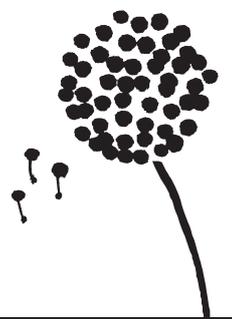


Mobilising the church



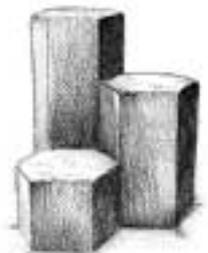
TEARFUND

A PILLARS Guide

by Isabel Carter



Partnership In Local Language Resources



Mobilising the church

A PILLARS Guide

by Isabel Carter

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Mobilising the church

A PILLARS Guide

Introduction to PILLARS Guides

This guide is designed for use in small group situations where one or more people are literate and confident enough to lead others in group discussion. Ideally just one or two double pages should be used each time, allowing plenty of time for discussion of the issues raised and for carrying out some of the practical ideas suggested. It would be helpful for the discussion leader to have some understanding of community development. This guide, unlike others, is written specifically for church members and those with a role in church leadership. It provides material for discussion, which can be used during leadership training, as part of a regular group meeting, or for use in small groups during whole church meetings. It also includes a number of Bible studies that are included with the discussion materials.

PILLARS guides aim to increase confidence among group members, so that they can successfully manage change within their own situation without the need for outside intervention. They try to build on existing knowledge and experiences among the members or within their community, so that different ideas can be tried out, adapted, and then either abandoned if not found useful, or adopted if found useful.

This guide encourages churches to see their work not only in terms of sharing and teaching spiritual truths but also in providing practical help and support within their communities. It includes ideas for helping the whole church to gain a vision for working in this way, based on biblical teaching. It looks at the need for servant leadership, which builds up and strengthens all church members. It gives suggestions as to how churches can widen their vision and improve their support for their communities. There are also pages on the importance of changing attitudes, learning through Bible study, planning and encouraging listening and facilitation skills.

The Bible studies and discussion questions are an essential and ongoing part of the process. They are best used in small groups, with time for everyone to discuss.

Objectives of this guide

- To take a fresh look at the purpose of the church
- To build understanding, based on biblical teaching, of the role of the church in combining the role of preaching the good news with practical involvement in the lives of the poor
- To give church leaders and members confidence to include practical service with those in need within their church's role
- To encourage vision and wholeness in the work of individual churches
- To enhance the work of the church by encouraging leadership and facilitation skills and by the development of small Bible study and support groups

Anticipated outcomes

- Leaders with increased confidence in their ability to direct and support new areas of practical work and activities
- Increased understanding of the role of the church in combining the task of preaching the good news with practical involvement in the lives of the poor
- Churches which encourage the development of leadership skills and are prepared for growth and change
- Small, discussion-based Bible study groups meeting regularly
- Improved relationships between the church, local organisations and the community, through working together to improve the lives of the poor in the surrounding area
- Healthy, growing churches
- Improved skills in listening and facilitation
- Increased confidence among church members in using their gifts and abilities, both within and outside the church
- Openness among church members to express differing views and opinions in discussion

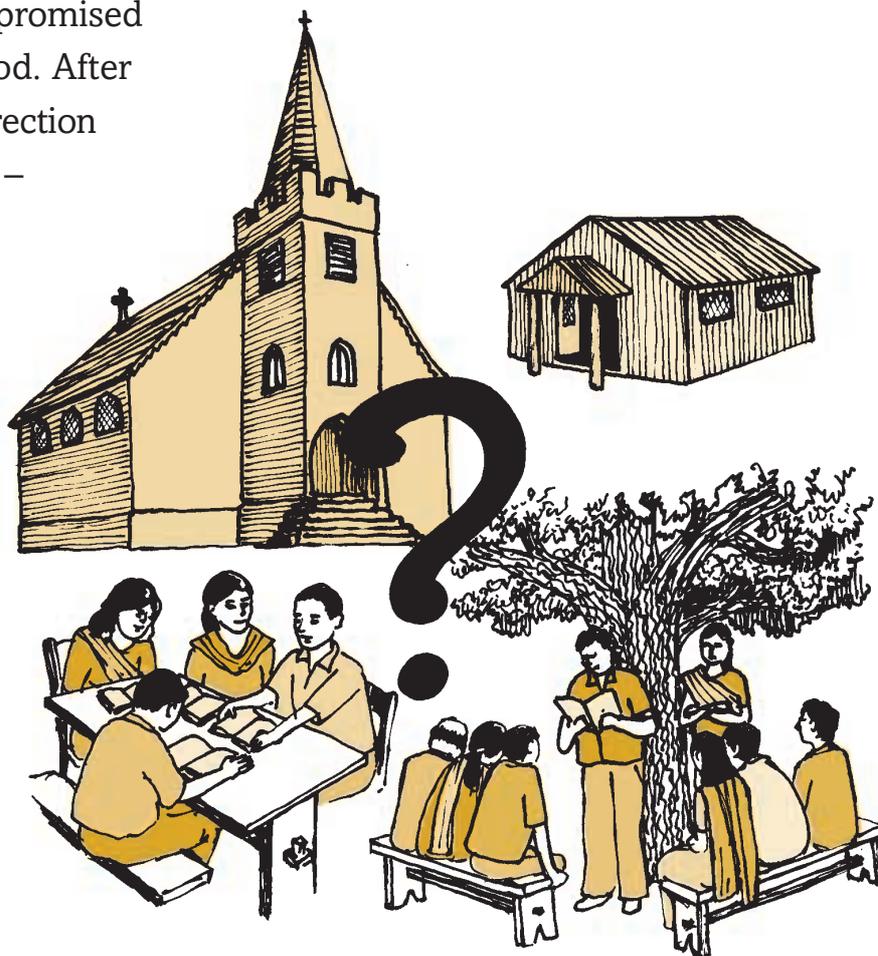
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What is the church?

To many people the word 'church' means a large building where Christians meet. To Christians it usually means the place where they meet with other believers to worship God. This may be in a home, a school, a church or under a tree. The word means both a place and a group of believers. It can also mean a much larger grouping of churches, all believing the same things and worshipping in a similar way. There is also a third meaning, when the word refers to all Christian believers.

Jesus first used the word that is translated 'church' in Matthew's gospel, (Matthew 16:18). He used it to describe the gathering of people who believed in him – his followers. The first disciples believed that Jesus was the long-promised Christ and the Son of God. After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, these disciples – inspired by the Holy Spirit – played a key part in establishing the early church with the community of Jesus' followers.



Discussion

B1

- What do we think of when someone says the word ‘church’?
- In 1 Peter 2:4-8 Jesus is referred to as the cornerstone or foundation. What is the significance of the cornerstone when building a house? What does this tell us about Jesus’ place in the church?
- Read Matthew 16:13-18. What did Jesus mean when he talked about ‘my church’? Remember that at that time there were no church buildings. The early Christians sometimes gathered to worship in the temple at Jerusalem and probably in Jewish synagogues, but mainly in private houses.
- Jesus himself never mentioned the idea of a building or a denomination. Why do Christians today seem to think these are so important? How much value do we give to our buildings and denomination?
- Read John 17:20-23. Unity was very important to Jesus. How effectively do all the different denominations and groups that make up ‘the church’ work together in unity? What could we do better? How would this affect the witness of the church?

How does Jesus view the church?

At the start of his ministry, Jesus read a passage from Isaiah 61:1-2 in a synagogue. The passage described the work of the Redeemer in preaching good news, freeing captives, giving sight to the blind and bringing justice to those who were oppressed. Jesus said that this prophecy was now fulfilled by his arrival.

In the gospels we learn of how Jesus carried out his ministry. He went out to people in the towns and villages, with his eyes open to their needs. He brought healing and released people from the power of demons. He challenged the authorities over unjust or hypocritical practices and preached the good news of the Kingdom of God. He sent out his disciples to do the same with little formal training and no resources.

Jesus spent a lot of time with the 12 disciples, teaching and training them and showing them how to live through his own example. He equipped them to continue his work on earth. Jesus' challenge to the disciples (Matthew 10 and 28) was to 'go and do the same'. We are challenged in just the same way by him to share in his work of caring for the needy, to teach others about all that he has commanded, and to make new disciples.



Discussion

B2

- What is traditionally seen as the main role of the church worldwide?
- What does our church believe is its most important role?
- Read Luke 4:14-21 and Matthew 9:35-10:1. Discuss the different roles that Jesus came to fulfil.
 - What do each of them mean in our community today?
 - How did Jesus put his words into action?
 - Does his way of life differ from our present way of thinking about the work of the church? If so, why?
- How can our church respond to his challenge to the disciples and to us?
- What opportunities does our church have to be a positive influence in our community? How could we be a more positive influence?

How do we see our church?

Work in small groups and think about our own church. Describe what our church is like, using a picture or symbol. Draw this inside a large circle on a big sheet of paper. Then share together and explain what the drawings mean. You could also use a role play to describe what our church is like.

There are many ways in which our church affects the wider community. Some are open and obvious, while others are more hidden, particularly in countries where believers face opposition. These may include practical caring, visiting schools or hospitals, or meeting with community leaders. Think of all the different groups of people in the wider community who do not belong to our church. Discuss what each of these groups of people might think about the church.

Using a coloured pen, draw arrows coming out from the circle around the church to show each positive influence of the church within the community. Use thicker arrows for the most important influences. Label each arrow. Use dotted lines to show possible future influences.

Share and explain the information on each piece of paper and take time to discuss what we have discovered.



Discussion

B3

- Thinking of the pictures drawn, what sort of church do the people around us think we are?
- What is the relationship between our church and the different groups in the community around it? How can we improve our relationship with different groups in the community?
- Read Matthew 5:13. Salt can preserve food. It also brings flavour to food.
 - Why does Jesus say that Christians are ‘the salt of the earth’?
 - How can we be like ‘salt’?
 - In what ways could we lose our ‘saltiness’?
- Read Matthew 5:14-16. How does our own ‘light’ shine on those around us?
 - Do we sometimes try to cover up the ‘light’?
 - How can we shine more brightly?
- What are the needs and challenges for our church, both from within and from outside? How many of these are we meeting today?
- Are we aware of issues that cause conflict or lack of unity within our church? How could we try to deal with these?
- What are the likely future challenges for our church?

Serving the Kingdom

Jesus was very clear, from his example and his words, that serving the Kingdom of God means more than just preaching. Through his example and through his teaching, he challenges us not just to talk about our faith, but to put it into action by caring for the poor, the sick and those suffering from injustice.

It is not enough for the church to preach the good news of the gospel in the hope that people will come to hear it. Jesus wants us to go out into our towns, cities and villages, declaring the good news and to **'be** good news'. Most of the disciples had little education – they included fishermen and labourers. Jesus did not train experts in understanding people's problems. He trained ordinary people of faith to continue his work – people who long for the Kingdom of God to come on this earth. Jesus inspired the disciples by his teaching and example and then sent them out to share the good news without their own food, money or equipment. In the same way today, ordinary Christians can share that same inspiration and go out to transform their communities.



Discussion

B4

- Read James 2:14-17. Discuss how well our faith is shown through practical action and caring.
 - What are the key practical needs experienced by people here?
 - What does this teaching challenge us to do in our community?

- Read Mark 6:7-13. Discuss how Jesus equipped the disciples before sending them out.
 - Did the disciples understand who Jesus really was when they were first sent out? How well did they know him?
 - How did Jesus prepare them for this work?
 - What resources did they need?
 - Why do we think the disciples were sent out in pairs?

- As a church, do we sometimes delay taking action and showing genuine love until we are ready? Does this matter?
 - What might be the results of such delay?

- How would our church respond if people who were very poor and dirty or who spoke a different language, for example, began to come to our services? What other kinds of people might prove challenging to fit into our present services or way of worship?

- Do we expect new people in our church to fit into our ways of worshipping and living before we really welcome and care for them? How could we be more welcoming to poor people or those of different cultures?

- Sometimes as Christians we can be unaware of how others around us are suffering. We think we understand – but we lack experience and insight. Consider a really challenging situation that people in our community experience. This could be nursing someone who is dying of AIDS, caring for a child with disabilities, working long hours in a factory or in the fields, or sleeping out at night on the streets. As a group, consider the realities and difficulties they would experience. You may like to invite someone in such a situation to come and share with you. What have you learned about their life and their particular needs? How could we respond?

Valuing the church

Jesus often met with ordinary, often poor and uneducated, people. He valued them, loved them despite their sin and understood their deepest needs and longings. Even more amazing is that he trusted them, and others like them, to do his work. Nothing has changed in over 2,000 years. Jesus still trusts us to do his work, despite all our failings. Knowing how much we are loved, valued and trusted by him should transform the way we look at ourselves and those around us.

The church's role is to continue Jesus' work in preaching the gospel message, teaching biblical understanding and carrying out social action. Jesus is still present with us in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church has a crucial role to play. We are God's development workers as he brings blessing to a needy world through us.

Though the church is made up of individuals who can help poor and needy people in different ways, it is much more effective when it acts as a body, combining and valuing the different gifts of members. The church is unique in its ability to influence society and help people who are poor. Church leaders can speak out and challenge the rich and powerful. In many countries, local churches provide a trusted network reaching into almost every community.



Discussion

B5

- Which needs could our church help to meet, both among our members and in the wider community?
- Do all members of our church feel equally valued and welcomed? If not, why not? How could this be changed?
- Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-30
 - Which part of the body does each of us feel we are like? Why is this?
 - How does the body work most effectively? What does this mean in the life of our church?
 - What lessons can we learn from this Bible passage?
- Try this useful practical exercise during a church meeting. Ask people to stand as they hear an activity which they can help with. Ask the following questions:
 - Who is good at digging?
 - Who is good at talking to people?
 - Who is good at cooking?
 - Who is good at carrying heavy loads?
 - Who is good at house building or repairing?

Make sure the list of questions will include skills that everyone present can help with. Remind people that we all have useful skills we can use to help others.

- How does our church build up confidence and skills among our members? How could this be done more effectively?

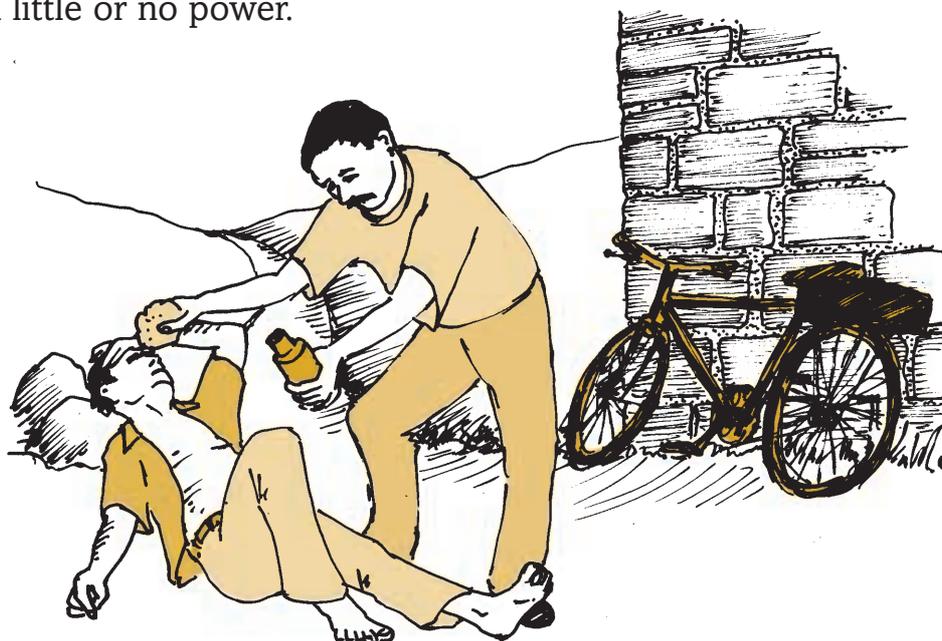
Acting as Good Samaritans

Jesus had compassion for people with all kinds of needs, including disability, sickness, ignorance and injustice. Churches, too, should be willing to help meet all kinds of needs. Though our church may have few financial resources, it has people willing to pray and show love in caring for the needs of others.

Like the Good Samaritan, Christians need to be ready to meet the needs of our 'neighbours', whoever they are. There are many needs around us but we should not feel so overwhelmed that we do nothing. Each of us can make a real difference to the lives of others.

Sometimes needs may be very practical. Widows, orphans or those with disabilities may need help in their homes. The church may be able to encourage local government or organisations to help improve water supplies, healthcare or education. Improving literacy skills may increase people's confidence. Young people under pressure to use drugs or take part in sex for financial reasons may find discussion and support groups helpful in understanding their options.

Where people face injustice, such as over access to land or unfair exploitation at work, the church could find experienced advisers to help defend the rights of those with little or no power.



Discussion

B6

- Read Luke 10:25-37. Who in the community are our neighbours? What needs do they have? How does Jesus tell us to love our neighbours?
- What are the challenges we may find in loving our neighbours? How can we help each other overcome these challenges?
- Our upbringing can make it hard for us to relate to certain groups of people – those of different age, level of education, caste, tribal group, or those who are very poor. How can we overcome these feelings? How can we help our children to grow up able to relate to people of all kinds?
- Through prayer, God can give us real insight and wisdom into different situations. How can we know whether such guidance is of God, or simply our own thinking?
- What additional skills or resources do we need to enable us to help people?
- What difference can we make in helping people in our community without lots of training or hiring expensive ‘experts’?

The demands of leadership

People often choose strong individuals with influence and wealth for leadership positions. Leadership involves taking responsibility for decisions that involve other people. It means making difficult decisions that may involve risk. Leaders who can effectively share their vision with others will inspire others. There are many different styles of leadership, including leaders who command, leaders who consult and leaders who enable.

Leaders should stand out and be distinctive because of their character. They should inspire others to lead lives that set a good example to others. However, leaders experience the same temptations and problems as other people. We often find that leaders feel tired, alone, overworked and unable to make effective changes. Some may give in to temptations such as the desire for power, status, money or sexual relationships outside marriage.

Using power wisely is one of the most important issues of our time. In the news we often hear stories of how people have abused their power. Effective leaders can show the way forward, not only within the church but in society as well.



Discussion

B7

- What examples of inspiring leadership can we think of? What is it about them that inspires us?
- Do we know people in positions of responsibility who feel tired, alone or over-worked? Do they feel able to make effective changes? How can we support them in their role?
- How do our personal lives affect the life of the church?
- What are the consequences for society if leaders do not live righteous personal lives?
- Jesus also experienced temptation. Read Luke 22:39-46 and discuss how he resisted it.
- Read Mark 10:35-45.
 - What are the characteristics of worldly leaders?
 - What kind of leaders is Jesus looking for?
 - How are they to be different from worldly leaders?
- Think of some ways in which Jesus served those around him.
- Is there a lack of effective leadership in our societies today?

A biblical model of leadership

The Bible gives many examples of how God provided leaders for his people. Jesus is the role model for all leaders. He had more power, wisdom and insight than any leader could hope for, yet his ministry was always one of service and encouragement. His teaching was inspiring and challenging. We can learn so much from Jesus' example of leadership. Other inspiring biblical leaders include Moses, Joseph, Nehemiah and Daniel. Different situations may require different kinds of skills in leadership – organisation, wisdom, humility, strength and vision.

Jesus had a deep knowledge and understanding of the scriptures. He often used this knowledge to highlight important teaching or to answer challenging questions. He also spent much time in prayer and was clearly guided by God in all he did.

Jesus resisted all temptations. Other biblical leaders sometimes failed in this. But all had a vital and close relationship with God, dependent on prayer, study of the scriptures and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Though they made mistakes, God showed patience and forgiveness in his dealings with them.

Biblical leaders often shared the burden of leadership and trained others to take leadership responsibilities. For example, Jesus spent much time with his twelve disciples; Daniel had three close friends; Joseph and Nehemiah organised well and delegated responsibilities to others.



Discussion

B8

- What examples of inspiring leaders are there in the Bible? (For example, Moses in Exodus chapter 3, chapter 4:1-17 and chapter 17 and Daniel in Daniel chapter 6.) What is it about them that inspires us? How much were they called and inspired by God?
- In what ways is Jesus the role model for all Christian leaders? Make a list of all the leadership qualities that Jesus shows.
- Read 1 Samuel 16:7. What does God say he looks at when selecting a leader? What does this mean for us?
- Read the following passages: Exodus 3:11, Judges 6:15, 1 Samuel 9:21, 1 Kings 3:7 and Jeremiah 1:6.
 - What sort of people is God choosing for leadership roles in these passages?
 - What were their attitudes?
 - Can we think of examples of such leaders today?
- How do our leaders serve and encourage others?
- Who makes the decisions in our church? How much are church members involved in prayer and support for leadership?
- Draw a diagram to represent the structures within our church. How are people given opportunities to serve or to lead?
- Are there opportunities for leaders to meet regularly with other leaders? How could such meetings encourage open sharing of work issues and pressures? Could they encourage leaders to be more accountable to others?

Servant leadership

Just before Jesus began his ministry, he was led into the desert, where he took time to reflect and consider his role. He was tempted to abuse his great power as a leader, but chose instead to become a model of servant leadership.

Jesus never looked for a comfortable home or wealth. He gave his life to serving others, through his teaching, healing and his love for the people he met. Although the disciples made a lot of mistakes and often disappointed him, he continued to encourage, support and challenge them. His example of servant leadership should inspire, challenge and remain a goal for all who are in positions of responsibility.

Servant leadership puts the needs of others first and listens to their views. Some groups within the church, such as the elderly, those with disabilities, women or children, may have few opportunities to share their needs and views. Their views, opinions and contributions to the life of the church need to be valued. In this way, decision-making can be shared, owned and followed by all church members.



Discussion

B9

- How can we follow the example of Jesus in serving others? Why can this be particularly difficult to do in leadership roles?
- Read John 13:1-17 which describes the example of leadership that Jesus provides.
 - What model of leadership does Jesus show here?
 - How would we feel if we were one of the disciples at that meal?
 - What should our response be to Jesus' action?
 - What characteristics of leadership does Jesus show here?
- Ask people to physically wash each other's feet. Discuss how this felt for the person washing the feet. Discuss how this felt for the people whose feet were washed. What does it teach us about leadership?
- Leadership is never easy. Do we support and pray for our leaders as much as we should? In what other ways can we help and encourage our leaders?
- Read 1 Corinthians 3:18-20. In many situations it can be very hard for leaders or those in authority to 'look foolish' or let others take charge. How does Jesus' example of washing the disciples' feet challenge our views on leadership?

Developing leadership skills

Effective Christian leaders inspire their followers, encouraging them to develop as individual Christians and to put their faith into action. The most effective Christian leaders are usually those who take time to identify, support and inspire others to share in their work.

Supporting and training new leaders for all aspects and levels of church life is very important. Leaders should give time to develop leadership skills in others. They must first believe in the potential of other people and be prepared to share responsibility with them. They need to give time, commitment and prayer to train and support people in these new responsibilities. People will make mistakes. Leaders need to develop patience and forgiveness and encourage people to learn from their mistakes and to continue.

Every church has people with potential leadership skills who may lack confidence and experience. Their potential may need to be recognised and encouraged through delegating responsibility, training and opportunities for service. Sometimes cultural views about leadership may need to be challenged by looking at biblical teaching, particularly relating to women, family influence or government practices.



Discussion

B10

- Is leadership a gift that can be developed or a calling from God?
- Read 1 Peter 5:1-4. List the characteristics of good leaders mentioned in this passage.
- Read 1 Timothy 3:1-13 where Paul talks about the qualities required in church leaders within the culture of those times.
 - Make a list of the qualities that Paul mentions here.
 - Which of these qualities should all Christians share?
 - Can these qualities be shown by women in today's culture who have leadership potential?
- How are people selected for responsibilities within our church? What skills and background are needed?
- Should people with responsibilities for leading others be well-educated and literate? Do they have to be men or older people?
- Is leadership always for life? Think of situations where those in leadership may outlive their usefulness. How can we learn to assess our work and know when to let others take the work forward? How can we train others to take on a leadership role?
- Do good leaders need much training? If so, what kind of training?

The value of small study groups

There is much emphasis on learning about biblical truths through preaching. However, there is also great value in studying the Bible in small groups. God does not need experts to help us make sense of the Bible. When people discover truth and new meaning from studying the Bible together, they are more likely to take action as a result.

Groups of 6–12 people who regularly meet together for Bible study and discussion develop as disciples. As people build relationships, they can pray together, discuss personal concerns and gain advice, fellowship and friendship. People with potential leadership skills may be identified through such small groups.

Each person needs to know they are valued and their gifts and skills appreciated. Membership of small groups can help people feel part of the church family, particularly in large churches where it can be hard to get to know others well. People outside the church may find such groups helpful in learning about the Christian faith.

Good Bible study notes that encourage discussion through questions can be of great value. Where possible, church leaders should provide or develop such materials.



- What have we found helpful about meeting as a group to discuss the information in this PILLARS guide? How do we learn from each other? What could be improved?
- What experience do other people in our church have of studying the Bible in small groups? How could we encourage this?
- Read Luke 6:12-16.
 - What did Jesus do before choosing twelve disciples to become apostles?
 - At what stage of his ministry did he choose them?
 - How much time do you think he spent with his disciples?
- If a church wants to form small Bible study groups, should people choose their own groups or should the leadership place people into groups which mix ages, abilities and men and women, and in which people may not know each other well?
- What kind of training or support would help someone to lead or facilitate a small study group? How could a leader of a small group train another assistant leader?
- How can those leading a Bible study make sure that people keep to the subject?
- How can we help people who feel uncomfortable about praying or worshipping in small groups?

Listening to others

We need to value and love people for themselves – seeing the image of God in them, no matter what their situation. We need to value what they have to share and their ability to understand their situations. We should give people confidence to look at themselves and their situation by listening to their views. We should not judge other people or make decisions for them. Instead we need to respect their potential and help them make decisions themselves.

The church should not expect poor people to come to them. Like Jesus, we need to go out into our community and build relationships of understanding and trust with those who are suffering. We must understand the real issues that people face in their lives. We should develop listening skills to use both within the church and the community. It takes skill to put people at ease and encourage them to share their feelings and discuss issues. Good listening can help people voice their needs and priorities too. Our own views and feelings must be put aside while we really listen and understand their situations.

These processes usually take a very long time, and much patience, humility and prayer is needed. Skills in listening can be developed as we change our own attitudes and beliefs about others.



Discussion

B12

- When talking to people, do we really listen to what they are saying or are we preparing what we are going to say next?
- Read Philippians 2:1-11.
 - Are members of our church in agreement over all the major issues that affect our church?
 - We read in verses 3 and 4 about how we need to think of others as better than ourselves. How do we do this as individuals? How do we do this as a church?
- Reflect on how much it cost Jesus to give his life for us. What was his ultimate reward?
- Do we assume we know better than others, particularly those who are poor or who are seen as of little importance by society?
- When people come to us for advice, are we always able to give them good advice? Do we ever try to encourage them to make their own decisions about what to do?
- How can we help each other to become better listeners?

Developing facilitation skills

People who are good listeners may also become good facilitators, able to lead others in discussion in small groups. Good facilitation is not easy. The facilitator's work is to build the right atmosphere, to help each individual to participate and to work together. Good facilitation is much more about listening than talking.

Good facilitators require many skills. They need to be relaxed and good at building relationships. Humour can often help to create a good atmosphere that helps people share their feelings and views. It is important that facilitators are aware of the different needs within the group, encouraging those who lack confidence to speak, and dealing tactfully with people who talk too much or whose views are unhelpful. They should treat everyone equally and with respect.

Facilitators can help discussion by making sure everyone understands any new words and sometimes rewording questions. They do not need to know the answers to all questions. However, it is helpful if they know how to help others find the right answers. Summarising decisions reached within a group can be very useful when facilitators are either taking things forward or concluding a discussion.



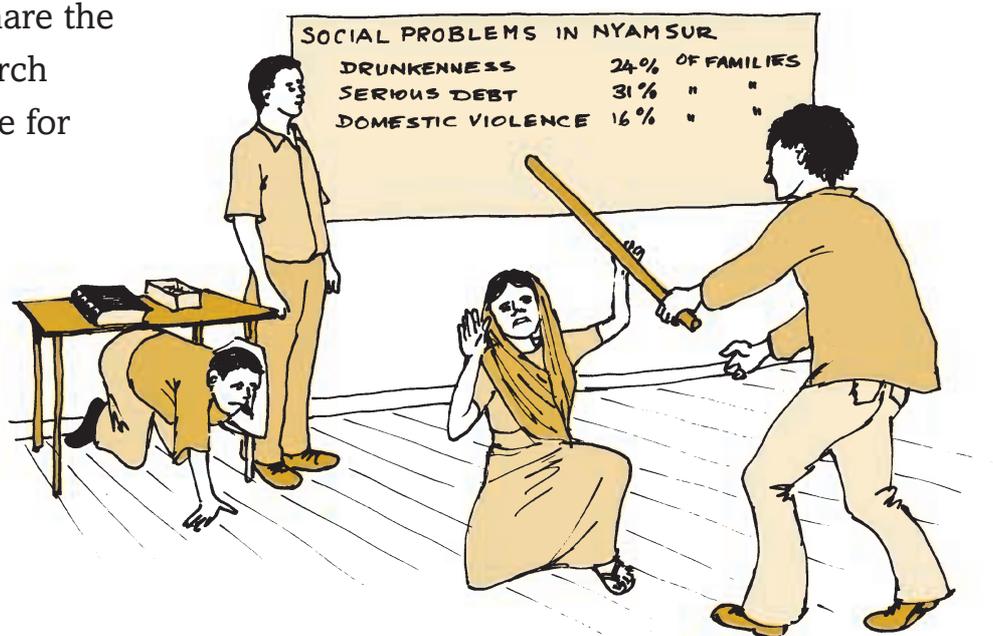
- How can we encourage people who lack self-confidence, or who are very shy and quiet, to share their views?
- What happens if one or two people dominate group discussion, particularly if other group members do not share their views? How can such a situation be avoided?
- What should facilitators do if they do not know the answers to questions?
- Read John 4:1-26. Here we read of how Jesus met with a Samaritan woman. Travelling through the country of Samaria was the shortest route between Judea and Galilee. However, relationships between Jews and Samaritans were very poor. It was unusual for Jews to speak with Samaritans, or for men to speak to women in such a way. In addition it was very unusual for a woman to draw water at midday, which indicates that this woman felt herself an outcast from society.
 - What barriers could have made it difficult for Jesus to listen properly to this woman?
 - What are the barriers we find in listening to people and valuing their views?
 - How can we overcome these barriers?
 - What was it about Jesus that encouraged this woman to talk with him?
 - What was the outcome of their discussion?
- How could we improve our skills as facilitators?

Understanding the real needs

Churches who want to respond to the real needs of their community as a whole, rather than as individuals, need to understand the common experiences and priorities of those who are suffering in the local community. Sometimes this may involve dealing with very sensitive issues that people rarely talk about openly. Church leaders or members may assume they understand the problems of their local community, but assuming is not the same as knowing. We must listen to those who are suffering in order to understand their situation.

Agree on a list of questions that will help to find out as much as possible about problems within the local community. Help members practise using facilitation skills. Then encourage them to talk to different groups of people, particularly people whose views are often ignored – such as women, children, older people and people with disabilities – and ask what would help improve their lives. Government statistics, surveys, school attendance figures and health concerns at clinics are examples of useful background information.

Plan a meeting to share the findings with all church members. Allow time for them to reflect on possible responses the church could make. Sermons, Bible studies and role play can help people consider their responses.



- In what ways are church members already involved in the community? What are the issues that church members feel most comfortable about helping with?
- What are the issues that local people feel most strongly about?
- What are others in the community doing to respond to needs? Where are the gaps?
- Could we learn from other churches or organisations that have been involved in responding to their communities' needs?
- Read Nehemiah 1:1-11. Nehemiah was a Jew in exile in a foreign land. Some of the Jews had returned to Judah after their oppressors, the Babylonians, were overthrown by the Assyrians. But many of the Jews felt settled where they were and so remained in exile.
 - What was Nehemiah's response on hearing the news of his homeland?
 - What does this say about his character?
 - How does this passage challenge us in our relationship with God and in our response to the needs of others?
- What are the key findings about local issues that have most surprised or shocked church members? Are there ways in which the church could help with these? If so, how?
- Discuss how these findings can be shared within a church meeting. Suggestions could include:
 - Making posters or charts
 - Acting out a role play
 - Doing a quiz called 'How well do we know our community?' where we ask questions about our community. The winner is the person with the most correct answers!
 - Asking a proportion of the church members to stand up to represent the number of people in the community who are unemployed, homeless or suffering from domestic violence, for example.
- The church family should model the kingdom of God, caring and supporting all church members. In this way, it will provide a powerful witness in the community. Are there also church members who need our help and support?

Co-ordinating our response

Meet together as a whole church with community representatives to agree on the response to the community survey. Both church and community need to 'own' these decisions so people will remain committed to giving their support. Place people into small groups, giving each group just one area of need to discuss.

Ask each group to discuss possible ways in which the church could respond to this particular need. What could be done by working together to make a real difference? Encourage people to be imaginative. After an hour they should agree together on two or three positive responses. Now give each group another topic to discuss. Finally, let each group share their decisions with the whole church.

Spend time in prayer to seek God's guidance. Then agree together on the church's response. It is better to achieve positive and encouraging results in meeting just one or two small areas of need at first, before moving on to other areas of need.

Commission a small co-ordinating team of six to ten people to meet together and plan how to move forward. The team should include men and women of all ages. Encourage people to pray for them and to pass on their ideas, thoughts and concerns to the team.



■ Read Luke 7:11-23.

This passage describes some of the great wonders of healing that Jesus did. It also tells of his response to John the Baptist's question about whether he really was the Messiah. Think about the impact on the everyday lives of the people touched in such a remarkable way by Jesus.

- What would being able to see and walk mean economically to the blind and lame in the time of Jesus?
- Lepers were social outcasts. What impact would being cleansed of leprosy have on them?
- What would be the greatest blessing to the deaf if they were able to hear?
- Why did Jesus have compassion on the widow and her son?
- Jesus brought good news of salvation to the poor in ways that affected the whole of their lives. As his followers we should do the same in his name.
- In what ways are we involved in this or similar work? Could we be doing more?
- What is the warning from God if we ignore those in need around us?
- What is our response to this passage?

■ Who should be chosen for the co-ordinating team? How should they be selected? (Try to avoid just selecting people who are already very busy and who show obvious gifts in pastoral care, evangelism or leadership.)

■ What is the church doing already that could be built upon?

■ Consider the issues on which the church has agreed to take action. What can church members do themselves without the need for any outside help?

■ In what ways might outside help be useful? Such outside help could include advice, funding or working with other organisations.

■ How can enthusiasm for supporting these new ideas be maintained within the church?

Moving forward with the community

Active churches with members who share Christ's love and compassion with their neighbours should have a positive impact on their community. We are called to be 'salt and light' in our communities, so our lives should be a good witness. Our actions should draw in other people.

Share responsibility for taking action with people outside the church. Skills in facilitation can help to ensure good participation. Discussions and plans must be made with community representatives. Give people in the community confidence to make changes that will improve their lives. This way of working may take a lot longer. However, it should result in more sustainable changes and prevent serious mistakes being made through lack of understanding.

The co-ordinating team should select people to meet different needs. Some people will be too busy to help. Some will not want to help because they are afraid, feel inadequate or fear the consequences. However, all church members need to feel a sense of ownership and support the action through prayer. Shared responsibility and ownership, within both the church and the community, should lead to shared satisfaction at results that improve people's lives.



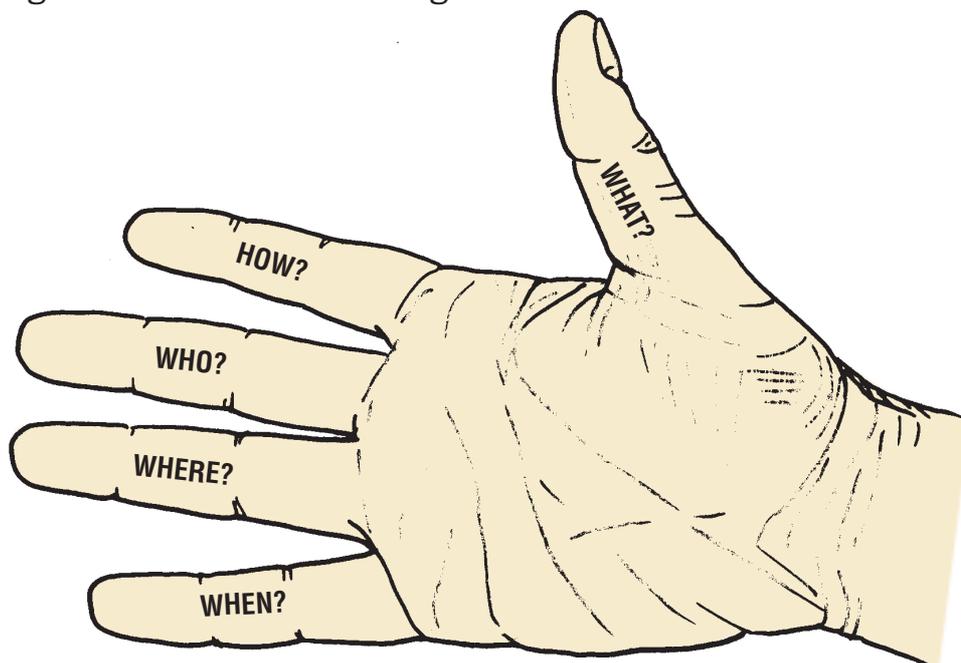
- Should a church wait until all its members are agreed and mobilised to work towards helping improve specific issues in the community?
- Sometimes the problems we experience in our communities are so huge, there seems little the church can do to have any impact. What encouragement is there in the Bible about people who took small steps of faith?
- Read Acts 2:42-47. What activities and attitudes characterised the life of the early church? What kind of a community was it? How does this compare with our own church community? What can we learn from their example?
- How can church members share their faith when they are involved with practical work in the community?
- Read Nehemiah Chapter 2. Nehemiah had a good job as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. This meant he tested the king's food and wine to check it was not poisoned. The king put a lot of trust in him and Nehemiah was probably a personal advisor to him:
 - Why was Nehemiah afraid (verse 2)? What did he do before answering the king?
 - What had Nehemiah already considered and planned for? What can we learn from this about the way we plan our work?
 - Discuss Nehemiah's actions during his first week in Jerusalem. How did he use this time? What can we learn from his approach?
- Read Nehemiah Chapter 3. What does this chapter tell us about the amount of shared participation in the work?
 - How did Nehemiah encourage people to participate (2:17)? What does this say about his leadership skills?
 - Some people rebuilt more than one section of the wall. Why do we think they did this?
 - Nehemiah 3:5 tells us that some people refused to participate in the work. How should we respond to church members who do not want to participate?

The work of the co-ordinating team

Good ideas need more than enthusiasm to be put into practice. It is easy to rush into new activities. The co-ordinating team needs to think carefully about what activities are planned, how to support this work, who will be needed, where to find the necessary training and resources, when action will begin and how to report back regularly to the church.

If a church lacks money to pay for equipment or training, consider working in partnership with another church with more resources. This could be located in a large town or city, or in another country. Building up a strong relationship can help encourage and challenge both churches.

Involve representatives of the people who will benefit from the work at all stages of planning. Good planning will encourage people's confidence. Most effective work builds on establishing relationships. Some groups may prove a real challenge. For example refugees may speak different languages, street children may not trust adults and people may be very reluctant to discuss personal problems. Gaining people's confidence in order to take a first step is often the hardest part and may take a long time. Don't be discouraged!



- How could the co-ordinating team build up links with other organisations?
- How can the church support the members of the co-ordinating team?
- How can the team select the right people within the church to carry out certain work? What can they do if people are unwilling to help?
- Do people have any experience of working in partnership with another church? Discuss these experiences. How could such a partnership work for the benefit of both churches?
- What relationships do church members already have within the community that could benefit the planned work? How can these be built upon?
- Read Luke 14:28-30. How can we 'estimate the cost' before starting any action, so that people will not laugh at us because we began something and were then unable to finish it?
- Read 1 Chronicles 22:1-19. David shows us the importance of making good preparations before beginning work. We can see how the Five Finger planning method applies to this passage:
 - **What is the action being planned?** What did David have in his heart to do? (verse 7)
 - **How is the work to be carried out?** What resources were needed? (verses 2-4, 14)
 - **Who is going to carry out the work?** What part did David play and why? (verse 5) Who is given the overall responsibility during the construction phase? (verse 6) What kinds of workers were involved? (verses 15-16) Who else does David encourage to help? (verse 17)
 - **Where is the work to be done?** 1 Chronicles 21:18 tells us that David was guided by God as to where to build the temple.
 - **When would the work be done?** (21:7-10)
- All the practical details for this project are thoroughly planned: the aim; the site; the materials; the workers; the supervisor; the helpers and the timing. Have we planned every detail of our work?
- Proverbs 16:3 tells us: 'Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed.' Are we following this advice?

Understanding good practice

The church can build up and train people with skills to lead and teach church members. In the same way, members may be trained in practical skills, such as in health, water and sanitation, literacy, agriculture or engineering.

When a church wants to reach out and be of practical help to the poor, it may lack knowledge and understanding of particular issues. Approaches can also change over time so new learning and understanding may be needed. Mistakes can be made. This is why so many churches leave 'development work' to the 'experts' – either in local organisations or in Church Development departments. However, churches are not setting themselves up in competition to prove they can do better. Churches can instead work alongside others, so that more people will benefit.

When considering any kind of development work, always ask skilled and experienced people first for their advice. Draw on the experience of government workers and NGO staff as well as Christian workers. Learn about what they are doing – and also what they are unable to do. Remember that the church is made up of many members, each of whom can reach out into the community in a unique way. Church members can share their faith through practical caring within their community, helping to change attitudes. Sometimes this can then open the way for other organisations to carry out other skilled work.



- What can church members provide that an NGO or government office cannot?
- How could our church members work effectively alongside a government campaign on HIV/AIDS awareness or domestic violence, for example? What can the church offer that government officials cannot?
- How can our church network effectively with local organisations and government offices? In what ways could developing such links ensure good practice in our work?
- How can the church make sure that it sets an example others will want to follow? How can it encourage others to share in practical action?
- Read the story of the Good Samaritan again in Luke 10:25-37. Jesus challenges us to show mercy to all, without judging, and to see our neighbours as whole people with physical as well as spiritual needs.
- How does Jesus call us to love others? What is the cost of this kind of love?
- The Samaritan asked the innkeeper to take care of the injured man while he attended to other business. How can we support one another in responding to the needs of our neighbours?
- What would be the likely impact of this kind of love on our neighbours and on ourselves?
- Can we truly love God without loving our neighbours in this way?

Training for growth

Opportunities to learn together are important. Sometimes outside training is available. Churches may be able to help each other. Training can also be based around resource materials such as this guide. Bible study groups are another very good way of sharing new ideas.

If a few leaders receive training, there will certainly be benefits but it may take a long time for others to see those benefits. Planning how to share any kind of training can be very valuable. There are two ways of sharing learning...

- Key leaders receive teaching and pass it on to other leaders, who in turn share it with leaders of small groups. In this way the whole church can benefit.
- Several church members receive training and share this with a larger group. Then the whole church comes together to receive the training, usually working in small groups (existing Bible study groups, for example).

This 'training of trainers' helps ensure that new ideas and teaching are passed on to the whole church instead of remaining with just a few individuals. Jesus sent the disciples off two by two to practise what they had learned. Then they returned and learned more before being sent out again. This pattern of learning, trying out and then reviewing what has been learned together is a very valuable way of sharing and reinforcing new learning.



Discussion

B19

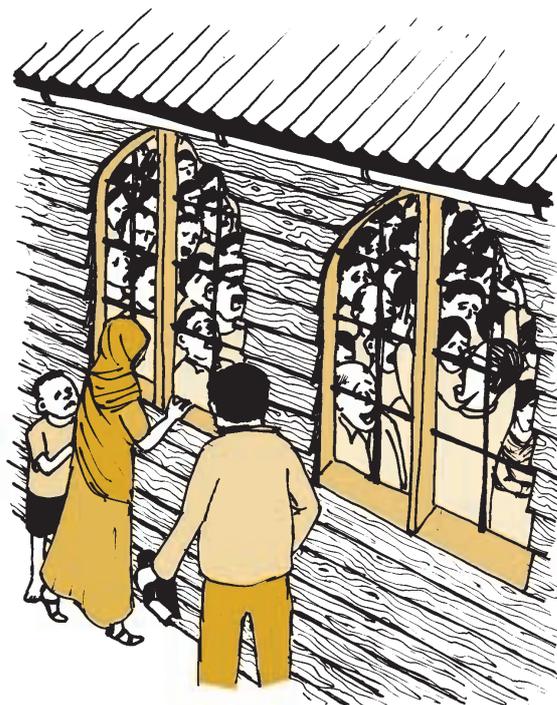
- Read Colossians 1:3-12. Paul sent this letter to the church in Colosse.
 - List the encouraging things he has heard about the church in verses 3-8.
 - Could others say the same things about our church?
 - How does Paul pray for the church in Colosse?
 - What does he pray for them?
- What fruit do we see in our church? Take time to pray this prayer for our church.
- What kind of training and learning is available to our church?
- Who do we already have within our church or community who has useful experiences or learning which we could ask them to share?
- What training or learning is available within our region or country in terms of organisations and individuals?
- How much do people want to learn about new ways? Would they, for example, be willing to contribute towards paying for transport for outside people to come and share knowledge?
- Where can we find out about possible sources of useful training?
- How can we encourage others to share any training experiences they have received?

Planning for growth

If a church is able to make a real difference in the life of a community, people will question why the church cares. Though the original aim may have been to reach out in love with practical support, one of the results is likely to be that people start asking about the Christian faith. This may bring growth in the church.

When the church encourages the practical outworking of the love of Jesus, we should not be surprised at the number of people who seek a relationship with God. Be prepared for growth! Be prepared too for new members with needs that may not fit comfortably into existing structures or services. Be prepared for God to do 'new things'! Churches may need to modify their structures and way of doing things to meet new needs for worship and prayer.

Churches that have invested time in training up new leaders will find themselves better prepared for growth. Church leadership should be flexible enough to alter existing ways of worship, add new services or take services out into new areas. Leaders of growing churches must take great care to spend enough time with God, deepening their own prayer life and study of the Bible in order to cope with the demands placed on them.



Discussion

B20

- Think back over the past five years. Has our church membership reduced, remained about the same, or has it increased? Can we explain why this is happening? What would we like to happen?
- What are the most important needs of new Christians? How can we meet these better?
- Read Acts 6:1-7 where we learn of how the early church coped with the demands of growth.
 - What complaints were made and by whom?
 - How did the disciples (the leadership) deal with this problem?
 - What was the result of their solution to dealing with growth?
- Growth can be really encouraging – but it can also bring problems. Discuss how our church would manage if numbers doubled within the next year. What support and change might be needed? What would be the biggest challenge?
- Read Mark 2:21-22. Discuss how best to repair an old, much loved item of clothing. When Jesus talks about the new un-shrunk piece of material he is likely to be referring to new believers fitting into the traditional structures.
 - Wine was kept in leather wineskins. What happens to old leather?
 - What is new wine like when the yeast is added?
 - Are new believers sometimes like new wine? What may happen as they join the church?
- Discuss possible ways to meet changes brought about by the new work the church is doing.

Dealing with problems

A church that has little impact on its members will be unlikely to attract much attention. However a lively, growing church which has a challenging impact both on its members and the surrounding community, can expect to face all kinds of problems or opposition.

Problems may come from the authorities, particularly in countries where the church is suffering or persecuted. Problems, even violence, may come from people whose lifestyle is threatened because it is based on exploiting the poor to make large profits. This might include money lenders, drug dealers or brothel owners. Divisions may develop through personal tensions and arguments among members or the leadership. Leaders may be unable to resist temptation and become involved in sexual sin or mishandling money.

Expect opposition and pray for protection against temptations and divisions. Teach members to be more aware of the need to face opposition. Encourage people to study Bible passages which will help to strengthen their faith. Make sure that individuals are not left to suffer the consequences of opposition without support. Remember, too, that opposition can often strengthen and unite the church.



Discussion

B21

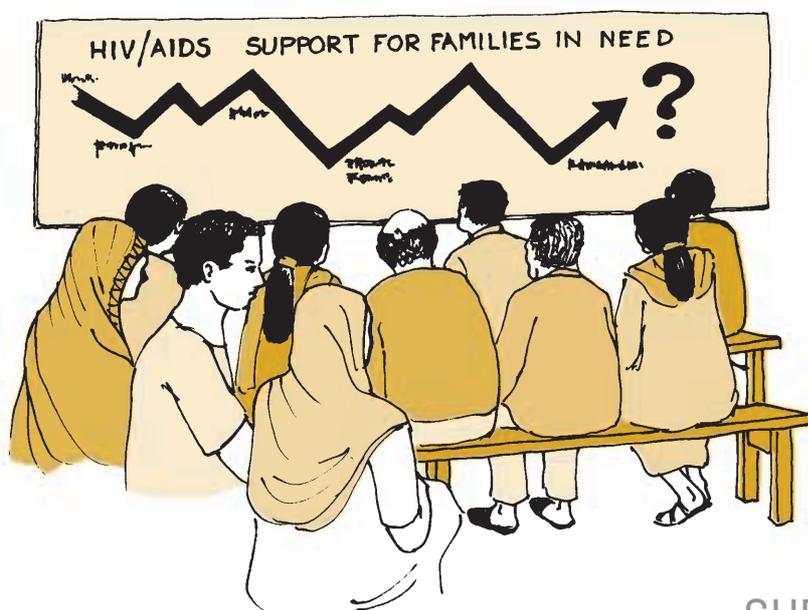
- Read 1 Peter 5:8-11. Here Peter reminds us to always be watchful.
 - What are we to be watchful about?
 - How can we resist the devil?
 - What does Peter say here to encourage us?
- What experience have people had of dealing with opposition? How did they respond?
- How can we encourage each other in difficult situations?
- Read 1 Peter 3:13-17. Should we expect problems as a result of doing good? How should we respond?
- What experience has our church had of persecution? What were (or are) the consequences?
- Read Mark 14:66-72. Peter went along when Jesus was taken away by the chief priests and soldiers to Pilate. He was convinced he would never let Jesus down (Mark 14:31) even though Jesus had said he would.
 - Why did Peter deny knowing Jesus?
 - Would we have done the same?
 - Did Jesus still want to use Peter after he had let him down? (Read John 21:15-17, Acts 2:14-21 and 2: 32-41.)
 - How does that make us feel?

Maintaining the vision

A church should begin a new venture with real vision and a lot of support and enthusiasm among its members. As the work progresses, there will be encouragements and surprises, but also discouragements and problems. People may lose enthusiasm. Leaders may leave due to health or work pressures. People in the community may feel threatened by changes and complain to the authorities.

A church needs to maintain and renew its vision. Set aside time to pray and seek God's guidance. We can renew the original vision and enthusiasm through Bible study, reflection and teaching. We all need such times of refreshment in our Christian lives.

Make time to stop and review progress on a regular basis. Reflect on what is going well, what could be improved and what has surprised people. Consider whether the work is meeting the needs of the poorest. Give thanks to God for all the positive things that have happened. Don't just look at the problems, which can so easily dominate! Such reviews allow people to share their feelings and concerns instead of building up resentment. Changes can then be made, if necessary. Some areas of work may be put aside to meet other growing or unexpected needs. Other people can be challenged to participate and share in the work.



- What experiences have we known in life of enthusiasm 'leaking' away? Discuss these. What was the result? What was our response?
- Why is it useful to set aside time to reflect and evaluate progress – or lack of progress? Why do we often find it difficult to set aside such time?
- How often should we take time to stop and review our progress?
- Read Leviticus 11:44-45. God calls us to be holy as he is holy. The word 'holy' means 'set apart for God'.
 - What does it mean to be 'set apart for God' in our daily lives?
 - How can we become closer to what God wants us to be?
- Read Revelation 3:1-6. The second and third chapters of Revelation are messages from God to seven different churches. This passage is written to the church in Sardis but serves as a warning to all of us.
 - What did people in the community think of the church in Sardis?
 - What does God think of the church? What makes him most disappointed?
 - What warning does God give if the church does not change?
 - What encouragement does he give for those who follow His way?
- What other examples are there in the Bible of people losing enthusiasm for a particular work or vision? What was God's response?
- How can we encourage discussion or support groups to help people share their feelings openly and work through any problems or discouragements?
- How can we use challenges and setbacks as opportunities for learning?

The perfect church?

Is there ever such a thing as the perfect church? Everyone worshipping together in perfect harmony; continuously adding new members and disciplining them; inspiring preaching and leadership; generous giving; a shining light both within the local community and with the poor in other areas? Can there be such a church with no problems at all? Unfortunately never – this side of heaven!

Churches are made up of people, and every person not only brings gifts and strengths, but also difficulties. People do not always fit easily together. There are always surprises, tensions, disagreements and divisions. People also change or move on. People with special gifts may leave, become ill or die. It will take time for others to take on their role and they will do it in a different way.

But the vision of the perfect church, working together to bring the Kingdom of God closer, is one we can all work towards. Always remember the church is God's way of working in this world. It should be the centre of all we do.

Vision is like a star. It is an ideal we can never reach, but if we follow it, we will make progress in the right direction.



- If an ideal church represents 10 on a scale of 1 to 10 and a church with poor leadership, weak preaching, falling membership, all kinds of problems and disagreements and tensions represents 1, where would we place our church now? Where would we have placed our church a year or two earlier? What would help us move up the scale?
- What are the things our church does well? What are the things we can thank God for about our church?
- What positive changes would we really like to see in our church?
- What are the main problems that our church has? How are we dealing with these? How could we help to resolve these problems?
- Read Luke 10:25-27. Here Jesus reminds us, in just two sentences, of the challenge we should follow as Christians.
- How are we to love God?
- In the process of studying this guide, have we tried to love our neighbours in a different way? In what ways? Can we ever love our neighbours without meeting their physical, social and emotional needs?
- How has the way we love God changed as a result of this guide?
- Do we think the vision of a perfect church is a useful one to keep reminding ourselves about? Or should we just accept our church the way it is?
- Read Ephesians 3:2-12.
 - Do we share in Paul's excitement about the gospel?
 - How does this passage encourage us to continue moving forward?
- Has the process of using this guide together as a church brought us nearer to the vision of becoming a 'perfect church'?

Glossary of difficult words

commission	to give people a special piece of work, with the authority to carry it out
community	people living in one local area, often with the same culture and similar interests
community ownership	when local people take control and accept responsibility for issues that affect their own development
denomination	a group of churches that share organised decision-making and accountability with a distinctive way of interpreting the Christian faith
facilitate (facilitator)	to enable others to share and take part
hypocritical	claiming certain standards and beliefs but not living by them
Kingdom of God	the perfect world of love and unity where God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit reign eternally
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations – organisations that are managed independently of government
oppressor	someone who takes control through the use of force or superior power
participation	involvement of people in the decisions and processes that affect their lives
poverty	a situation where there are not enough physical or spiritual resources to maintain an adequate standard of life
preaching	providing teaching which is based on the Bible – usually during a church service
prophecy	a message given by God speaking through people, which may give a warning, encouragement or tell of future events
Redeemer	Jesus, who paid the price for our sins by his death on the cross and resurrection
Samaritan	someone living in the country of Samaria, Palestine
synagogue	a Jewish place of worship
transformation	positive change that is radical and lasting

Recommended reading

Mobilising the community

This is a PILLARS guide based on an exciting process of community mobilisation used in East Africa. The contents complement this guide and look in more detail at community surveys, gathering information, planning, and working with the community. The guide costs £5 including postage and packing costs and is available from Resources Development (see below).

Guide our steps

A collection of 101 participatory Bible studies on all aspects of development. Most were originally used in *Footsteps*, PILLARS and ROOTS resources and have been adapted for group study and discussion. This book costs £7.50 including postage and packing costs and is available from Resources Development (see below).

Footsteps Issue 53

This issue looks at the topic of holistic change in our communities. It includes articles on mobilising the community, typical perceptions of the church's role, an integrated approach to HIV/AIDS, working with nomadic people and a checklist for holistic development work. Back issues of *Footsteps* cost £1 each and are available from Resources Development (see below).

On solid ground

This is a video training pack for use in improving relief and development practice. The videos are available in Spanish and English, together with a 64 page facilitator's guide and CD-ROM. They are designed for use with small groups, ideally with an experienced facilitator. They were produced following Hurricane Mitch in Honduras and include topics such as transformation and integral mission, healthy communities and healing invisible wounds. The packs cost £23 (US\$35) and are available from: Latin America section, Tearfund, 100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE. E-mail: latam@tearfund.org

Calling Christian leaders

by John Stott, published by IVP, ISBN 0 85111 257 9

John Stott has found in his travels that models of Christian leadership today are often shaped more by culture than by Christ. He urges that our view of leadership must be determined by our view of the Church, and not the other way round. He demonstrates how central is the theme of 'power through weakness' and urges Christian leaders to be characterised above all else by 'the meekness and the gentleness of Christ'. The book costs £7.99 and is available from IVP.

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Further information

This guide is one of a series published by Tearfund.

Others in the series include:

- *Building the capacity of local groups*
- *Improving food security*
- *Credit and loans for small businesses*
- *Agroforestry*
- *Preparing for disaster*
- *Mobilising the community*
- *Healthy eating*

All are available in English and most are available in French, Spanish and Portuguese.

Further details, order forms and sample pages from these guides are available on the Tearfund international website: www.tilz.info

For organisations wishing to translate these materials into other languages, a CD-ROM with design files and layout is available.

For organisations planning workshops to train people to either use or translate PILLARS materials, a workbook is also available.

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Mobilising the church
A PILLARS Guide

by Isabel Carter

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