history audit

introduction

The Parish History Audit is a process of exploring and naming the historical themes of church, congregation and community. It is not same as a parish history (although there are clear links between the two).

Very often, understanding our past can give us a valuable insight into our present situation and our future direction. Whilst it's not a good idea to be ruled by what has gone before, it can give us an indication of what may be waiting around the corner. The same is true of our mission in the parish.

Evidence suggests that history tends to repeat itself, and that high dividends can be paid in naming and understanding the themes that have repeated themselves in any given situation.

when to use this resource

This resource 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 question in that stage:

- what is our history?

process

The process for carrying out a History Audit closely resembles the 'Look - Listen - Read - Research' pattern given in Writing a Parish History. If you're interested in learning more of these themes, there's a helpful guide at http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/building-on-history-project/. The Parish History Audit, however, will be much more of an overview, identifying specific themes, rather than a detailed history.

It differs from a community audit and a church audit in that these two look at the present situation. As the name suggests, the Parish History Audit looks at what has gone on in the past, and how it may influence the present and the future.

themes

There are many areas of research to look at when completing a History Audit. Which ones you focus on will depend on your own situation. However, a possible list of audit themes may include:

- Interactions and relationships with other organisations
  include other Anglican churches, ecumenical partners, secular organisations, the wider community
- Church attendance
  electoral roll and average Sunday attendance figures, worshipping community figures and their related joiners and leavers statistics
- Children and Youth Ministry
  including numbers, focus, etc.
- Style of worship and changes in worship
- Use of the church and buildings; architectural developments and changes in use
- Lengths of stay and profiles of incumbents
- Recurring themes in PCC minutes, parish magazines, etc.
- Patterns of lay leadership
- Issues and initiatives in outreach, mission and evangelism
- Church music
- Social, funding raising and other church events
- Finance
- Church and congregation planting
- Socio-demographic changes in parish population and church congregation

points to consider

Whilst undertaking a History Audit, it's worth considering these questions:

- Can we identify and name cultural themes?
- Is there evidence of significant, ground-breaking change taking place? If so, what events or actions enabled these to take place?
- Are there clear sticking points that nobody has ever managed to address?

naming the themes

There is enormous power in the naming of specific issues and themes for two specific reasons:

1. The accepted wisdom of what it was like in the 'good old days' (or 'bad old days'!) may not actually be true when researched in detail.

   The myth of the full church is one good example of this.

2. There will almost certainly be issues and themes which recur throughout the history of a church which no one has ever really explored and identified.

   For example, the cry that 'we can't get people to attend the Harvest Festival service' might be researched to discover that for 150 years the Harvest Festival service has been poorly attended; does this say something?

sources of evidence

Once again, the 'Look - Listen - Read - Research' pattern is a good one to use. Specific documents which may be worth surveying will include:

- PCC Minutes
- Parish Magazines
- Annual Reports
- Annual Accounts
- Service Attendance Registers
- Church Electoral Rolls
- Statistics for Mission returns
- Parish profiles (produced during clergy vacancies)
- Mission Action Plans and equivalent
- Strategy and vision documents and statements