



## *Forming a Vision, Plan and Priorities*

There are many possible catalysts for embarking on a new Parish Vision.

### **Typical examples are:**

- The arrival of a new incumbent or lay leadership.
- A perceived lack of direction or momentum.
- A prelude to a Stewardship / Funding Programme.
- Difficulty in making decisions.
- An interregnum leading to a selection process.
- Several years have passed since the last one was formed.

Different catalysts will affect such things as urgency, expectations and format of presentation. Variations will also arise from location, tradition, history and available skills / personalities. Notwithstanding the context, there are vital steps and common to all successful vision forming.

### *Why do it?*

#### **Because the result...**

- Can make a transforming difference to the parish and community.
- Is a conscious and shared desire to discover God's will for our parish and its people.
- Creates common purpose to bind together our work and prayer for God's kingdom.
- Builds a firm foundation for decision-making and allocating resources.
- Is a source of inspiration for personal and parish commitment.

### *Keys to Success*

- An open-minded and prayerful readiness to embrace new responsibilities.
- Commitment by the church leadership, including the PCC, to the process and its outcomes.
- Wide consultation within the church family (and the local community).
- Communication and explanation of the resulting plans.
- Clear responsibility for making the plans a reality.
- All supported by a foundation of continuing prayer.

### *How do we go about it?*

This resource explains what steps your parish can take to form and communicate a new parish vision, its priorities and plans.

**CHURCH  
VISION – PLANNING  
CYCLE**  
outline view



## *1. Commitment by the Church Leadership*

This is the crucial first step. Whatever the context - there needs to be a shared commitment by the church leadership:

- a) To discern God's will for the church / parish
- b) To the process and its outcomes
- c) To support a small 'vision team' to spearhead the process

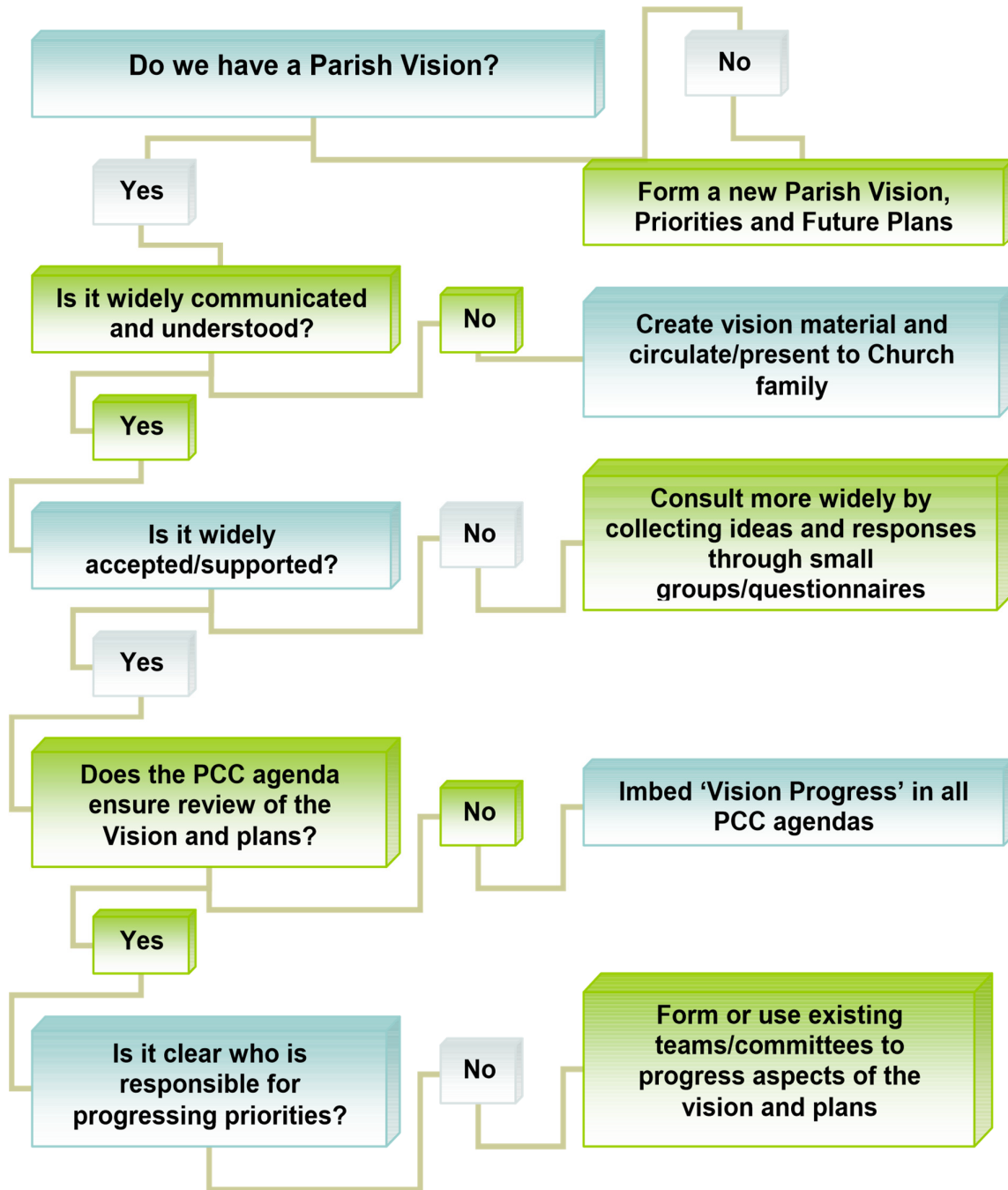
Whatever the context and starting point, a vital first step is for the church leadership, including the PCC, to recognise the importance of vision forming as a prelude to decision-making, allocating resources and optimising regular giving.

In order to take this step, the leadership (typically the incumbent / clergy team and the PCC) should prayerfully consider why a new vision is needed and when is the right time to commit to the process. An external input (e.g. a Diocesan Parish Resources Officer or equivalent) to a PCC meeting often helps the PCC to understand the potential benefits, the practicalities and timing issues.

As well as passing the relevant PCC resolution, PCC members should commit to support the consequent stages, such as the PCC Away Day.

## 2. Do we already have an effective Parish Vision?

Sometimes the Incumbent/PCC will be uncertain whether previous vision work has happened and if it provides a good foundation for the Parish Funding Programme. The following flow chart can be help to define the starting point and sets out some questions for the PCC to ponder.



### *3. Top Down and / or Bottom Up*

There is no single 'right' way to go about forming a Parish Vision and Plans. It is important to take into account the context of the church or parish.

A good question to answer at the outset is how best to combine the discernment by the leadership with the views and contributions of the wider church family and, in some circumstances, the local community.

In either method, it can be a good idea to involve the local community at the consultation stage. This is most likely to be effective in smaller village locations, where the church is recognised as central to the community.

**These considerations lead on to 2 principal models:**

#### *a) Top Down*

PCC leads the process, starting with a PCC Away Day, which generates:

- Priorities for the next three years
- Plans for the next twelve months

In some cases, the Incumbent and / or the 'Leadership Team' will first define some vision priorities for the PCC to 'buy into.' However, a preferred option is for the PCC (perhaps with other key people) to work unfettered in the first instance.

The PCC output is then shared with the wider church family by invitation to comment on the outline priorities and plans. A particular effort should be made to elicit support / enhancement from people who are (potentially) involved in the priority areas, which have been identified / discussed.

This feedback is then assessed by the Vision Group to enable the PCC to consider amendments / change in emphasis to their original vision and plans.

#### *b) Bottom Up*

The perceptions and priorities of the church family are collected through a questionnaire, which is then analysed and considered by the PCC.

From this, the PCC discerns the priorities for the parish at a PCC Away Day, together with outline plans as in the 'top down' model.

**If a 'Bottom Up' approach is taken, the PCC Away Day may be preceded by:**

- A Parish Survey (using the PDP Questionnaire or another model). The output from that would form the profile to be presented by the Facilitator to the PCC.
- A Parish Away Day, from which the priorities for attention have been distilled through a similar process.

## 4. *The PCC Away Day*

The purpose of the PCC Away Day is to focus on the process of discerning God's vision for the parish and forming some outline plans for the future. It is a crucial step, whether using the 'top down' or 'bottom up' model. The full commitment of the PCC to participate is needed.

It is often a good idea for key people who are not currently on the PCC, to join the PCC Away Day (e.g. leaders / workers – such as Children and Youth, Pastoral Assistants, House Groups, PCC sub-groups).

### *The Facilitator*

The role of the facilitator is to enable and encourage attendees to take part and make their contribution, not to present their own views. An experienced, external facilitator, who is familiar with the PDP, or other process, is recommended.

### *The Agenda*

An outline Agenda is circulated to the PCC prior to the Away Day, and again on arrival at the venue. You might want to use this example as a template:

#### **Vision Day Agenda**

- 09:00 Arrive and Coffee
- 09:30 Opening Prayers
- 09:45 Where are we now?
  - What's going on?
  - Making our own assessments
  - Forming the 'group view'
- 11:00 Discovering the Priorities
- 11:15 Coffee Break
- 11:30 A Vision for the Future
  - What we want to say...
- 13:00 Lunch
- 13:45 Making Plans
  - Starting, Changing, Stopping
- 14:45 Next Steps
- 15:00 Closing Prayer and Depart

*As well as opening worship and prayer, there should be opportunities for prayerful reflection during the Away Day, and the following meetings of Vision Team / PCC.*

*This is to ensure that the entire enterprise is grounded in prayer and a shared desire to seek God's will.*

*It is usually preferable for the PCC Away Day to be held at a pleasant location outside the parish, so that the chances of distraction are minimised.*

## *5. The Parish Development Profile Introductory Questionnaire*

The Parish Development Profile (PDP) (or other) questionnaire is completed by PCC members on the day, or in advance, by the congregation. The questionnaire invites members to express their own preferences concerning the life of their parish church.

There is a template PDP Questionnaire available that might be re-worded to the preference of the church context, without becoming too unwieldy.



PLEASE SEE SUPPORTING TEMPLATE: [Introductory Questionnaire](#)

### *Analysing the Results*

The profile of results is completed by the Facilitator and presented to the PCC for initial discussion before the PCC Away Day. The gap analysis highlights the topics, which appear to warrant priority consideration.



PLEASE SEE SUPPORTING DOCUMENT: [How to Analyse the Results](#)

### *Consulting and Communicating*

Although the leadership role of the PCC is crucial, it is also vitally important that the wider church family is fully involved in discernment of God's vision and commitment to the resulting priorities.

In the 'bottom up' approach, the consultation will have taken place through questionnaires or a Parish Day prior to the PCC Away Day.

In the 'top down' approach, the output from the PCC Away Day (and subsequent PCC Meeting), should be shared with the wider church family, with an invitation to:

- a) Add comments
- b) Offer support or any specific initiative

## 6. *Vision and Plans Review*

Groups are formed to discuss the priority areas (one or more groups for priority areas). The groups are asked to discuss and commit to flip charts for each project:

- What we already do
- What we aspire to
- What we plan to do

**A good way of expressing this, is for each group to complete flip charts, which say:**

- In 2013, we are already .....
- In 2016, we want to say .....
- During the next 12 months, we plan to .....

Each flip chart is presented to the rest of the PCC for comment / refinement. The completed flip charts are then handed over to the Vision Team to present to the next PCC Meeting for acceptance / amendment as the working document, to be used for wider consultation and eventual agreement of specific plans.

### *Generate a List of Potential Initiatives*

Typically, the PCC Away Day will generate a list of potential initiatives. One of the tasks of the Vision Group and the PCC is then to home in on a manageable number of small steps, which can build momentum, as more people become committed.

The context of the church will influence the reality of how this can be done. In most cases, there will be two options at the outset:

- a) Establish new team(s) / group(s), each to take responsibility for one topic / initiative
- b) Ask an established team / committee to consider how to progress the new initiative

In either case, the responsible team / group does not need to be populated by the PCC and gives an opportunity to approach newer arrivals / young people to become involved. During the consultation process, some potential candidates may well have expressed views or support.

The team / group should report its progress and challenges to PCC meetings, and for inclusion in the prayer letter.

One of the most important benefits of the vision process can be to involve people who previously have not been involved in core activities of the church. It can be the beginning of a new journey of faith. A suggested format for reviewing and reporting progress of the new initiatives can be used as below.





Vision and Action Plans Review Format				
Plans/Tasks 2015 - 2017	Specific Steps	Timescale	Responsibility	Current Status

### *Church Family Presentation*

The immediate impact of the PCC Away Day is usually very positive. There is often a positive feeling arising from the recognition of what is already being achieved and possibilities for the future.

However, there will also be some feelings of concern:

- The possibilities are great, but they are also daunting
- The existing stalwarts will be asked to do even more
- The Incumbent will be expected to do everything

In order to make sure that the potential from the Away Day (and all that accompanies it) is turned to advantage it is important for underlying prayer and that the final 'Vision and Plans' are presented to the church family.

**The best way to achieve this will vary, but the most probable approaches are:**

- a) A parish event with refreshments, or
- b) During worship services and / or
- c) Publication of leaflets, brochures or articles

**It can also be helpful to:**

- Write and publish a Parish Vision Prayer and pray at services / meetings / individually.
- House Groups / Prayer Groups to talk and pray about the priorities that came out of the PCC Away Day.
- A monthly (electronic) prayer letter celebrating prayers and confronting challenges to be circulated.

