

New Places for New People

Starting new Christian
communities:
A practical guide

Chapter 16

Connecting
with the Wider
Community

Connecting with the Wider Community

The pioneering team needs to become a community itself. The New Place for New People (NPNP) will form out of real relationships that will transform both your team and those they encounter. As a pioneering team you will work incredibly hard together: planning meetings, designing publicity, running social media, putting out chairs, running events, and tidying up afterwards. It is important that a team has a purpose and a life beyond the hard work.

Make sure you have times together where you can know more of each other's story, discover passions and dislikes, laugh and cry together. It is this healthy community that new people from the wider community will want to be part of.

Exploring faith and God together will also be a vital part of growing together as a team. Try to use approaches which enable everyone to get involved, eg share stories together; ask one another 'where have we seen signs of God this week?'; practice Lectio Divina; share a Bible story and encourage people to imagine themselves as a character in the story; share a favourite piece of music or a poem and reflect on what it means to you; use art and creativity to connect with God. Read more about developing the prayer life of the pioneering team on page 40.

The pioneering team needs to connect with the wider community

It can be tempting, in the early stages of pioneering, to invest all your time in building the pioneering team, assuming that 'wider outreach can come later'. However, the small steps of testing ideas and connecting with your community are essential in the early stages of your project as you develop your practices and rhythm of meeting, and cement a culture of being outward-looking, welcoming, evangelistic people.

We suggest exploring the following five ways of connecting with the wider community: serving, joining, listening, praying, and sharing testimony.

Serving your community

Serving your wider community without expecting anything in return will build trusting relationships for the long-term future and possible future partnerships. You could try:

- **Volunteering.** There are likely to be projects that need your help and time. Is there something like a timebank, night-shelter, foodbank, or befrienders group you could join?
- **Launching an imaginative project.** Could you begin a movement for good focused on an issue? Organise a litter pick, build a community garden, renovate a local play park...

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- **Heading up a national initiative.** As you understand your community more, is there a creative national campaign you could highlight? The Big Lunch, Mental Health Awareness week or Climate Action...
- **Doing something lovely.** What could you do to brighten up someone's day – a blessing stone, craftivism, free cream teas or gifts at the bus stop?

Joining wider community group activities

If you want to get to know new people unaffiliated to the church, you need to meet them. And if you want new people to join your new community then they need to feel they know you. Consider joining a community or group that you are interested in or have a passion for, perhaps sport, allotments, reading, or local history. Regularly attend networking events, which are great places to connect.

Attend the things people care about – key community gatherings such as market days or a community festival, or meetings about key community changes or specific issues such as the local authority planning meetings or strategic developments.

Listening to your community

Listening to your community will strengthen relationships and enable you to better serve others. To learn more about listening to your community, see page 56.

Praying in the community

Being physically present in the community that is the subject of your prayers will bring fresh perspective and insight, compared to praying in a church or meeting room.

Take time as a team and as an individual to pray in the streets, paths and fields of your community – either while walking or moving through the area, or while at rest. This could include asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you as you go (“Speak Lord, your servants are listening”) or you might ask God to help you notice beauty, signs of creativity, hope, or a sense of connection. You may wish to pause and pray in places you feel drawn towards.

You could be focused in one place over a long period, divide up the streets of the community amongst the team, or ask God to lead you to the right place as you start each time. It is quite probable that there will not always be deep revelations while praying in the community, but it is the faithful commitment to pray for those you seek to begin a new community amongst that is important.



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Sharing testimony

As you get known in your community, and people encounter your love and service, there will be times when people want to know why you are doing it. It is at this point that, in a gentle way, testimony can be sensitively shared. It is not about a polished presentation, but a natural account of how God is working in, moving in, and changing your life. It takes practice to confidently share your testimony, so it is important that, as a team, you work on helping each other do this in a safe environment.

Digital presence, communication and evangelism

Every NPNP must take digital presence and communication seriously. It is now a part of everyone's life and a big part of how we experience the world. You can serve, join, pray, and share testimony in the digital world, as well as 'in real life'. Join online community Facebook groups and follow key people on social media. Answer questions and share recommendations. Begin a low-key social presence for the project that can tell the unfolding story of the new community as it emerges. Remember to take plenty of pictures of events and people (who are happy to be photographed) to populate your online content so that people get a visual sense of who and what you are as community.

Further resources

For more advice on digital evangelism, visit:

[www.methodist.org.uk/
digitalevangelism](http://www.methodist.org.uk/digitalevangelism)