



Taking a fresh look at the  
welcome you offer  
to tourists  
and visitors

CHURCH  
OPEN  
ALL  
WELCOME

WELCOME GUIDE

 GROWING  
THE RURAL  
CHURCH

 DIOCESE  
OF EXETER  
THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  
IN DEVON

 pray

 grow

 serve  
with joy



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# WELCOME GUIDE



## GROWING THE RURAL CHURCH

**DIOCESE**  
OF **EXETER**  
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**OF ENGLAND**  
**IN DEVON**







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# WELCOME, WELCOME, WELCOME

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*"For I was a stranger and you welcomed me..."*

Matthew 25:35

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## A message from Bishop Robert

We all want our churches to feel welcoming. As visitors enter our church buildings, we hope that they will feel a sense of God's peace and love. But how can we encourage more people to cross the threshold of our churches and explore them? And if they do walk in, how can we engage their hearts as well as their minds? How can we help them to pause and connect with God? How do we tell them more about the Christian faith and our church communities? And how can we do all this when we are often not there in person to greet them?



These are significant challenges and I hope this resource will help you grapple with them. Above all, I hope it will enable you to see your church with fresh eyes, and identify tweaks and changes that can improve the welcome you offer that speaks of the generous hospitality of God. Our churches are sacred spaces. Many of them are extremely beautiful, wonderful examples of medieval architecture. Rejoicing in our heritage, let us communicate to our visitors both the joy of the Gospel and that the Christian community is alive, open and welcoming to all.

*Bishop Robert*

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*"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,  
for by doing that some have entertained angels  
without knowing it."*

Hebrews 13:2

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## A lesson from a DIY store

*The Reverend Gareth Regan, Team Vicar in Newton Abbot and former Store Manager for B&Q*

When I worked in a large superstore we recognised the importance of helping people to find their way around our massive shop. The same goes for the Church; it can be a confusing place to navigate for a new visitor and we have to help them find what they are looking for. In my last job, it was screws and nails, now it is far more important as we want them to find God.



## A story from the races

*The Venerable Dr Mark Butchers, Archdeacon of Barnstaple*

We are so familiar with our church building and routines that it can be easy to forget how alien churches are to some people now. When I was a priest in Oxford, I once went to watch the greyhound races and felt what it was like to be in a totally unfamiliar environment. Everyone else seemed to know exactly what to do, whilst I wasn't sure where I was supposed to sit, how I bought a ticket, where to queue for food and drink, how the betting worked - the whole experience was utterly bewildering! It gave me a feel for what it must be like for many people nowadays coming into a church service. Church is foreign territory for them and even getting over the threshold can be a challenge. A warm word of welcome is critical, but there has to be more than that. How can we put ourselves in their shoes and ensure that everything we do, say and hand out makes them feel that church is the place for them?







# WHO ARE YOUR VISITORS?

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*They come, they come; we may not always see their  
face, but this is their space.*

*Their space to breathe, their space to be.*

*They come, they come; in times of joy and times of  
sadness, shedding tears of grief and gladness.*

*Their space to breathe, their space to be.*

*They come, they come; keep the doors open wide,  
welcome them inside.*

*Their space to breathe, their space to be.*

---

Before reviewing your welcome, have a think about who your visitors might be. Are they:

**Tourists on a day out?**

**Walkers?**

**People visiting graves?**

**Members of the congregation?**

**Families?**

**Guests to weddings, funerals or baptisms?**

**Local school children and their teachers or parents?**

**People looking for a place of peace or solitude?**

**Elderly visitors, young children, or visitors with restricted mobility?**

It may be that your visitors include all of the above. Try and keep their different situations and needs in mind as you carry out your review. Also remember that for some people, visiting a church can be intimidating and even quite stressful. Some people worry that there are lots of restrictions and rules, and may consider church to only be for people who are “better” than they are. Some visitors may also think that attending church is old fashioned and only for the elderly. It is important that through our welcome we are able to show that the church is still alive, still relevant, and that the Christian message is open to everyone.





### **It's a nice idea but we don't have the time or the resources!**

Please don't feel overwhelmed by these questions. It may be that there isn't the time or resources to change things immediately, but it is helpful to have an accurate picture of where changes could be made.

Many of the suggestions in this pack are quick wins that should not take a lot of time or be costly. Ideally all the churches in Devon would have the resources to carry out a full welcome makeover, but realistically this won't be possible for all. So even if you only make a couple of changes, this is a great start.



# PARKING



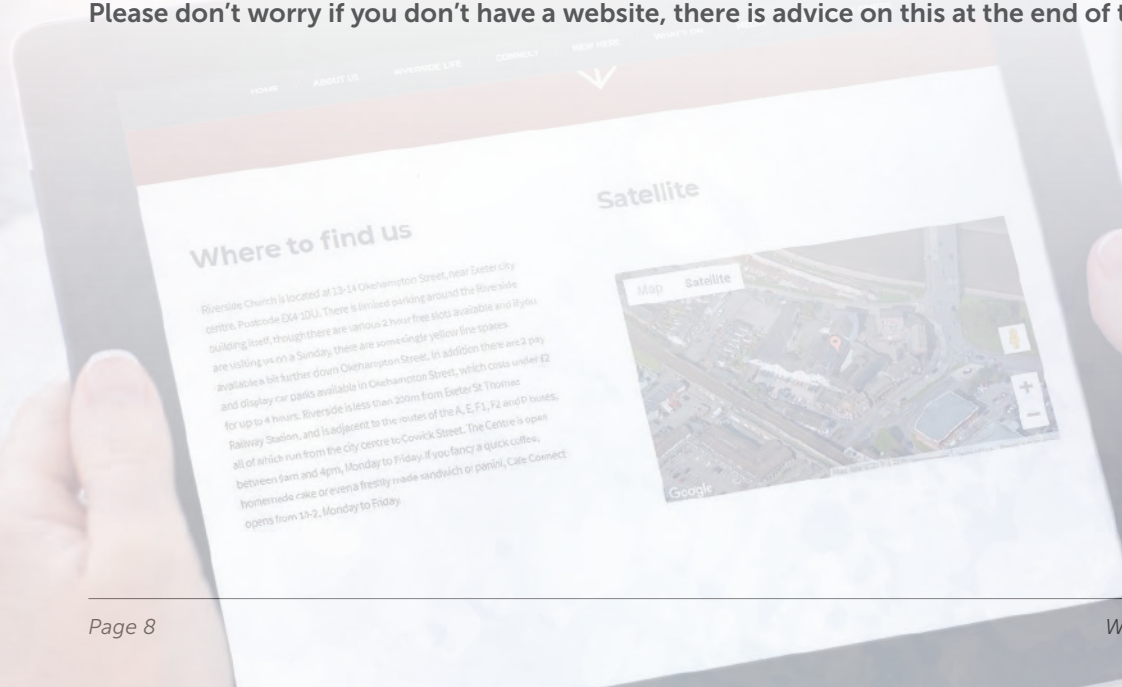
You may have a huge car park, or none at all, but what is really important is that visitors can plan their visit and know what to expect. If someone with restricted mobility is attending a wedding, they need to know the situation before they arrive, so they are prepared.

**Do you have adequate parking?**

**Do you have parking spaces allocated for people with restricted mobility?**

**Is this made clear online so visitors know what to expect and can plan their visit?**

**Please don't worry if you don't have a website, there is advice on this at the end of the guide.**





# ACCESS

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It's important to recognise where access may be a challenge and make sure this is communicated online to visitors so they can plan ahead.

**Are the pathways into the church accessible for wheelchairs and prams?**

**Are there handrails to help those with restricted mobility?**

**Is the path through the churchyard uneven or sometimes slippery?**

**Are the main routes into the church adequately lit?**

**Do you have an easy access toilet and baby changing facilities?**

**Are there details of access to your church online so that people with restricted mobility know what to expect and can plan their visit?**

# CHURCHYARD

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**Do you have a graveyard plan and is it easily accessible to visitors?**

**Are the watering and refuse areas obvious for those visiting graves?**

**Are the grassed areas tidy and litter free?**

**Is there seating in the churchyard?**

**Is this enough for the number of visitors you have?**

**Could this be improved?**

This doesn't have to be an expensive bench; you could leave picnic rugs or folding garden chairs to be borrowed during the summer months.



# SIGNS

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When looking at all signage have a look at the condition of the signs and see if they could do with a clean or lick of paint. This is a quick win which can hugely improve your welcome.

## Where do I find welcoming resources?

Please visit the website [www.exeter.anglican.org](http://www.exeter.anglican.org) where you will find welcoming posters which can be printed off or sent to you.

## Looking at your church noticeboard

**Is the overall presentation tidy?**

**Do some of the notices need updating?**

**Is there a warm message of welcome, encouraging people to enter the church?**

**Thinking of all the signs, could any do with a clean or a repaint?**

**Do you need to carry out other maintenance such as hedges being cut back?**

**Does any of the language need changing to make it more friendly or easy to understand?**

## Don't let language be a barrier

Look at the language used in the signs. Is it visitor friendly eg "Please keep to the paths" instead of "Keep Off the Grass"? Some people feel uncomfortable going to churches so keep the language as warm and friendly as possible. Try to avoid words that visitors may not understand, such as incumbent, Eucharist, sacrament or denomination.

You are  
so very **welcome**  
here

We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, gay, confused, filthy rich, comfortable or dirt poor. We extend a special welcome to wailing babies and excitable toddlers.



# LOOKING AT THE PORCH

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The welcome in the porch can make the difference between people walking in or walking away, so try and look with fresh eyes at your welcome. Remember that some people may be nervous and will need encouragement to open the door.

## Is the porch clean and tidy?

Is there a welcoming sign on or near the door, which encourages people to enter?

If there is a noticeboard, is this clean, tidy and up to date? Does it have times of services and clergy/laity contact details?

Is there a clean bowl of water for dogs?

Is the door to the church easy to open?

If not, is there a sign explaining how to open it and encouraging people to do so?





## Hide the boring bits!

There are some housekeeping notices which need to be put on the noticeboard but will mean very little to visitors. These may include your flower rota, insurance certificate or a Citation document.

Try and put these in less obvious positions and leave your notices for visitors at eye level. Always remember to display your safeguarding notice.



## Amazing A boards

Putting an A board outside your porch is a great way of reassuring visitors that the church is open and they are welcome.



# INSIDE THE CHURCH

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**As you step into the church does it feel cold and dark? How will it feel at different times of the year?**

Try and think of ways that this very first impression could be improved. It would obviously be costly to leave the heating and lights on, but maybe you could have a sign up during the winter months encouraging people to turn on the lights (and off again!) and make themselves a cup of tea to warm up.

**Does the church look clean and tidy?**

**Are the edges of steps marked appropriately?**

**Are there any refreshments on offer?**

**Are these replenished regularly?**

**Does your welcome area look clean and tidy?**

**Is the visitor book clearly visible and is there a pen?**

**Is there information about the history of the church?**

**Does this look smart, up-to-date and appealing?**

**Do you have toys or activities for children? Are these somewhere obvious and clearly available for all children who visit and not just those who attend a service?**





Please  
help  
yourself  
TAKE A SEAT  
BE STILL ♥ ENJOY

### Be clutter free

By clearing away any unnecessary clutter your church will appear calmer. It will also help visitors focus on the key information you really want them to see.

### Plasters and punctures

If you have a lot of walkers or cyclists visiting your church, think about how the welcome to them could be made warmer. As well as water and biscuits you may be able to offer tea/coffee/hot chocolate making facilities. You could also provide a puncture repair kit, a basic first aid kit, plasters, dry socks, plastic bags for wet clothes, an area to charge mobile phones...

### Setting the mood with music

Having music playing as visitors enter church is an incredible way to create a calm and inviting atmosphere. You may not want to have this playing all day but if you know someone with the technical skills, this could be set to play as people enter.

Search online for royalty and copyright free music.





## Tell the story of the building

Some people don't have the patience for long blocks of text, or aren't able to read them. Think about how you can creatively hook their attention- it might be an object, a picture or a simple timeline to give them a quick introduction to the story of the building.


## Babies and young children

Be mindful of parents with young children who may find a visit to church extremely stressful. Many people feel that their children need to be prevented from making any noise or touching anything! Think about how your church can make them feel more welcome. Do you have a clearly marked area for children to play in? Are there toys and books to look at? Are there books on Christianity for children? Do you have any nappy changing facilities? Think about putting up a sign to reassure parents that you are delighted to welcome children and fully expect them to be noisy.



*"Whoever welcomes one of these little children  
in my name welcomes me."*

Mark 9:37



Think about leaving your hymn numbers up, to show  
that the church is still in use and very much alive

### Cake and cushions

If you have some willing volunteers who enjoy baking think about offering some delicious home baked cakes to visitors. This doesn't have to be every day; you could offer it during busy periods or for a special event. Perhaps you could scatter some cushions around the church to give a more homely feel? Or have picnic rugs for people to sit on outside? A cupcake with the message "You are loved" might just change someone's life...





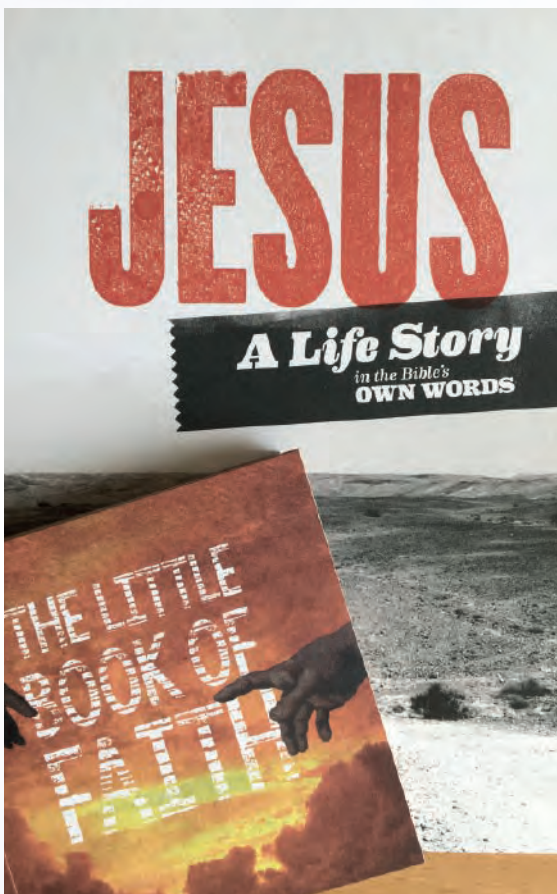
# WHAT ABOUT FAITH?

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*"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.'"*

Mark 16:15

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Thinking of a visitor who may wish to learn more about what being a Christian means, is there information on Christianity available to take away?

Does this look smart, up to date and appealing?

Do you have information for visitors who have suffered a bereavement or are experiencing mental health issues such as depression and anxiety?

Can visitors read the faith stories of people connected with the church?

Are there contact details for someone who visitors can contact if they want to learn more about Christianity or need someone to talk to? Are they somewhere obvious?

Are the details of who to call if someone has a safeguarding concern clearly visible?





## Help people connect

In order for people to connect emotionally, try to tell a human story. This could be from the past or the present. It could be a story about grief, love, faith, families, ill health or even someone's bad experience of church (hopefully with a happy ending!)



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*“And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear unless someone tells them?”*

Romans 10:14

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## Where can we get resources?

Lifeworlds do some great free Christian resources:  
[www.lifeworlds.global/shop](http://www.lifeworlds.global/shop) or try Christian Publishing  
and outreach: [www.cpo.org.uk](http://www.cpo.org.uk) or [www.chpublishing.co.uk](http://www.chpublishing.co.uk)



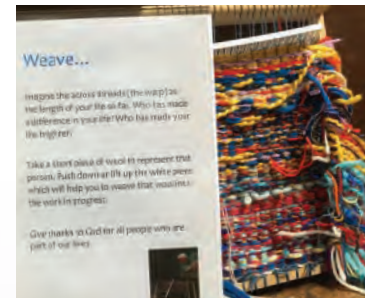
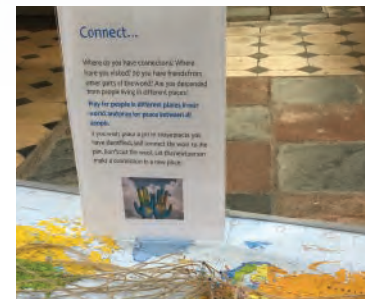
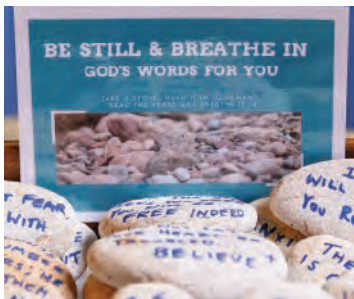
# ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE AND CONNECT

Thinking of someone who finds praying daunting, is there a simple prayer on display?

Does it look smart and up to date?

Is there an area where visitors are invited to participate in an activity and say a prayer? You could have a prayer tree, prayer cards, a sand tray or a pebble bowl. There are no set rules for prayer stations so be creative and imaginative. Make sure these look welcoming and cared for.

Is there an area where visitors can leave requests for prayer? Is this clearly marked? Does it look smart and looked after? Is there a way of showing that the requests have been prayed for?



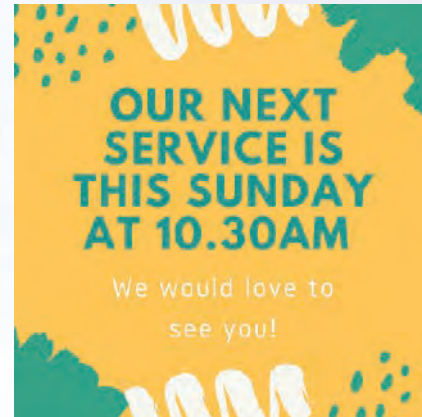
## Invite action and spiritual connection

Colour a picture, hold a stone, place pins on a board, write a prayer and place it on the prayer tree, light a candle... Outside visitors could spot butterflies, count wildflowers, take tree rubbings, water the plants, discover a labyrinth, climb a tree... These are simple ideas to make visitors feel they are in a welcoming place and encourage them to actively engage with your church.





# YOUR CHURCH TODAY



Some visitors may think that your church is a beautiful building from the past which now stands empty. Think about how you can communicate the life that still exists in your church, and how you can invite them to be part of your church's future. Consider where this information is displayed and at what point on the visitor journey it is visible. In other words, give visitors some time to breathe in the ambience of your church and become interested in it, before you start inviting them to attend!

**Is there information about when your services run with a warm message of welcome?**

**Perhaps you could have a photograph to show what your services look like?**

**Is there information displayed about any courses or events being run such as Alpha, Toddler Groups, Memory Café etc?**

**Does this look smart and up to date?**

**If you have very few services, could you signpost visitors to a church nearby?**



## Is there a reason to return?

Is your churchyard full of snowdrops in Spring?

Do you hold a candlelit carol service at Christmas?

A flower festival in the Summer?

A Teddy Bears Parachute Jump off the tower in July?

Do you host a toddler group on a Tuesday?

Knit and Natter on a Thursday?

If you do then shout about it! Don't assume that people will read about it in the local magazine, they may have missed it or have never read it, or they may live outside of your area but would still love to attend.

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*"I will search for the lost and bring back the strays."*

Ezekiel 34:16

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### Don't stop looking!

Once you have made some changes to improve your welcome, make sure you are maintaining the quality of what you offer. Ensure that noticeboards are checked regularly, the church is decluttered, materials are replenished and where possible try and introduce new ideas and activities so that returning visitors have something new to see or do. Decide who is responsible for this and how often your church needs checking.



# DONATIONS

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The message asking for donations is something best seen towards the end of a visit, rather than at the beginning. If possible place the collection box by the door in clear view as people exit. If you have a subtle donations box set into the wall, think about getting a new more obvious box, or putting an eye catching sign up.

**Does your collection box look up to date and obvious?**

**Do you have a message explaining to visitors why donations are needed and what the money will be spent on? Does this look smart and up to date?**

## Experiment with words

*If you think you could get more donations, consider changing your message and monitor if this makes a difference.*

## Paying by card

Have you thought of contactless giving devices or online giving such as donations by text or QR code? These can be cheap to set up and are great for anyone who doesn't have cash in their pocket but would still like to donate. If you would like some advice on the different options, please call **01392 294960** or email **[enquiries@exeter.anglican.org](mailto:enquiries@exeter.anglican.org)**





# ONLINE

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In 2018 86% of adults in the UK said they used the internet daily. Having an online presence is a great way of engaging with people in your community and beyond.

**Do you have a website?**

**Is it up to date?**

**Is the language warm and welcoming?**

**Are you happy with the overall presentation?**

**Are there clear directions, a map and a postcode to guide visitors to your church on your website?**

**Do you have details of how to visit by public transport?**

**Are there details of parking and disabled access?**

**Do you have details on the A Church Near You website, the Explore Churches website and other relevant websites such as Small Pilgrim Places?**

**Are these up to date?**



## Thinking about social media

Social media is a powerful resource and a vital tool in engaging with our local communities and visitors. Think of it as the online equivalent of the village shop, pub or school playground – a place to share information, encourage conversation, swap ideas and offer support.

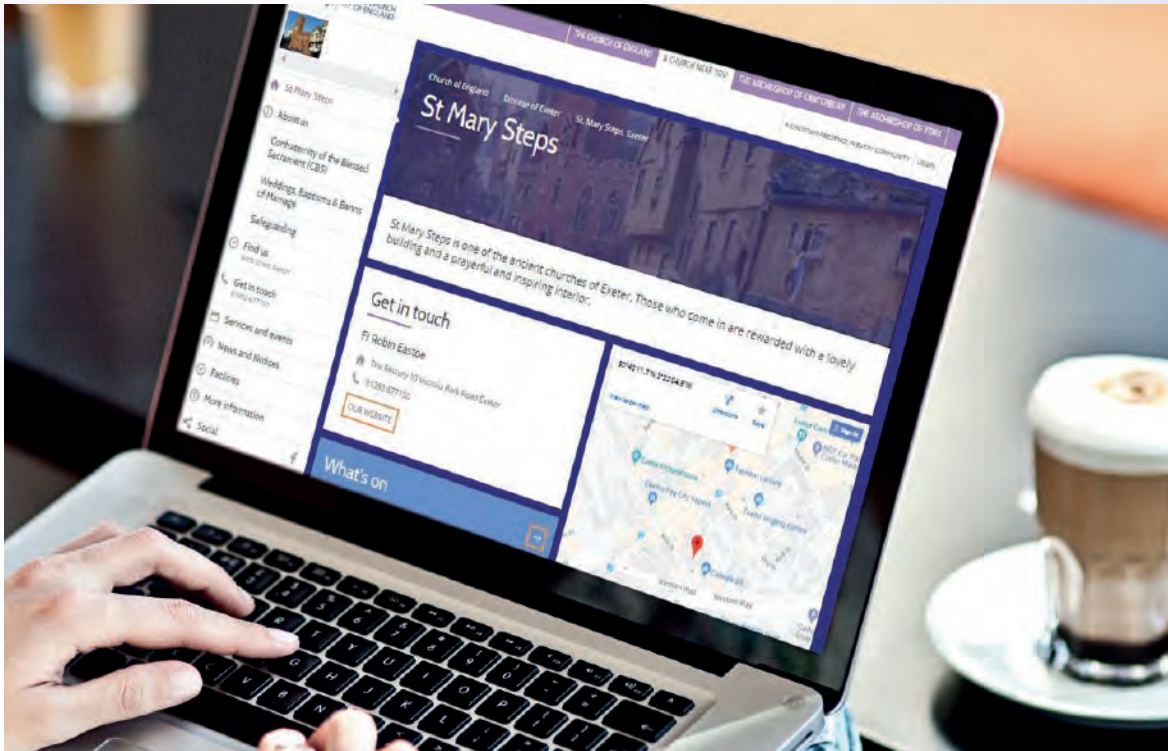
Facebook is the best place to start as it is still the most popular social media platform across a range of ages. Instagram is also a great place to share beautiful images of your church and congregation and show how welcoming it is.

The main message is: Don't be scared of social media, the Diocese Communications team is here to help!

**Does your church have a Facebook page, an Instagram account and a Twitter account?**

**Is your church active on the local community Facebook page? Are these regularly updated?**





## Introducing A Church Near You...

This website has 1.5 million users a year, of which 66% are first time visits.

This is easy to use and a great way to promote your church online. **Your church will already have an entry which you can add information to.** You can add details of parking, facilities, access, events, who to contact, news...

To register as an editor visit <https://achurchnearyou.zendesk.com/>

### Getting some help

If you would like help using social media and the A Church Near You website, the Diocese offers regular training sessions. Please contact [communications@exeter.anglican.org](mailto:communications@exeter.anglican.org) to sign up.

The Church of England produce a really helpful monthly e-newsletter with up to date information on marketing, website management and tips on social media. To sign up go to [www.churchofengland.org/labs-latest-newsletter](http://www.churchofengland.org/labs-latest-newsletter)



# MORE IDEAS FROM AROUND DEVON TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE THROUGH THE DOOR...

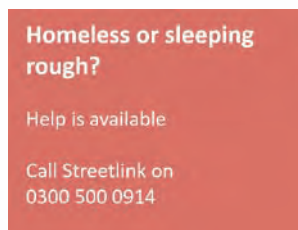
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- > Hosting the library van and running a café alongside it
- > Offer the church as a venue for local bands to practise in
- > A 'Church on the Mat' service aimed specifically at toddlers
- > Hosting the Post Office twice weekly
- > Host a bring and swap a plant event
- > A children's corner with activity sheets, toys, books and bean bags to sit on
- > A pop up barbeque in the summer holidays to help feed local children who would have normally received free school meals
- > A fundraising event where people abseil down the church tower



- > Register the church as a venue for champing (camping in church!)
- > Set up bird nest boxes with cameras for people to watch on a screen in the church
- > Approach the local school about hosting an art exhibition
- > Hold a Fair Trade event and invite local producers along
- > Hold a bring and share lunch after the family service
- > Run a photography competition
- > Invite the local history group to research the names of people on gravestones
- > Organise a Teddy Bears Parachute jump off the church tower
- > Put photos of the congregation up around the church





# PARKING

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What can we do to improve parking?

What details would it be useful to have online?

Welcome guide

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# ACCESS

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What can we do to improve access?

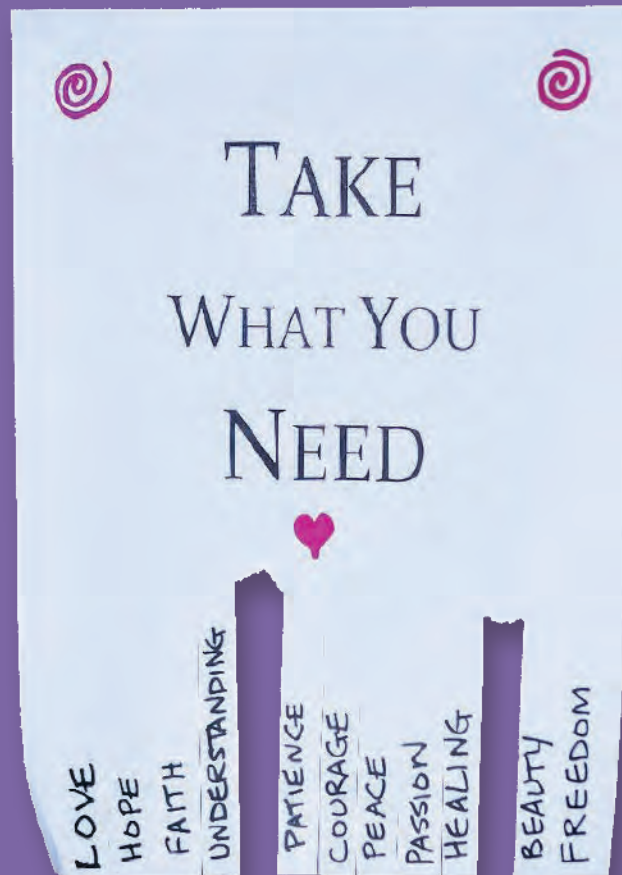
What details would it be useful to have online?

Welcome guide

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## WELCOME WORKSHEETS





DIOCESE  
OF EXETER  
THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  
IN DEVON



pray



grow



serve  
with joy