
rdp>
rationale

www.rapiddevelopment.org.uk



introduction to rdp

The rapid development programme is a proactive opportunity-led, workshop based approach to parish and deanery development and growth. **rdp** differs markedly from other church development programmes as it starts with; opportunities not problems; an outward looking and growth bias; and it directly challenges current thinking. It seeks to achieve a fundamental shift in our thinking and approach to a more intentional engagement and meaningful mission focussed on reaching 'new' people in the context of an unchurched and a changed society.

At its core is an outward looking and structured analysis of local dynamics and the clear and focussed identification of local opportunities for church growth within the specific local context.

The programme provides permission for innovative and exciting thinking. Shifting to an outward looking approach allows participating parishes or deaneries to identify both the opportunities and new additional resources for engagement-based growth.

The rapid development process helps deaneries and parishes to:

- Regain their confidence and rethink/rediscover a narrative (a story they can tell about who they are and why they are there, that is not historic or backward looking but positive, forward looking and speaks to those people they want to reach).
- Begin to articulate an overarching vision that has meaning behind clear words and a means of translating it into real actions (it's not about mission statements).
- Identify what it is that they should be offering and to whom and not all

things to all people. This needs to be focussed and clear if it is to be done well.

- Generate parish and external excitement for meaningful engagement with their community (something that excites the parish and their allies for meaningful change in their community).
- Identify who are the real change agents in their community that they want to bring on board to contribute to mission and bring in new resources – re-energising mission (openness and generosity leads to reciprocity).

This document introduces some of the assumptions that underpin **rdp**. It will not take you through the whole programme. Rather we want to outline some of the key assumptions that we make about the challenges facing churches and our approach to achieving a rapid shift in thinking and impact.

assumptions

Like any programme, **rdp** is based on a number of assumptions about the world and the potential for change.

We have all made some key assumptions about where we find ourselves now – some of them are false (a misreading of the current potential) and some of them are just plain delusional, such as an aging population will lead to more ‘coming back’ to church. (The fact is, the data does not bear this out; they are baby-boomers, they were never ‘in church’!) Some continue to think that things will change, despite the fact that we don’t, or that change will happen without us.

Some of our key assumptions about change are illustrated below. Some of them may seem trite because there are some pretty basic things that we need to do, but which, for a range of reasons, we do not seem to have got round to doing. Some of our change assumptions involve a fundamental and rapid shift in key elements of current thinking, approach and actions.

Firstly, there are some assumptions about the current state of the church and the wider social context of engagement, mission and parish development:

1. The Church of England will not survive this decade in its current form. There are a number of studies and projections and all of them are bleak¹. Without a fundamental shift to a more

pro-active approach and focussed investment the well-established long-term trend of decline will not be changed. We are not seriously investing in the future and currently most of our resources go on legacy costs (buildings and pensions) alongside a status quo mission model that is not working well enough in the majority of our churches.

2. All institutions/businesses have had to change in response to:
 - the fundamental and increasingly rapid changes in the economy, society and culture,
 - a set of more consumerist expectations,
 - changing gender relations,
 - a greater diversity in beliefs and lifestyles.

Libraries, pubs and cinemas amongst others have had to change, or they have closed. In some cases we are holding on to and celebrating the wrong things (often Victorian inventions) in the misplaced name of “tradition” and talking and behaving as if there has not been a major shift over the last 40 years.

3. There are also a set of widely held sociological myths; that growing individualism and secularisation makes church decline inevitable.

¹ A brief summary and the key references are available from the resources section on our website.

This is a complete misreading of the research. Firstly, there are many successful 'new' (often refreshed old) forms of coming together such as concerts, allotments, various cooking/food clubs, single issue organisations/movements and social networking. We are actually living in a very pro-social period, but this desire to come together in new ways is not transferring to, or being embraced, by the conventional collective organisational forms such as political parties, clubs, trade unions etc. People are looking to come together, as the progress of the Olympic torch, the riots, the Jubilee, the Olympic opening ceremony and Paralympics have shown.

There is also widespread confusion about secularity. We do live in an increasingly unchurched society, but it is not an unbelieving society. It is very clear from recent studies that the overwhelming majority of young people, for example, do believe in God, have an active prayer life, have a strong and positive view of Jesus and are interested in developing the spiritual element of their lives, but the studies are equally clear that they, and the majority of other people including the majority of Anglicans, are not interested in the conventional church narrative or offer. In our terms,

they are unchurched. We all have to assume that the majority of people we want to work with are unchurched and this means that we will have to develop a very different looking and sounding offer.

4. In recent decades all communities have experienced significant demographic, physical and social change. New residential developments have been built. New groups (e.g. students) and different generations (e.g. young families) have moved in. Others have died (the great wartime organisers) and there is greater diversity in lifestyles and cultures.

The majority of churches have either not recognised this, or have responded inadequately to the changes around them. Many have an understanding of their community based on denial, nostalgia and, in some cases, intended or unintended exclusion.

Equally, it is clear that there are specific 'new' opportunities in all communities for meaningful engagement, purposeful mission and real growth, but

this potential will only be realised successfully if there is a deeper understanding of local dynamics and a clearer and more relevant narrative and offer.

5. The final assumption is that we have an amazing world and life changing message. This message of love and hope is **very** timely. It is an exciting message and approach which embodies new ideas of what it means to be human, what healthy relationships consist of and what now constitutes justice and hope. This good news specifically talks to our post-crash world with its sudden and profound willingness to question and explore values and ethics; a greater recognition of neighbours and their role in “my life”; and an emerging post-consumerist ethos. There is a wonderful opportunity for meaningful engagement and purposeful action NOW! We also believe that the Church of England with its radical calling to be everywhere and for everyone is in a unique position to bring (and build) this good news to an unchurched society.

“ This has to be the future of churches... it reaches to the very heart of who we are and what it means to be church. ”

rdp change

Many parishes, deaneries and dioceses are stuck in:

- a (no/low growth) cycle of insufficient resources
- an unclear understanding of their local dynamics and the opportunities for meaningful engagement and growth
- a loss of confidence and
- the inappropriate deployment of assets.

A core part of the problem is the bias towards looking inward for ideas, resources and people, essentially talking to the same people again, while trying to squeeze more out of less and offering more of the same. If we are to grow again then we need to make a rapid shift in our approach and this must begin with an outward focus for ideas, people, energy and money.

We have an incredible message, values and potential offer – we have to regain our confidence and faith, get out of our comfort zone and proclaim and build these again.

understanding

We have to start with a rediscovery of the changed communities around us, specifically the relevant dynamics and opportunities for intentional engagement, to renew our presence and offer and to raise our profile. We also have to work out who are the people delivering real

change so that we can work with them, also helping us to reconnect meaningfully and purposefully. Learning with and from others is a useful tool that we could do with rediscovering.

focus

We have to release our resources for growth and away from the activities that do not work anymore. This means moving beyond thrift and investing faithfully in our own future. Generosity with others leads to reciprocation, contributing additional and much needed passion, energy and skills. We also have to refresh our spaces, making them available and central to an inspiring and joyful life again.

narrative

Just as in Jesus' mission, we too have to act in ways that disrupt (positively) the mundane ideas of life and faith, bringing/building good news, and exciting people again about our offer. There are also direct and indirect negative perceptions of us that we urgently have to challenge and address. We will need to invest in events, marketing and activities that will enable us to reconnect again with our neighbours, within a clear framework of distinctive, targeted and relevant good news messages.

rdp change model



focus

resources - generous working with others to release the resources that we need

spaces - the relevant use/feelings in our spaces for growth

narrative

connection - clear, consistent and quality ways to communicate

disruption - the right messages/actions to change perceptions and raise our profile

understanding

brand - the right brand that talks to the community as it actually is

alliances - working closely with the real change agents

the opportunity

It is probably now something of a cliché, but for several decades Britain has become a field of mission. At a local level there is greater population churn and there are new residential developments, more complex households and new groups such as students, migrants and young families moving in.

Our churches have an offer that was developed around a community and a set of cultural assumptions that have either changed dramatically or, in some cases, no longer exist. We need to have a clear understanding of current community dynamics that can underpin our engagement and mission.

Our wider culture and expectations have also changed. The majority are unchurched and they see church as somewhere that is “not for people like me”.

The idea that we should defer to established institutions and authority has long gone. There are instead consumerist expectations of welcome, comfort and involvement. Reaching out to the unchurched, in very changed communities, will inevitably involve us in taking risks:

- We have to get noticed (no longer quiet and safe)
- We need to use relevant language + messages (language and experiences

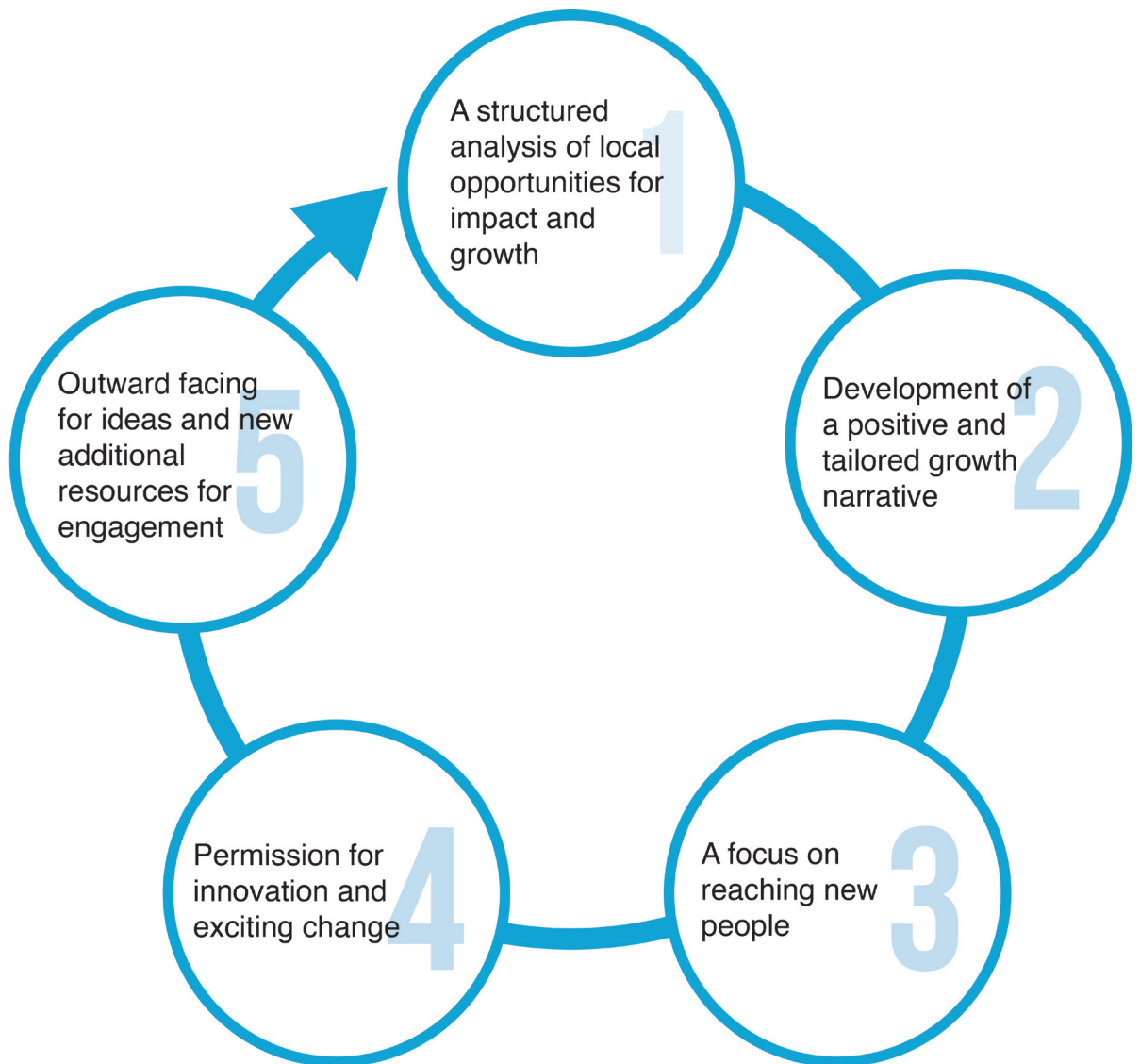
that people can understand)

- We should be more generous (welcoming, loving and investing in our community)
- We must use new technologies that make this easier. (Communities are on line as well as geographic.)

We need to articulate our amazing values (peace, love, joy, hope) and excite people with our vision and actions. This will attract new people, energies and skills and, as well as nourishing our communities, replenish our skills and networks and refresh our presence.

We have some good things to build on. The Church of England is everywhere for everyone, with residual but strong goodwill and levels of trust. We, of course, have some great locations and spaces. In short, we have a good base for success. In many places, there will be an interesting ‘project’ or recent experience of success from which useful lessons can be drawn. Frankly, most of what is holding us back is our ‘culture’ and some learned negative assumptions and behaviour; it is in our gift to address those.

rdp cycle



and finally...

For many readers of this document making it this far, we have probably not said anything very new and you may be thinking, 'We know all this'. Great! Then let's get on with it! Perhaps the question is, what is actually holding us back?

In our workshops, we are direct and challenging. We have to stop finding reasons or distractions from what now urgently needs to be done¹. We have to be smarter about how we organise ourselves; generate resources and find new ones; engage with our communities and excite them about our remade offer.

We need to find new answers for how we can relate to our communities now, in an unchurched (rather than dechurched/post church) society, and undertake effective and purposeful engagement-based mission in the world as it actually exists, not as [some] want it to be, or how it used to be 20/50 years ago.

We need to rediscover the joy, hope, love and good news that we are about. Many of our current measures are not about success and, in some cases, they are part of the problem (short-term and about the maintenance of decline, e.g.

fundraising for the roof!).

In **rdp**, we have created some of our own measures (on the website) which have come out of the words and experience generated in the programme so far: www.rapiddevelopment.org.uk

We have to re-imagine and renew ourselves as outward looking and successful mission organisations and move out of the spiral of 'inevitable' decline to become engaged, excited and re-energised once again.

“ ...it has proved a helpful way of cutting through a lot of our flim-flammy to the reality of who we're trying to reach and how. ”

¹ New loos, heating, glass doors, boiler, roof maintenance, parish share - or that £1million we need for a new hall so that we can do this! If we start with our current deficits and problems, we aren't going any way but down.

appendix 1: programme description

The rapid development programme (**rdp**) was developed by the Council for Social Responsibility (CSR) based at the Diocese of Portsmouth.

It is a unique programme for local parishes and deaneries that are considering new ways to engage with their community and to re-energise their offer.

rdp uses adapted social/business development techniques; the programme seeks to encourage parishes and deaneries to rethink, from first principles, their opportunities/role in their local community.

The programme covers:-

- Social and cultural challenges facing local churches and deaneries.
- Identifying and engaging with the emerging opportunities in your local area.
- Identifying your real priorities for growth.
- What is it that you can meaningfully offer in your local communities?
- Developing a narrative/pitch about your offer.

- How can you generate additional resources to achieve your ambitions?
- What do you need your spaces to do?

What a parish or deanery can expect from **rdp**:-

- Pre-meeting visit from a facilitator to get a sense of their key issues and potential.
- Two full day workshops (1-3 parishes or a deanery), with parish teams.
- In-house presentation (in varying formats) with the participating parishes.
- The production of a tailored project prospectus covering key findings, messages and priorities for growth.

We also provide a free follow-up workshop and tailored set of resources.

rdp is designed as a short and quick (rapid) parish or deanery development workshop programme to help parishes or deaneries to make the quick shifts in their thinking, ambition and understanding of the opportunities for growth.



contact

If you are interested in finding out more about what we are doing, we would love to hear from you. More details about the programme and a growing selection of free resources are also available on our website.

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