

Practical input

## Creating a map of your church's engagement in the world

*Lots of what many of us do as Christians is corporate and expressed through our local fellowships and congregations – we come together to worship, to intercede, to study and to reach out as one body in joint initiatives. And this is a very important part of what it means to be church. But it is far from the whole picture. Because we are each, and all, still part of the church when we are dispersed. Indeed, when we are scattered, we can and do connect with, and influence, a wide variety of people and places.*

*This simple creative idea is designed to help small groups and churches create a clearer overview of some of the primary places and spheres in society that members of their community are inhabiting, blessing, influencing and reaching out to.*

*The heart behind it is to stimulate prayer for your church or fellowship's scattered witness; to inspire a deeper sense of affirming, connecting to, and honouring an empowering, every member ministry and mission view of the church as a sum of its distinct body parts, as well as one of gathering to act jointly; and to build a greater sense of community and mutual pastoral support for each person. It can also be incredibly encouraging as even in a small group, a much fuller picture begins to emerge of just how many places or people are part of your church's mission.*

*Because every church and fellowship group is different, we've kept this resource very flexible so you can adapt it to your particular setting and emphasis. But we hope and pray that however you use it, it will inspire, release and empower your fellowship to own, pray for, and act out its dispersed mission with greater passion and ownership.*



### 1. Gathering a sense of what your fellowship's scattered engagement looks like

- There are quite a number of different ways you could go about doing this. And it's a good idea to think first about what is going to work best for your fellowship. This will depend on things like:

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- How big the size of group or church is that you want to involve – a small group that knows each other well is likely to feel more comfortable, and potentially therefore happier, to go into more detail.
- Whether you want to gather the information in person, and if so, what type of meeting you will be doing this at – members only or public, a normal service, or a special day devoted to looking at this mission?
- The length of time you will have – the more areas of engagement you want to map, or the more people you have, the more time you'll need, especially if you're going to do the information gathering in person.
- The sense you have of how comfortable people will be to share a top level indication of their connections outside of church. This exercise is obviously designed to affirm every part of life rather than be intrusive, but everyone has different experiences and preferences about the level they want to share
- The number and type of areas of engagement you want to map – e.g. work-places or spheres, community institutions, areas of town or nation, particular businesses – it might be you want to map it all, or just concentrate in on one approach such as vocation, or local connections.
- What you will need to put in place to keep information gathering and sharing safe and appropriate. People sharing in a small group is very different to gathering information about the whole church... even if you don't include names or other personal details. Make sure that those participating understand they should not share sensitive or personal information about specific people, and that they are also happy with how you plan to approach sharing the information they do give (see section 3).
  
- In some cases even, how you will pastorally handle it if:
  - anyone contributes involvement in something or somewhere others in the church might struggle with – and how you communicate support without endorsement if this is necessary
  - there are very different levels of engagement because of ability, gifting, capacity or commitment.
  
- You might like to give people time to reflect on their own first, perhaps with a piece of paper, or even dispersed through an email survey or similar. Use a flip chart, screen, simple worksheet or email pro forma, or even a range of differently coloured post-it notes to encourage people to think about how they connect with the world outside church under one or more of the various categories below:
  - where, and with who, they work
  - the people their work influences, reaches or effects (locally, regionally, nationally and/or internationally)
  - any schools, medical facilities or other community institutions or organisations they are linked with through work, family or volunteering
  - the street, or area they live in
  - the organisations or causes they are passionate about supporting, or are involved with, individually
  - the shops, businesses, services and clubs they regularly engage with
  - any particular places they love to spend time in
  - anything else they/you think is significant
  
- Depending on all the factors you thought through about your context before starting, you can decide how you want each person to share this information with you and/or the group as a whole. It could be that they pass in the details for you to collate and present at a later date (in person or via email) or that you gather and group them together 'live' – at least initially – by inviting each person up to share what they have come up with in turn.

## 2. Mapping your church or fellowship's engagement in the world

- Again there are lots of different ways you could do this, but keeping things simple and visual will really help – even if visual in this case means bullet points under clearly segmented headings, rather than drawings... although if you have people who would enjoy creating a more graphic design for you – brilliant!
- But don't worry too much about how 'good' it looks, or whether it's a map, or mainly lists... the important thing is just to summarise the information in a clear way that people can understand, relate to, pray for, and get behind in encouragement!
- If you are collating and presenting the information 'live' in a group, you can simply have different sheets of flip chart with particular headings on that each person – or a nominated scribe – populates as they each transfer the information on their individual list to the general lists, or stick on their relevant post-it-notes.
- Even if you have done the mapping 'live', and certainly if you're doing it separately, you might like to look at creating a simple, small poster, fold out leaflet or online PDF, so you can present and circulate a summarised version of what you've gathered together for ongoing prayer.
- It may be – especially if you're focusing on connections and presence in your local area, that you literally create a map (or highlight areas of an existing map) to show all the streets, buildings, or even town centre shops that your church members engage with.
- But, if you are covering lots of different categories of engagement, or have an emphasis on the different vocations and spheres of society that your members are moving in, you might prefer to take more of a diagram approach, grouping sub-lists of places or institutions together in spheres under things like education, health, politics, business etc and perhaps having a representative graphic under each.
- It might be that you end up with more than one item, to collate and summarise different types of engagement too... especially if you live somewhere that a lot of people commute elsewhere to work from, or you have a real range of types of vocational engagement. It's all about choosing what suits you best!
- It's of course up to you too whether you want to include your church's gathered, corporate engagement alongside the dispersed elements too. Doing so will obviously build a more complete picture, as it will reunite the two areas of engagement. But the principal idea of this exercise is to redress an imbalance that sometimes exists, so make sure if you do include the gathered elements here as well, that they do not dominate, or end up seeming like an undercover recruitment drive for volunteers! This is all about recognising, affirming, and supporting what the church is *already* doing when it is scattered.
- Be aware in sharing what you create with everyone that contributed, that even if specific names of members haven't been included alongside where they work or connect, you may well still be handling sensitive data and/or that not everyone who would see what you have created would understand its purpose. For example, it might be fine to email, or give out, your 'map' to your members, but not to display it in an open church service and/or leave it up in a church building that's open for public activities.

## 3. Inspiring ongoing prayer for your church's dispersed – as well as gathered – engagement with the world

- If you have gathered and – at least to some extent – created your map 'live', it's brilliant to get everyone praying together there and then. You could do this corporately and generally, or by dividing different categories up between different individuals or pairs. You will know the best way to help everyone in your group engage in prayer. And depending on the time, and nature of the gathering, this can be a short, closing type of prayer, a more lengthy time of intercession, or even a separate session after a break.
- Even if you did gather to create your 'map', it's almost certain you'll want to share and circulate it for ongoing use. Because this will be when it can start to become a really powerful tool... if it can become embedded in the

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individual and gathered prayer life, and missional outlook, of the whole church or fellowship group going forward.

- There are so many different ways you could facilitate this... all sizes of groups could explore creating an occasional gathered event or recurring rhythm of prayer to specifically pray with the map you have created. This could be something as simple as encouraging everyone to give five minutes each Monday morning to look at the map, bless the scattered church's witness that week, and ask God to bring to mind any particular individuals, places or spheres for them to pray for during that day, or week. Or it could take a more intermittent approach, such as deciding to designate specific seasons of particular prayer for this area of the church's mission.

### 4. Further ideas to explore deepening this area of prayer and mutual support

- Smaller and more intimate groups doing this exercise, such as prayer triplets or home groups, could explore increasing their sense of connection, ownership and support of each other's unique engagements with the world by:
  - sharing photos of particular buildings, logos etc
  - organising visits to pray on site in different streets, through a prayer walk round key locations in your community and/or even each other's work-places if this is appropriate.
  - having messaging groups where there is a mutual expectation of sharing particular requests for prayer or encouragement in dispersed mission as they crop up.
- No matter the size of group, you could invite a range of people to share more about one or more of their areas of engagement through a special event, special sermon or intercessions series, or piece of writing for a church communication (as appropriate). Perhaps also, having become aware of the dispersed connections your church has, when particular national flag days, or seasons of emphasis come up, there will be a new sense of the resource available to you of people who can share experiences, or inspire prayer for different areas of society.
- Keep asking God to bring to mind ideas for how you can increase prayer around, and support for, the dispersed engagement your church or fellowship group has with the world... there will undoubtedly be specific things he will lead you to focus on, or develop, for your specific context and members as you explore this whole area of the church's wider mission with him together.