly appreciated by people at that moment of need; but equally, of course, it can be the subject of considerable criticism if those needs aren’t met.

### “WE HELP THE VICAR TO BE THE CHURCH” (STAGE THREE)

The next step is when churchgoers realise that someone somewhere will be valuing what the Vicar is doing all the time, and that (s)he often cannot meet the needs of everyone. So keen churchgoers start to think of routine jobs and responsibilities that can be taken off the Vicar’s hands.

“We help the Vicar to be the Church” - not that we could possibly do any of the wonderful and valuable caring ministry that is ‘the Vicar’s job’; “We aren’t good enough for that!”

This shift towards a sense of lay responsibility can often be formalised (and in some cases fossilised!) through the traditional Stewardship Campaign. It also begins to lay down a boundary between those who think the church is “ours - though we never go” and those who think that the Church is the Vicar’s - “and we must help him/her to run it.” Once again, these shifts of perception are signs of spiritual growth.

Problems of communication, at earlier stages, had been between the local residents (wanting their church on their terms) and anyone else (Diocese, non-resident incumbent, ‘Stage Four congregation’, etc). Now they are between the local churchgoers and their non-churchgoing neighbours.

Many local churches are still at Stage Three, with ambivalent feelings about their relationship to the community in which they are set, a problem aggravated by the gradual collapse of local secular community life.

### “WE ARE THE CHURCH” (STAGE FOUR)

It may be for quite negative reasons that a congregation then discovers a new and very important truth: “We are the Church”. The boundary between worshipper (“Christian”) and

non-worshipper (“non-Christian”) can be very starkly visible at this stage. Many Free Church congregations quite readily see themselves as set apart in this way.

Most Stage Four congregations in the Church of England contain within them so many memories of the earlier stages, and probably so many worshippers who are still at those earlier stages, that the boundaries remain fairly blurred. One is more likely to find tensions and divisions within the congregation - tensions which could and should be creative. In practice they are more likely to trap the congregation within its own internal concerns.

As a result, a Stage Four congregation can all too easily forget that it still has a missionary, even evangelistic, responsibility to communicate with those who are outside the church gate. When it starts to think about these things, or about ‘those outside’, it easily becomes very self-conscious. “How can we show everyone the love of God?” is a reasonably positive expression of this. “How can we get more people to join us?” is the rather more self-righteous line that we usually take! ‘Those outside’ promptly detect a degree of hypocrisy!

## STILL A LONG WAY TO GO!

As more and more congregations reach Stage Four, two developments warn us that the Holy Spirit still has much to teach us:

1. In recent years many of ‘those outside’ have become increasingly alienated from anything to do with ‘church’ – to the point where they resist any invitation to come through the church door. A new ‘Stage Zero’ has emerged, fearful and even hostile towards any formal religion.
2. At the same time a more sophisticated Stage Four church has emerged making the most of contemporary consumer culture. These highly-motivated and well organised ‘supermarket’-style mega-churches can be very successful up to a point, not least by working to break down people’s fear of crossing the threshold of the church.

Sooner or later, however, those who are more prayerfully sensitive to the evident long term failure of this way of 'marketing' the Gospel, start asking what has gone wrong.

### "WE ARE PART OF GOD'S CHURCH" (STAGE FIVE)

Any shift beyond Stage Four is unstable, highly vulnerable and still quite tentative - given the equally unstable society in which we as 'Church' are called to live out Christ's Gospel. The new insight seems to be something like: "We as 'Church' are servants of the Kingdom, part of the Body of Christ".

The bravest of the new generation of 'Fresh Expressions of Church' will recognise this. When the Holy Spirit renews us at this level, communication becomes incarnation. We rediscover that our humanness is at least as important as our churchgoing, and that what we may be able to contribute to God's mission purposes as 'Church' only makes sense when we recognise what God is already up to (and suffering) in the hearts and minds, the hopefulness (sic!) and the heartache, of all God's creatures.

On this basis, a Stage Five church will be marked out by its intimacy, its identification with people as people, its hospitality, and by its love-longing to be connected to God's purposes through prayer, possibly even by 'stigmata' - signs of its own involvement in the sufferings of Christ on his cross. Its pain, however, will be balanced (maybe even richly overcome) by a hopefulness and expectancy, a sense of re-assurance in the glory that is God's.

Stage Five communities of Christ's disciples may well not be overtly 'successful'. They may not be immediately recognisable as a 'congregation'; in fact they may show more of the characteristics of a 'monastic' community - but not one that is shut away. They will sometimes appear in the most unexpected places - just as do any glimpses of the Kingdom!

Groups such as these get involved in the day to day affairs of ordinary people - energised by the communicating love of God, the Holy Spirit. The

result is a whole life perspective on the place of the Church in society. We as Christ's Body belong to humankind - but humankind belongs to God.

All five stages observed in this booklet are stages of renewal, as individuals or small groups or even whole congregations experience glimpses of the rich communicating of the Holy Spirit. These glimpses cannot be sought but they are there to be received by those who are open to them.

### RE-TELLING YOUR STORY

This little quiz is intended to enable you to think positively about the journey of faith on which you and your local church are engaged. It's a journey away from two opposing traps: despondency on the one hand, complacency on the other. It's a journey on which we would be foolish to say "We have arrived!"

The quiz offers you the opportunity to re-tell the story of how the Holy Spirit has been leading you and your local congregation over the course of time, and to consider prayerfully your response to the Spirit's leading in the future.

When people see themselves only as churchgoers, they are overlooking the one thing that breathes life into the whole enterprise - God at work in their daily lives. When our congregational life gets in a rut, we should - like those TV celebrities in the jungle - be shouting, "Get me out of here!"

A full colour PowerPoint version of this leaflet - with the quiz and its interpretation - is available for download from [www.parishandpeople.org.uk](http://www.parishandpeople.org.uk)

*This quiz is a re-working for the 21<sup>st</sup> century of an idea first presented in 'How to be a Local Church' by John Cole (Kevin Mayhew 1990) and originally conceived by Josephine Bax in 'The Good Wine' (Church House Publishing 1986)*