

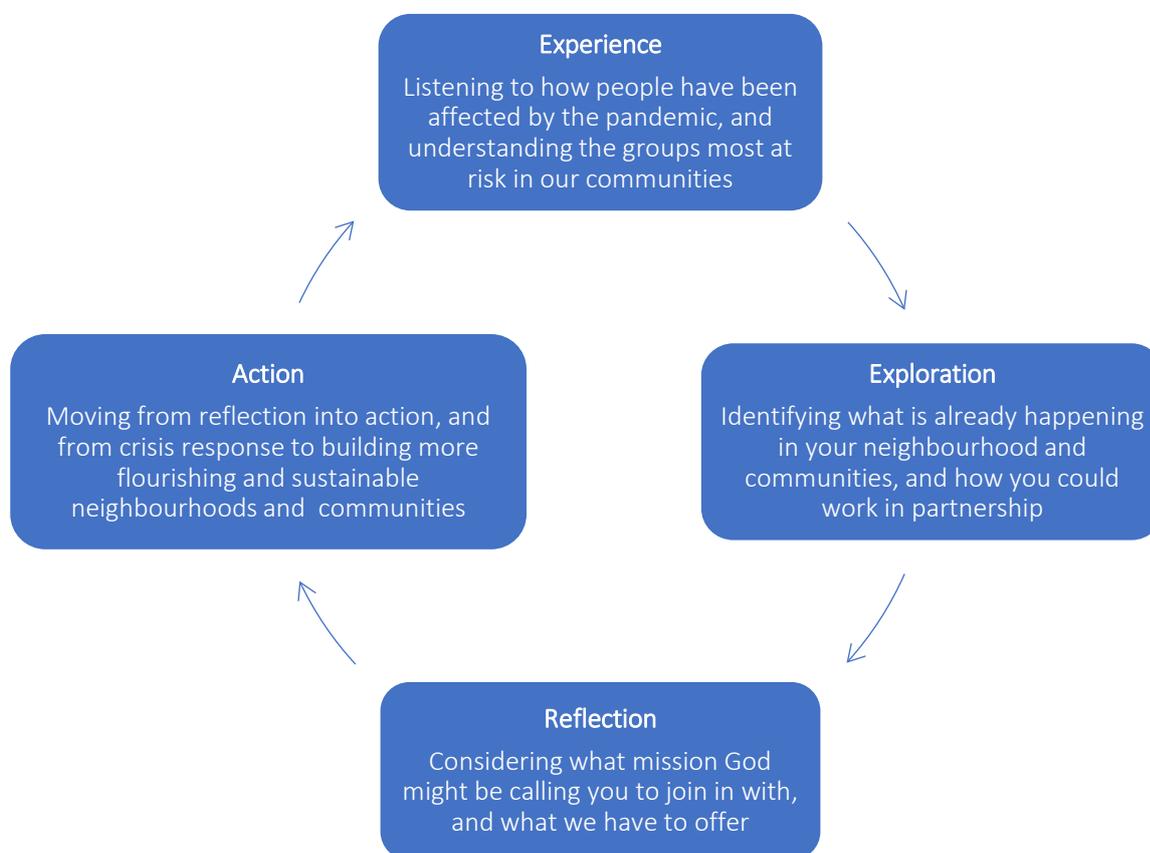
# New Reality, Same Mission: A stimulus to renewed community engagement as we emerge from the pandemic

## Summary of the Pastoral Cycle

The pandemic has highlighted existing injustices in society, and brought many new challenges. It has also prompted communities to pull together, and shown the value of bold, collective action for our wellbeing. As the lockdown begins to ease, churches and communities will find themselves in a range of different situations. Many challenges and possibilities will present themselves.

While the impulse to get stuck into 'doing something' may be hard to resist, it is important to begin by trying to understand the new reality, and reflect on its implications. How have people been affected? What is going on in our communities already? Where is God at work? What have we to offer? And how, therefore, should we join in?

One established model for such a process is the pastoral cycle. This booklet is structured around a version of this:



This model offers a series of stages to work upon, in an ongoing cycle. In practice, it is more like a continual spiral as we reflect on new experiences and situations we encounter and then move forward again.

The cycle can be approached at any stage; you might already be at the action stage, such as a volunteer at your local food pantry, before you hear about the experiences of hard-pressed families, which leads you to reflect upon how and why they are in the situation they find themselves. Or you might be praying, reflecting and trying to discern what God wants you to get involved with in these challenging times, which will hopefully lead you to some form of action as a response.

For each stage, there are **questions to consider** and **suggested action points**. Please do not feel constrained by these, but explore those which feel most pertinent to you and to your situation.

# Experience

## Listening to how people have been affected by the pandemic, and understanding the groups most at risk in our neighbourhoods and communities

We are all sharing the experience of the storm caused by Covid-19 and the lockdown, but it is increasingly clear we are not all in the same boat. Some are being buffeted but remain fundamentally secure, yet it is clear that some groups are at risk of being financially overwhelmed.

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

- ❖ How have you experienced this crisis?
- ❖ What have you found hardest?
- ❖ What have you appreciated, and where have you found new joy amidst the crisis?
- ❖ What have you learned about the world, your neighbourhood and local communities during this time?

(Source: adapted from Tearfund, [The World Rebooted](#))

## What's happening in our neighbourhoods and local communities?

The questions below can offer a good insight into thinking about the aspirations and needs of different individuals and communities in the area and, subsequently, how local churches might respond, in partnership with other agencies, for the mutual benefit of everyone.

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

Take some time to think about the neighbourhood where you live and/or your church is part of.

- ❖ Who lives in it? Who works in it? Who plays in it? Who learns in it?
- ❖ How have different groups been affected by the pandemic restrictions, or responded to it?
- ❖ How are local people – of different ages and backgrounds – feeling at the moment?
- ❖ Who might have been pushed 'to the margins' by the crisis? Which people, groups or voices are not being heard?

## Listening to those most affected by this crisis

*"We are not living through an era of change, but a change of era. We are entering a new chapter in the history of the world, and of the church. The scale of the challenge before us demands a careful response."* (Pope Francis)

**Action: Identify 6-10 people in your local neighbourhood to talk to who can help you understand the impact of the crisis from their perspective. This could include local professionals (teachers, health visitors etc), but should also include people directly affected (eg people who have lost family or friends, work or income, or who have had to apply for benefits – maybe for the first time).**

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

- ❖ What do we now know about the challenges and aspirations in our local neighbourhoods and communities?
- ❖ What injustices have been raised by your listening and research?

## Exploration

### Identifying what is already happening in your neighbourhood and local communities, and how you could work in partnership with others

The challenges in our local communities and wider society, exacerbated by the effects of the pandemic, are bigger than anything we can tackle alone. We will need to work in partnership with other agencies and faith groups to make a meaningful difference.

#### Questions for reflection and discussion:

- ❖ **What have we learned about what makes for good partnership work, both in the past and during this crisis?**
- ❖ **Who have we worked with before, and what do we know about how they have been responding to the situation?**

### Working in partnership

If you haven't already done so, investigating which local initiatives are already supporting local people is vitally important in order to avoid duplication of activities or services, and to offer to collaborate and potentially partner with local agencies working for the common good.

**Action: Contact your local councillor(s), Churches Together group, other faith leaders and community organisations to build an understanding of what is already going on locally in response to the crisis.**

**Action: Identify a shortlist of 3-4 local groups, organisations or networks that you might work in partnership with in developing your response. Have a conversation with each of them to see if they are interested in working in partnership, and what you could each bring to the partnership.**

### Supporting one another

One encouraging feature of the response to the pandemic was the way that many 'mutual aid' groups sprung up. These have a much more effective approach than traditional models of community service with their unhelpful, sharp distinction between 'helpers' and those being helped.

#### Question for reflection and discussion:

- ❖ **What are the benefits of a 'mutual aid' approach?**
- ❖ **How can you ensure that whatever you do enables and empowers individuals and local communities to flourish together, for mutual benefit?**

**Action: Investigate what mutual aid groups already exist in your neighbourhood and encourage church members to join them.**

# Reflection

## What does God ask of us?

As with all important questions, there are no quick, easy or set answers about what local churches, groups and individual Christians should do in their neighbourhood and communities in response to the current crisis. But it is abundantly clear that the mission to which God invites us is one which prioritises the needs of those who suffer most, especially in times of particular trial or challenge.

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

- ❖ **What do we see as our mission in this moment? As individuals, and as a church or group?**
- ❖ **Which stories and scriptural passages seem to have particular relevance?**
- ❖ **How can we mutually support each other in building God's kingdom in our own, everyday situations and realities?**

**Action: Pray & discuss together about what your response might look like.**

## What do we have to offer?

Having listened to the aspirations and concerns of people in your area, explored what others are doing, and reflected on your mission calling as an individual and as a church, it is time to reflect on what you might have to offer. As individuals and as a church, you will have a range of resources, experiences and skills that you might contribute.

**Action: Make a list of your resources and assets (including people) and the ways in which you might be able to offer them in your neighbourhood and to local communities.**

# Action

## Ideas for responding

An important stage in the pastoral cycle is action. This will be different in every context, but it's not all about big and exciting activities. Keep checking Walking the Way's [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) pages, as well as The [Church-Related Community Work news](#) and public [Facebook](#) group, [Walking the Way](#) and [URC](#) news pages, for simple stories of people serving their community in the name of Jesus. These include Wyke URC (Yorkshire), where woodturning and craft groups, unable to meet in the building, have worked at home to bring cheer to the community with some lovely wooden reindeer, and Diss URC, where the organist plays on the busiest shopping days during lockdown, taking requests, to spread a bit of cheer. God is already at work in your life, through the gifts and talents you already have. The challenge is using these to serve everyone.

### Questions for reflection and discussion:

- ❖ Taking into account all that we have experienced, explored and reflected upon, what are our priorities?
- ❖ Who will we work with on this?

**Action: Turn your priorities into a plan of action and take that forward with your identified partner(s).**

## What comes next?

Working in partnership to support those most hard-pressed and at risk in our local neighbourhood and communities is a vital short-term priority. However, as we begin to emerge from lockdown, we also have important long-term choices to make about the kind of society and economy that we rebuild. We've seen how deeply we all need each other, and how our current set-up fails to meet the needs of too many of us.

### Questions for reflection, prayer and discussion:

- ❖ What part could you and your church play in reshaping society – locally, nationally and internationally?
- ❖ Based on what we've learnt and are learning, how can we ensure that the church, and society as a whole, enables everybody to flourish?
- ❖ In particular, what can be done to help those facing greatest hardships (locally and globally)?

**Action: Commit to doing at least one thing as an outcome from your discussions and prayers, and then reflect on the experience.**

## Who can help us?

Remember to visit [www.urch.org.uk/same-mission](http://www.urch.org.uk/same-mission) for the latest full edition of the 'New Reality, Same Mission' booklet, as well as up to date information and suggestions on who can provide support, guidance and funding as you continue to explore the pastoral cycle.

Arguably the best source of support comes from others who are Walking the Way of Jesus alongside us. As such, we'd also love to hear from you and how you're finding the 'New Reality, Same Mission' materials, especially the pastoral cycle. It is vital that we all share, not only in good news and practice, but in the challenges and questions which emerge along the way. E-mail the Walking the Way team at [wtw@urch.org.uk](mailto:wtw@urch.org.uk) or call us on 020 7520 2718.