



# A Preparation Course



Food for thought...

# CHURCH21 - A PREPARATION COURSE

## PURPOSE

This course has been designed to help prepare parishes participating in the CHURCH21 parish development programme. Other parishes may also find it helpful.

CHURCH21 is for parishes seeking ways to address the challenges of ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To get the best from the programme it will be helpful for parishes to have an awareness of the particular challenges and opportunities they are faced with.

This course invites you to

- a. reflect on where you are now,
- b. identify the values that shape your sense of identity and purpose, and
- c. motivate more of the congregation to engage with the mission of the parish.




## BEFORE THE COURSE

- The five members of the Church21 parish team are asked to meet initially to plan the running of the course and, in particular, to compile the statistics needed for the Preliminary Session (page 6) “An Overall Look at Our Parish”. In some cases exact figures will be hard to come by. All that is really needed is a broad brush stroke portrait of the parish.
- These findings should be communicated to the parish through as many channels as are available
- Please take care not to let the discussion be driven by these findings. We want the process to be as open as possible.
- These findings will also be made available to your parish facilitator, who will act as a guide through the process.
- The five members of the parish team should attend the main sessions primarily in a listening role
- The more people who share in the course the greater will be the sense of ownership of the process. Please try to encourage as good mix of ages and gender. It would be a good idea to have represented vestry members, leaders of children’s, youth and adult organisations, as well as some “ordinary” members and, if possible, some people who are new to the parish or “on the edge”.

- It is probably better to invite people personally as well as giving an open invitation.
- It cannot be stressed too highly that the purpose of this course is not to set a course of action at this early stage of the process but simply to open up possibilities and begin a process of discernment which will continue right through the programme.

## CONTENT OF THE COURSE

- The course explores six key areas of development with a view simply to promote discussion and allow issues that are particularly relevant to the parish to surface.
- The ethos is to offer parishes a range of options some of which will stretch more than others. Please do not always select the “easiest” option.
- It takes a **MENU** approach:

- **STARTER**  ***Suggested timing 10 minutes***  
Designed to open up the issue and get people thinking and talking.
  - **MAIN COURSE**  ***Suggested timing 40 minutes***  
The focus of this is a reflection on and unpacking of scripture using a series of questions designed to help people explore the topics in a deeper way. Don't feel you have to use all the questions.
  - **DESSERT**  ***Suggested timing 15 minutes***  
This aims to help people respond to God prayerfully, relating what they have been thinking about in this session to their own journey of faith.
- Please use at least one option from each section but realise that the focus of the discussion should be on the Main Course.
  - For those who prefer to prepare their own material an alternative scripture passage is suggested.
  - You may not want or need to do every session but there is value in taking people through the whole process.

## CONDUCTING THE COURSE

- If possible the course should be led by two or more people and the ideal is that the primary leader should be a lay person.
- For discussion divide the participants into groups (probably between 5 and 8 works best).
- Each group should have a leader to chair the discussion, encourage participation from all, and note key aspects of the thoughts that have been shared.
- Please exercise sensitivity in the prayer exercises. Most of them will work well where people pray quietly but if the group is comfortable to pray out loud please also encourage that.
- Each group is asked to appoint a recorder. The report should be **brief**, agreed by all the members of the group, and should highlight just a few points from each question. These reports should be given to the Church21 parish team.
- Parishes are asked to discuss with their facilitator how the course will be run. Some may feel it is best to involve the facilitator in some aspects of the course. This will be by negotiation between the parish and the facilitator. It is not envisaged that the facilitator would lead the course on his/her own.
- Some parishes may find it difficult to complete the course during Lent. Please feel free to use the material in a way that you are happy with.
- What is offered here is only by way of suggestion. Please be as creative as possible. Some parishes in the past, for example, have incorporated aspects of the course into Sunday worship or invited people to stay after church for lunch and then to share in the course. At least one has so enjoyed this way of working that they have built this into their regular pattern for meeting together on an ongoing basis.

## AFTER THE COURSE

- Following the final session the parish team members are invited to meet again to review the outcome of the course before sending a summary to the Church21 Administrator, Brigid Barrett, Rossorry Rectory, Kinarla, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh BT74 5PX or email [brigid@church21.org](mailto:brigid@church21.org).
- It may be helpful to have a parish meeting at this stage to feed back to parishioners some of what the course has brought to the surface in terms of challenges, hopes and dreams.
- A brief report should be given to the parish at large, perhaps in a small booklet or in the parish magazine.

## **VALUES**

As you run the course please bear in mind the values of CHURCH21: respect, listening, gentle challenge, encouragement and careful listening to one another and, above all, to God.

# PRELIMINARY SESSION

## AN OVERALL LOOK AT OUR PARISH

Parish Development is about looking at our churches from a different angle and as objectively as possible. If a group of parishes is participating together in Church21 the best way forward may be to come together for this preliminary meeting and, if possible, also for the subsequent sessions. It would be helpful to have present as representative as possible a group of parishioners.

### To Start Off (15 minutes)

The Church21 parish team will have compiled some information about the parish. They should, as far as possible, try to give a brief overview of the current state of the parish, including:

1. A thumbnail description of your parish - not everyone in your parish will know.
2.
  - a) Total numbers – individuals and/or families
  - b) Age breakdown
    - under 4
    - 4 – 12
    - 13 – 17
    - 18 – 25
    - 26 – 60
    - 60 +
  - c) Number of churches and number of services
  - d) Average attendances at church services
  - f) Who attends? What gaps are there?
  - e) Organisations and membership
  - f) How your financial situation might be rated on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 is comfortable, 1 is precarious!)

Please don't spend too much time presenting this factual information or allow much discussion of it. Emphasise that it is simply to provide background for a more informed discussion of the following questions.

### Questions for group discussion

In the Bible we find God asking four questions:

- Gen. 3:9     Where are you?  
Exodus 4:2   What is in your hand?  
1 Kings 19:9   What are you doing here?  
Ezek. 8:15    What do you see?

**Briefly, consider what each question meant in its original context. How might these questions be interpreted for us as church today? Perhaps something like this?**

***Where are you?*** Adam and Eve were not where God wanted them to be and were trying to hide themselves from him. Are we, as a parish, in the situation God wants for us? Is there any sense in which we may be a “hidden” church? What might lead us to “hide our light under a bushel?”

***What is in your hand?*** God demonstrates his power by transforming the staff held by Moses. In what ways, small or large, have we as a parish experienced God’s transformation? What sense is there of resources held in our hands that could be used to greater potential?

***What are you doing here?*** Elijah flees his persecutors and is challenged by God to know what he wants of God. What do you want God to do? What’s your dream for your parish? How can we know what God wants for us?

***What do you see?*** God shows Ezekiel society from his perspective. How you would characterise the state of the community in which you live, its needs and its possible futures. Where might the church be called to make a difference?

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These are big questions. They are, in a sense, the very questions we will be addressing in Church 21 and we will keep coming back to them time and again through the programme. We make no apology for doing so for we cannot develop in the way God wants unless we are constantly reassessing our priorities in the light of God’s will amidst changing circumstances.

Allow some space for people to listen to the feedback from this exercise.

Point out that listening is at the core of the Church21 process. It involves listening in 3 directions – to God, to each other and to those outside, who may see us differently. Take a few moments to begin to explore what that might involve.

Encourage those present to attend the six sessions of the course when specific aspects of parish life will be unpacked in the light of the questions we have been considering.

You may wish to conclude with prayer. If at all possible, this should be led by a Church21 team member other than the rector. Suitable prayer resources are available on the Church21 website [www.church21.ie](http://www.church21.ie).

## **Now what?**

The Church21 parish team is asked to do two things after this meeting:

1. Communicate a summary of the main points of discussion to others in the parish. Start in a way that is appropriate to you - e.g. through church magazine, leaflet, in church etc. It would be helpful if you could do this before the six main sessions begin.
2. Send a copy to the Church21 Administrator:, Brigid Barrett, Rossorry Rectory, Kinarla, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, BT74 5PX or [brigid@church21.org](mailto:brigid@church21.org)

# Church21 Preparation Course

## Session 1: WELCOME

### STARTER (10 MINUTES)



1. First impressions count! Many are looking for a place in which to worship which is friendly and welcoming. What first impressions do newcomers get when they visit your church?

*Jesus came to church one day  
And sat down in a pew.  
The Rector preached, the people sang  
And no one ever knew.  
He wasn't dressed in special clothes,  
Nothing fashionable or new,  
No shining light above his head,  
So no one ever knew.  
The service done, the people left.  
They'd other things to do.  
And Jesus also left that church.  
And no one ever knew.*

2. Invite someone from outside the parish to visit and give some feedback on the welcome their received
3. Invite someone new to the parish to share some of their insights. Encourage honesty.
4. Imagine you have been asked visit some place that makes you feel quite uncomfortable. Where might that place be? Has anything like this ever happened in reality? How did you feel? Why? What might help you feel more comfortable in that situation? Now turn the situation around: how might someone unused to church feel about coming to worship in your parish? What might help them to “cross the door”?

## **MAIN COURSE (40 minutes)**



### **Read Acts 9: 10-20 Ananias welcomes Paul**

**Focus discussion on Ananias as a welcomer. Allow those present to pick up on a few of these questions:**

(It may be helpful to point out that it is the person rather than the context that is the focus of this study. Hopefully, no parish will ever regard the people outside with quite the same suspicion as that which met Paul! )

- What might bring people to church for the first time or after a long absence?
- What negative factors might make genuine welcome difficult?
- What qualities do you recognise in Ananias that enabled him to offer a sense of belonging to Paul?
- How might we work towards a situation where every regular members of the parish sees that they have a role to play in welcoming others?
- What specific steps can we take to make people feel welcome – without frightening them away?
- What are the first things a newcomer sees, or who are the first people a newcomer meets?
- Where does welcome begin? At the church door? Or in the community?

**Other suitable Bible references to explore in your own way:**

Matt 25: 31 – 40, Heb. 13: 1,2; 1 Peter 4: 8,

## **DESSERT (15 minutes)**



**Choose one of the following**

1. Invite those present to imagine they are going to a church they've never been to before. Imagine that the welcomer is Jesus. What does he say? How does he act? What do you see in the background? Take time to explore how you feel.

***Pray that Jesus' ministry of welcome might be a reality in your church... and in you.***

2. Ask people to use the letters W-E-L-C-O-M-E to express what they would like the welcome in your church to be e.g. Warm, Encouraging, Loving etc. Write the words on large pieces of paper and place on the floor around the room. Invite people to move around and quietly to pray that these qualities might be reflected in their own lives and in the life of the parish.

3. Invite those present to think of one or two people they know who currently do not attend worship (it could be family members, friends, colleagues, neighbours, anyone) but whom they would like to welcome to church. Play some quiet music. Invite those present if they wish to write the names of those they have identified on a piece of paper and in silence to bring them forward to a set point (e.g. A cross on a table). Stress the pieces of paper will not be identified. It is confidential, between them and God. One person concludes with a spoken prayer e.g. St Patrick's prayer p 450 BCP (can be used first in "me" form for the welcomer and then "them" for those to be welcomed).

# CHURCH 21 Preparation Course

## Session 2: FELLOWSHIP

### STARTER



#### 1. THE HAT TRICK

Just as the organ began to play at the crowded morning Communion Service, a man wearing a brown hat was ushered into the front pew. Since he continued to wear the hat, one of the sidesmen came to him kindly suggesting that he take it off. "No", he said, "I prefer to keep it on."

There was some consternation at the back of the church as the churchwardens discussed what they should do. The Rector's warden was enlisted to make another appeal, which he did, only to have the man under the hat reply, "I have every right to keep my hat on, and I intend to do so!" The warden retreated and then had a bright idea, he would ask the Enrolling Member of the Mothers' Union to try and have the hat removed, but alas, she also failed.

The service went ahead, the preacher was distracted by the sight of the man with the hat in the front seat, and his sermon suffered accordingly. Yet through it all, even at the communion rail, the hat still sat glued to the head of the unknown man.

After the recessional hymn, while the people were being greeted as they left, the Rector begged the hated man to stay for a few moments. When all the hands were shaken, the minister approached the man, and in a friendly way, said, "It's nice to meet you, sir. It has been a great pleasure to have you worship with us this morning, and I hope that you will come again. However, it is the custom in the Anglican Church for men to remove their hats during the service. I hope that you might conform to this practice in the future."

The man under the hat replied, "Thank you very much. I enjoyed today's service. It is good of you to invite me to become part of the congregation. In fact I joined three years ago and have been coming regularly ever since, but today has been the first time that anyone has paid any attention to me!"

**What issues does this story raise for you? Discuss in groups.**

2. In a TV documentary on "Faith in the Future", a growing church was featured. The programme focussed on one young couple who had started attending church. Two things drew them to that particular church:-

1. The worship was lively and sincere and the teaching was relevant.
2. The friendliness they encountered.

Someone has said that the most effective form of evangelism is friendliness – something we can all attempt.

The threshold of a church is sometimes a bigger barrier than we realise.

A survey in America found that 83% of those who started going to church for the first time did so because they were invited and brought along by a friend.

### **How did you begin attending this church?**

3. We often end a meeting by saying “The Grace”. Why not begin this session by saying it together? If appropriate suggest keeping eyes open. Then unpack what it means, especially the word “fellowship”.

## **MAIN COURSE**



### **Look at Acts 2:42-47**

- What were the values of these early Christians as they formed themselves into church?
- How might our values compare?
- What is the fellowship that is talked about here?
- Whose job is it to care for people?
- In what ways can we become a more caring parish?
- Are there areas of fellowship and caring in our parish that are being neglected and which need attention?
- What ways have we of integrating into the life of the parish new people who join?

**Alternative passage for study:** James 2: 1 – 4

## **DESSERT**



1. Play a CD of Graham Kendrick’s song “Peace to you” (CH 508). Encourage all present to share the peace without using words then to pray quietly for someone who is not present.

2. Plant a fast growing flower bulb in a pot. Place it somewhere that people can see it grow week by week. Encourage them to ask each time they see it, How am I growing in my faith? How am I contributing to a growing fellowship within this parish?

3. Use sections 4 and 5 of the Litany (page 176 BCP) to pray for increased fellowship within the parish

# CHURCH 21 Preparation Course

## Session 3: WORSHIP & NURTURE

### STARTER



1. Encourage those present to share with each other an experience of worship they have had outside their own parish and which made an impression on them. What impact did it make and why?

2. After a complete visitation of his diocese of Bath and Wells, the then bishop, George Carey, wrote to clergy and churchwardens:-

“Bishops and archdeacons spend a great deal of their time worshipping in many different types of churches. They vary a great deal from a High Mass to a low communion. It might be the old Book of Common Prayer, or the revised services, or a free form of Family Service... I don't want to make judgements on what we see going on, but I will tell you this – the quality of what is offered has a significant bearing on the growth of Christianity in that place....I am convinced that worship needs more attention, not less, by congregations, if they are concerned to make it available to others. The better we prepare, the better we hone the human skills of love and devotion, the more it will come from the heart”

### **Do you agree? What is the essence of worship?**

3. Use the Nooma DVD “Sunday”. It last just 10 minutes or so. Ask, “Why do we worship?”

Note – This DVD is widely available. It is stocked by the Good Bookshop, Belfast, and Scripture Union, Talbot St. Dublin. In case of difficulty please contact the CHURCH 21 administrator, Brigid Barrett ([brigid@church21.org](mailto:brigid@church21.org)).

### MAIN COURSE



### **Read Ephesians 5:15-20**

- Why is worship important?
- Who is worship for?
- What is the connection between worship and life?
- What do you think God would want to say to us about the worship offered in our parish church?

- How accessible are our forms of service and how relevant are they to the lives of our people?
- What do I bring to worship? What do I receive?
- What opportunities are there to develop and nurture the faith outside of church services? Should anything else be available?

**Alternative Bible passages:** Amos 5:21-24; 1 Cor. 14: 24 – 26, 40

## DESSERT



1. Play some quiet instrumental music on CD. In the silence invite each person to pray for three things:
  - a. For one thing for their parish and its worship,
  - b. For one other person in the church and
  - c. For one thing they'd like to receive for themselves.

Allow several minutes on each topic. One member of the group could conclude with an appropriate spoken or liturgical prayer.

2. Thank you – Please prayers.  
Seated in a circle pass a lighted candle around the group twice. As each person receives the candle they are invited to say “Thank you God for.... (perhaps something in the life of the parish?)”, then, second time round, “Please.... ”. Give permission for those who might find it intimidating simply to pray inwardly. Give examples before you start.
3. Use the Late Evening Office – led by a person or team of people who would not normally lead worship

# CHURCH 21 Preparation Course

## Session 4: SERVICE AND CARING

### STARTER (one of the following)



1. One of the great 18<sup>th</sup> century preachers, George Whitefield, went to America. In addition to Bibles and prayer-books, he carried medicine for the sick and provisions for the destitute. As well as preaching, he established orphanages and engaged in social action.

A recent conference on Evangelism reported, “The Church faces a clear challenge to be involved....We must change from being maintenance people to those who have outreach as a priority”.

“If we as Christians are out-loved by those who profess no faith in Christ, then our discipleship is seriously questioned”. Rev. Jack Burton.

St Francis of Assisi once said to his followers, “Go and preach the Gospel, with words if you must!”

*Find a need and fill it*

*Find a hurt and heal it.*

### **In what ways is ours a serving church?**

2. There are different kinds of restaurants;
  - a. Self-service
  - b. Waiter-service
  - c. Take away

### **Can you think of ways that churches might approximate? Which kind of restaurant might our church be most like?**

3. Play the song “The Servant King” (CH 219) or “Brother, sister, let me serve you (CH 517). Look at the words. What kind of service ought to be at the heart of the church? How do we compare?

## MAIN COURSE



### **Read John 13: 1-17**

- What kind of service did Jesus envisage for the church?
- What would it mean for us as a church to serve our community with this kind of attitude?
- Do we have any sense of what that might look like? Are there particular needs we may be being prompted to respond to?
- Is the fact that Judas was among the group of disciples whose feet Jesus' washed in any way relevant to us?
- How does Jesus call to serve sit with the oft-quoted motto "Charity begins at home?"

**Alternative Bible Reference:** Romans 12: 1 – 14; Matthew 25: 31-46

## DESSERT



1. Go for a prayer walk. Take a short walk together around the parish or community. Stop at key venues such as schools, factories, places of entertainment and pray silently for those who meet there
2. Read the story of the woman anointing Jesus' feet with expensive perfume (Mark 14:1-9). Invite people to reflect on this extravagant act of service. Make the point that we are called to serve others extravagantly by passing round a bottle of perfume and inviting people to sprinkle the person beside them with some of the perfume as a kind of "commissioning" to go out and put this into practice. The lingering smell can be a powerful reminder.
3. Use all or part of the Renewal of Baptismal Vows (BCP p.398).

# CHURCH 21 Preparation Course

## Session 5: COMMUNICATIONS

### STARTER



1. Ian Coffey in a seminar on Growing Churches remarked how much of an impression is given by our service sheets, magazines and other communications.

**They should be of good quality. “Casual is not spiritual!”**

Presentation is important and reflects the ethos of the parish.

**How well do we communicate, with each other and others around us? How do we know what it is that we ought to be communicating?**

2. Your church has decided to produce a welcome leaflet to give to people new to the area. What would you want it to say about your parish church to someone who knows nothing about it?

3. Six or seven years ago an organisation identified 3 essential categories of communication for churches:-

1. The occasional leaflet/invitation to major events, e.g., Christmas, Harvest, Weeks of Renewal, Flower Festivals etc., which will be circulated beyond the parish membership.
2. The monthly Parish Magazine which had 3 basic aims:-
  - a) To inform church members of activities about to take place and to report on past events,
  - b) To present what the church means to members and to teach about the faith,
  - c) To present the parish as lively and involved fellowship to visitors and to those with only a tenuous link.
3. The weekly service sheet/announcement sheet.

**How do those categories stand today? Where might there be gaps in our parish communications?**

**Would it be a good idea to do a survey of what parishioners think about communication and how it can be improved?**

## MAIN COURSE



### **Read Matthew 13:1-3, 34-35**

- What evidence is there that Jesus was a good communicator?
- What methods did he use?
- What implications might this have for the way we communicate as a parish?
- What did Jesus want to communicate?
- What do we want to communicate?
- What message do our buildings, both outside and inside, give and are they easily identified and accessible?
- Are announcements in church really the best way of informing parishioners about what's happening?
- If communication is a two-way process could we be described as a "listening church"?

**Alternative Bible Reference:** 1 Cor. 14: 7,8; 1 Cor. 13: 1-2; Mark 4v9

## DESSERT



1. Get a string of Christmas tree lights – with one bulb blown. What effect does this have? When the bulb is replaced read Matthew 5:15, "Let your light so shine..." Use the bulb as a stimulus for prayer. Invite the group to share with God their longing for his light to fill the dark places of the community and the world.
2. Draw a map of the local area and highlight meeting places for significant numbers of people. Pray that the message we seek to communicate might permeate those places.
3. Use Thursday Weekday Intercessions (p.142 BCP)

# CHURCH 21 Preparation Course

## Session 6: LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY

### STARTERS



1. Take a moment to consider the following definitions of leadership.

**What strikes you in any of them? How, together, might these statements inform our view of leadership in the church?**

The only way to lead people is to show them a future: a leader is a dealer in hope.' *Napoléon*

'The first essential characteristic of leaders is that they are going somewhere, in other words they are aiming at goals or objectives that lie in the future.' *Tom Marshall*

'A good leader is one who leaves behind them men and women who possess the conviction and the will to carry on without them.' *Lydia Dunn*

'A Christian leader is someone who is called to lead; leads with and through Christ-like character; and demonstrates the functional competencies that permit effective leadership to take place.' *George Barna*

'Good leaders grow people, bad leaders stunt them; good leaders serve their followers, bad leaders enslave them.' *Sir Adrian Cadbury*

'I am among you as one who serves.' *Jesus*

2. A Church of Ireland parish church has listed on its noticeboard the times of service, the names of the clergy and contact details. Then, right at the bottom, it says: "Ministers – the Whole Congregation". What would the reaction be if this was included on your church noticeboard?

3. In a seminar on Church Growth, Ian Coffey identified the DNA of growing churches. One of the common factors was that members were encouraged to discover their gifts and then given opportunities to use them. They were not only given responsibility but were also trained and resourced.

**Is this a priority or a weakness in our church (nationally and locally)?**

## MAIN COURSE



**Read Exodus 18: 13-26**

**What comes to mind when listening to this reading?**

A book on this chapter of the Bible is entitled, “The Jethro Principle”.  
What is the main principle behind Jethro’s words to Moses?

How do you react to the following quotations?

- “The “omni-competent cleric” does not exist! But an omni-competent congregation is very biblical.”
- “The laity are not there to help the clergy do their job. The clergy are there to help the laity be the church.”

**What is your vision for leadership at every level in your parish? How could it become a reality?**

**Alternative Bible Reference:** Ephesians 4: 4-16; 1 Cor. 12: 4 – 13, 27

## DESSERT



1. Use Wednesday Weekday Intercessions (p 141)
2. Ask those present to form a circle. Invite each member of the group in turn to stand in the middle of the circle. As the group gathers round in prayer and blessing a designated person reads some words based on 1 Cor. 12:27: “Now all of us together are Christ’s body and you (name...) are a valued and necessary part of it. May God equip and strengthen you do his will. Amen. ” (or other appropriate words).
3. Compile a list of all those who have specific leadership roles and responsibilities in the parish. Pray for each group individually. Pray that God will raise up leaders for the future.