

MAP for Derby Diocesediscerning the angel of the community

# introduction

This exercise for finding out more about your community is based on the exercise ‘Discerning the Angel of the Church’, which you will also find among the additional resources on the MAP for Derby Diocese web pages.

Like the Angel of the Church exercise, this one is an excellent way of engaging those who think more creatively and imaginatively. It’s a tool that people of all ages, including children and families, can get involved in.

The exercise is derived from on one contained in the book *Growing Healthy Churches* by Robert Warren, which in turn takes its inspiration from the book of Revelation. Here, John is given the prophetic words of Christ to the seven churches. In each case, the words are addressed ‘to the angel of the church in…’. The words are not addressed to a literal angel, but to the character and heart of the church. So, the angel of the church is all these things.

This exercise seeks not to find the angel of the church, but the angel of the community.

The exercise is designed to help gain insight into the essential character of the community where it is carried out – its ‘angel’, in the same sense as the angels of the churches in Revelation. It seeks to use creative language and imagery, like the book of Revelation itself, to try to describe something that might otherwise be difficult for someone to put into words.

The angel of the community can encompass several elements:

* Where it has come from (history)
* Where it is now (geography)
* What it is (personality)
* What it may become (vocation)

Alongside the exploration of the community, the exercise brings a not-to-be-missed opportunity to engage with the community. They can be involved in the exercise, building relationships and allowing them to be listened to. How and where the exercise is carried out therefore needs careful thought.

# when to use this resource

‘Discerning the angel of the church’ is most appropriate for use during stage two of MAP for Derby Diocese, to help the church to reflect on their journey toward God’s calling so far. It is particularly helpful whilst considering the following questions in that stage:

* What is our history?
* To where has God brought us?
* With whom do we share our life and what do they say about us?

# the process

1. Invite the community to be a part of it

Consider running the event in a public space and advertise it well. You could hold it on the streets, in a shopping centre or on a market stall, in a village hall or in a car park (weather permitting!) You can run it in the church, but consider how likely non-churchgoers will be to attend.

You could run a stall in another community event that you’re putting on (see Community Audit Ideas).
2. Encourage imagination

Take as many opportunities as you can for people to be creative. Use pictures, ask people to draw, paint or make things. Doing so will engage all ages together, and it will be an excellent opportunity to get children and families involved.
3. Use some warm-up questions

Asking some simple questions to get people’s imagination going will help draw them in, and may well give you some insightful answers:
- What sort of animal is our community like?
- What sort of colour is our community like?
- What else is our community like?

Once again, people of all ages can answer these questions. Don’t forget to follow up the answers by asking ‘Why?’
4. Identifying the angel

Take a large number of different pictures of angels and place them on tables (or on your stall) so that each can be clearly seen. Ask people to look at them all, and enjoy them.

Then ask them to choose one that best represents the character or personality of the community. If you’re running a stall, try and find out why the person has chosen the angel they have and make a note of their choice and response. If it’s in a group exercise, get people to share their choices without comment first.

Is there a consensus? Or some popular choices?