Stage 2: Know Your Church

Session 2 – A church in a community

One of the key aims of this stage is to explore how Holy Trinity church might help its community flourish. However, if the church is going to offer itself as a resource to the local neighbourhood, it needs to know enough about itself to be able to understand the contribution that it can offer. So the session is intended to increase our knowledge by developing a profile of the church and its congregation.

Session Objectives

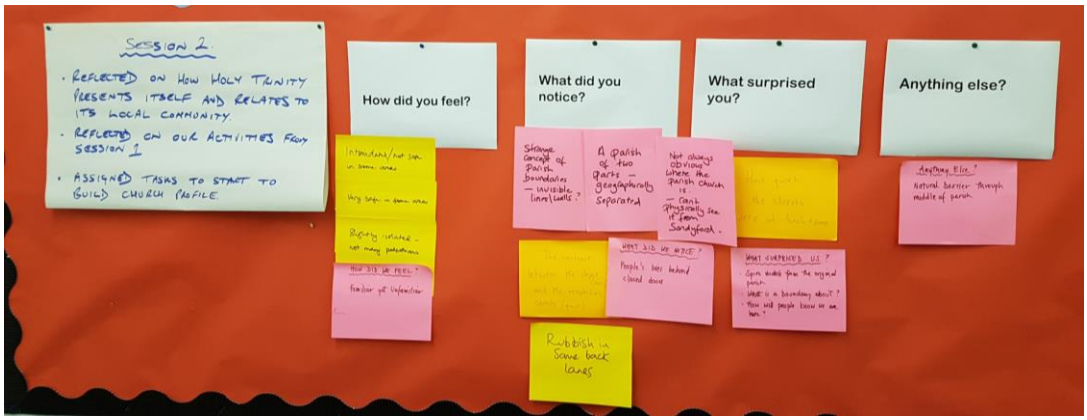
At the end of this session, we should have:

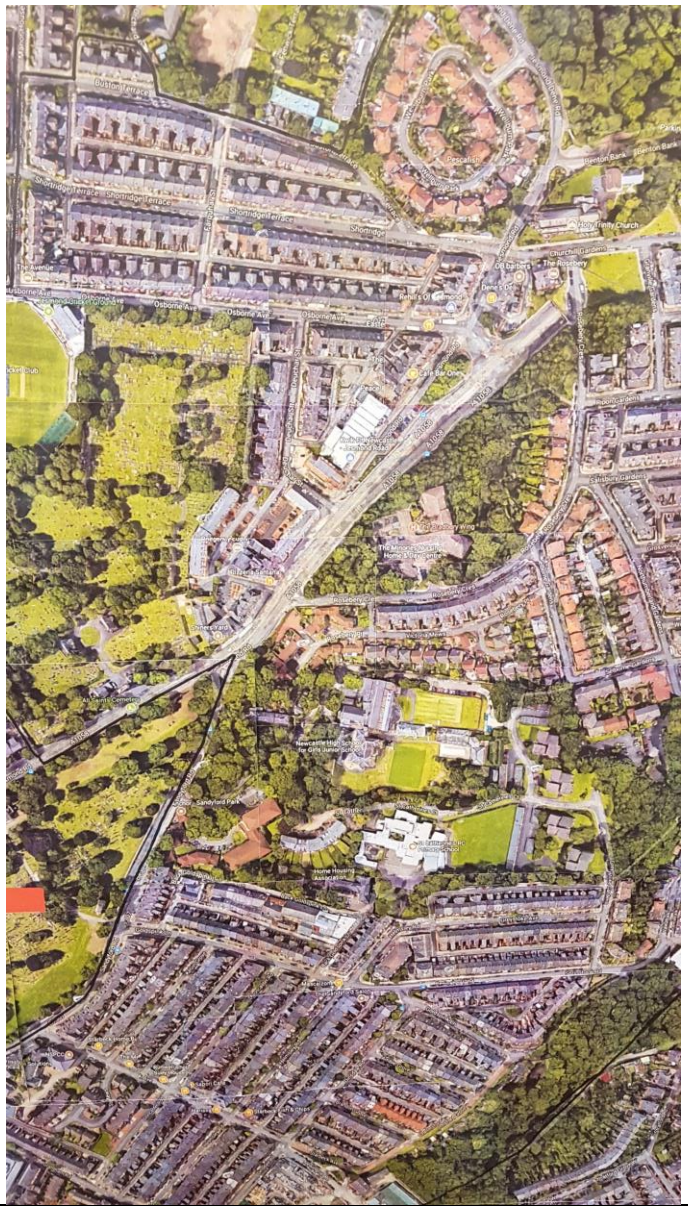
- Reflected on the experiences of doing the prayer walks and gathering information
- Reflected on how Holy Trinity presents itself and relates to its local community at present
- Have assigned tasks in order to build a church profile

Session Overview

	Activity
	Introduction to session Steve introduced the session by outlining the key Objectives – see above
	Feedback from the prayer walk We began by splitting into two groups in order to discuss our various experiences of undertaking prayer walks around the whole of the parish. In order to focus our discussion we used the following questions: • How did you feel? • What did you notice? • What surprised you? The summary of our discussions were recorded on "post its" and put up on the display boards and listed below **How did you feel? :** familiar yet unfamiliar, slightly isolated – not many pedestrians, intimidated/not safe in some areas, **What did you notice? :** rubbish in some back lanes, the strange concept of parish boundaries – invisible lines/walls, people's lives behind closed doors, the contrast between depos (south of parish) and the residential streets, not always obvious where the parish church is – can't physically see it from Sandyford.

What surprised you? : how quiet the streets were at lunch time, spire visible from the original parish but not the new areas, what is a boundary about?, how will people know we are here?





We also had some discussion about how we talk about the parish recognising that there seems to be some distinct differences across the whole parish particularly in terms of demographics, and the recent addition of the Sandyford area. Tim pointed out that we needed to be mindful of the language we use in relation to the "new area" … encouraging us to think of the original and new as one parish. We also noted the accessibility of Holy Trinity (HT) – it is visible as a building from some parts of the parish yet not all of it.

We wondered if people in the Sandyford area would know that HT is their parish church and would they gravitate more towards Christchurch. This lead us neatly into discussion about How HT is viewed by others in the neighbourhood

How is our church perceived by the wider community?

Firstly we looked at the materials brought along about HT – photos, newsletters, flyers, archive material etc. We were fascinated by the archive material and old photos noticing that the interior of the building had not changed much. Some of the old church magazines went back to 1920 !! .

We used the questions in Appendix 5 to shape our discussions.

Diocese of Newcastle

Know Your Church, Know Your Neighbourhood

TOGETHER NEWCASTLE

Appendix 5: Thinking about our Church

The following questions are worth considering during the main task in this session.

1. How is our church perceived by others?

Think about the external appearance of your church and any associated buildings. Look again at the photographs you have brought with you and discuss your feelings with your group. Try to put yourself in the place of a visitor to the church and consider the following:

- What does the outside of the building look like?
- What impression does it give?
- What do the notice boards say about us?
- What about the interiors of our buildings?
- How well maintained are our non-worship spaces e.g. halls, loos, etc?
- Do our premises give a sense of welcome and hospitality?

2. How does the church relate to users of its premises?

Think about the organisations, events and activities that take place in your church's premises during the week. Divide these into 3 lists:

- Organisations and events which you think are mainly connected with regular churchgoers
- Things which involve fringe churchgoers
- Things attended mainly by people who rarely or never come to church

3. How does the church currently communicate with people in the local community?

Then think about the ways in which your church communicates with people in the parish – how and how often:

- What newsletters/leaflets are circulated and to whom? How frequently are they sent?
- What does their content say about the church?
- What is communicated through the internet?

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	The following were some of the key points **How is HT perceived by others?** Friends and family who had not been in the building before commented that *they "had no idea it was so lovely inside"* Inside there is life – the main church building is closed big and dark. What about a glass fronted entrance (seemed like this has been explored in the past) The church hall in particular the long wall *"doesn't smile however inside there is life and beauty"* *Could we project an image of the inside of the building on the outside of the building … sort of inside out?"* *"No idea it was so friendly and lively"* The notice board is a bit old fashioned We sometimes have a have a large banner on the fence – letting people know about some events e.g Messy church. We use the building as a bit of a magnet to draw people in – but we don't always seem to retain them/see them again People who come to events seem to be comfortable in the space **How does HT relate to users of its premises?** We had some discussion about the current use of both the church and the hall, there was a general view that younger people/parents come with children and older people come however the group in the middle there aren't as many. We noted the groups/Events which included • Vintage • Trinity Tots • Messy Church • Film night • Walking group • Various user groups in the hall – not necessarily connected with church • Birthday party bookings **How does HT communicate with people in the local community?** We noted that we leaflet the area for special events e.g. Christmas fair. We then had a discussion about leafleting parish in order to let people know about the change and that HT is their parish church however not sure a leaflet drop will unite the parish. Question from Tim regarding energy and what might be the best use of time and energy in order to make links, and create a sense of one parish. Maybe we need to consider something more geographically appropriate – a local presence, so people can get to know us before they think about coming to church – build some relationships locally first. One of the group acknowledge that this was one of the benefits of Barnabas and Jude's. Comment that when Barney and Jude's held a social/music night the building was full with students We have a website – the newsletter is replicated on the website, however the website could do with a bit of an update. Various Facebook pages for focussed activities e.g. Alternative Christmas Fair- Messy Church It was noted that the Messy Church Facebook page gets the largest number of hits particularly the links to the songs used at sessions available on you tube. We then had a discussion about identifying needs within the parish and how this is likely to be very different across the parish in which case do we do a different kind of church that responds to the identified need? Again this lead neatly into the next stage of the session

	Congregational conversations Steve explained the next stage of the process which is the task to be undertaken between session 2 and 3. On top of the knowledge gathered about church activities, it is also important to know about the community activities that church members are involved in. The group is encouraged to carry out conversations with members of the congregation asking for their perspectives on this process and what they might have to ofer. As a group we had a discussion about how best to do this • One to one • Small groups • During service on Sunday • Give out questionnaire take away and return There are costs and benefits with all the options and after some debate we decided to go for a filling in session during or at the end of a Sunday service on Sunday 3rd December. It was hoped that this would give the greater return rate and consistency in terms of information going out to the congregation as Tim would be able to introduce it and explain the purpose and process. We then went on to discuss the questions – Steve handed out Appendix 6, 7 and 8 Steve drew attention to the confidentiality policy Appendix 7. Then we worked through the information on Appendix 6 in particular the need to be clear about • The purpose of the information gathering – what is it for? • Who will see it – what will happen to the information? • Unless anyone wants an ongoing conversation or wants to know more the questionnaires are anonymous. The exception would be if any one shared information that caused concern regarding safeguarding in which case the information would have to be passed onto the safeguarding officer. It was agreed that the "question" template Appendix 8 needed to be amended as some of the questions are not critical or relevant to the process at HT. Steve Tim and Alison to work on these and a final copy will be prepared for circulation to the congregation on the 3rd December. Unfortunately we ran out of time so were unable to complete some other discussion items however we can pick these up next time Key questions: • Overall, how do you feel about the way HT presents itself? • Is this a fair reflection of the life that goes on within? To what extent does the church look inwards on itself, and how far is it ready to look out towards the whole neighbourhood? Also next time • How will the answers to the questionnaire be collated and by whom? • How will the information be fed back to the wider congregation and by whom?
	We closed our session with the Grace