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Historic Religious Buildings Alliance
a group within the Heritage Alliance

Embargoed until: 10:00 Friday 3 November

New guide for parishes looking to open up their church for community use and mission

A new, updated and extended version of 'Crossing the Threshold: a step-by-step guide to developing your place of worship for wider community use and managing a successful building project' toolkit has been launched.

Its development is in response to a growth in church communities wanting to adapt and improve their space so that it can be opened up to other community groups

Many parishes are also starting to look at ways of creatively using their building to increase footfall and to open up opportunities for trading and social enterprise, with concepts ranging from community cafes, to libraries and soft play, to simply making the space suitable for renting out for children's parties and group meetings. Much of this work is in line with the churches desire to support people in their communities and to find new ways of building strong relationships with their localities.

The new improved toolkit for 2017 offers guidance for parishes as they start to consider any changes they would like to make to their buildings and who have a vision for it to be opened up for wider usage whilst maintaining it as an active and welcoming place of worship.

Becky Clark, Director of the Cathedrals and Church Buildings Division for the Church of England welcomed the toolkit:

"This excellence grassroots initiative is set to become national guidance and I commend it to parishes across the country. Our churches are the hub of their communities in times of joy, grief and for those on the margins who are in need of our support. Offering a welcoming, safe and sustainable environment is really important. This advice is both practical and accessible and will help churches looking to develop their buildings for the benefits of all in their communities."

The revised resource includes additional support on managing building projects and new models of how churches and communities can share the management of completed buildings to the benefit of all involved.

The publication has been funded by a grant of £12,000 from Allchurches Trust to the HRBA (Historic Religious Buildings Alliance) with the Diocese of Hereford contributing £2,000 towards the updating work.

Trevor Cooper, Chair of the Historic Religious Buildings Alliance explained how it became involved: “The Historic Religious Buildings Alliance have been running one day training days in partnership with Purcell Architects on ‘*Managing major building projects in places of worship*’ since 2013. From early on, we were aware there was no single straightforward and practical guide that we could signpost our audience to which they could refer to when they returned to their communities. Joining forces with the Diocese of Hereford in the task of updating and expanding their *Crossing the Threshold* toolkit meant we can meet this need and bring it to a national audience.”

It was updated with input from HRBA and an alliance of interested parties, including Churchcare (Cathedral and Church Buildings Division) and Parish Resources, the Church of England, National Churches Trust and representatives of other denominations and updates include guidance on changes to funding and grants, particularly the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The toolkit also draws upon the impact many parishes in the Diocese of Hereford have seen from simple improvements such as installing new facilities, such as kitchens, toilets and flexible seating to more ambitious reordering and refurbishment projects.

Wendy Coombey, Community Partnership and Funding Officer for Diocese of Hereford said: “We have tried to include new sections, not only reflecting changing practice, but new ideas and approaches. So for example, how do you creatively engage with local people? What new models of governance could be applied to projects to make it easier for local people to be involved?

“We have included more guidance in response to requests from parishes, on subjects such as how to work with architects, or how to be more thoughtful about the environment.

“The more resources and support we can give to our church communities to care and develop their church buildings, the more it frees up their time and energy to engage more in their Christian mission and outreach – and building stronger community relationships enables them to do that.”

The new toolkit is available online: www.hereford.anglican.org/crossingthethresholdtoolkit and is free to download. Printed versions are available on request, subject to a small admin charge.

As far as is possible, the guidance is applicable to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and covers churches of all Christian denominations.

Notes to Editors:

The toolkit was launched as part of a day of talks and training at St Martin in the Bullring, Birmingham on Friday 3 November.

Filmed interviews with speakers at the event are available as are photographs of the event.

Background to the toolkit:

The new guide provides a further and much needed update to the 2013 version of *Crossing the Threshold*: a community development approach to the use of church buildings. It was first developed in 2009 by the Diocese of Hereford and then updated four years later.

Positive feedback on previous versions:

A PCC member from a South Shropshire village church remembers attending the launch of the first *Crossing the Threshold* toolkit in 2009. “It galvanised us into doing something,” she says. “The only facilities we had in the church was a Belfast sink, a cold water tap and a small immersion heater above it. There was no toilet, but we progressed to an outside Elsan, hired for any substantial event.”

The launch and the toolkit encouraged the PCC to pursue the changes they wanted. “The case studies made us realise that what we thought were pie-in-the-sky ideas really were possible. What other projects had achieved was an inspiration. It gave us lots of ideas for potential funders, too, many of whom we thought wouldn’t be interested in our project idea.”

“We completed our project in 2013, and now have good facilities: two toilets (one disabled), storage for tables and stacking chairs, a simple kitchen area at the back of the nave, and a preparation kitchen in a room at the base of the tower. We also have comfortable seating for the choir and the congregation, and the nave provides a flexible space for services, exhibitions, fetes, holiday clubs, concerts etc. For us, *Crossing the Threshold* was part of the catalyst that helped us on our way.”

Details on partner organisations:

The Historic Religious Building Alliance brings together those working for a secure future for historic religious buildings. Our scope is all listed places of worship in the UK. Our members are representatives from the main Christian denominations and other faith groups as well as organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, Historic England, the Churches Conservation Trust and the National Churches Trust, and the Historic Chapels Trust and the Amenity Societies which in different ways support those who have responsibility for looking after our church heritage. Membership also includes individual clergy and churchwardens and trustees as well as other who support them e.g.: architects, fundraisers and historic churches support officers part-funded by Historic England.

HRBA also produces a free e-newsletter, with excellent feedback which is now sent directly to over 1,325 recipients.

<http://www.hrballiance.org.uk/>

The Diocese of Hereford is the most rural in the Church of England. It covers Herefordshire, south Shropshire and some parishes in Worcestershire, Powys and Monmouthshire. The diocese has over 400 church buildings in 356 parishes and 84 schools and academies. It is also home to dozens of Christian youth organisations, community events and social action groups many of which benefit from sympathetic changes made to churches. More than 30% of church buildings in the diocese now have improved facilities thanks to the hard work and dedication of volunteers in parish and advice from support staff. Between 2013 and 2016 these efforts saw £2m of capital funding for building improvement projects brought in through grants and other means. <https://www.hereford.anglican.org/>

Allchurches Trust is one of the UK's largest charitable trusts. Allchurches Trust is the charitable owner of the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group, which grants a significant proportion of its profits to Allchurches so they can be given back to society for good causes. <https://www.allchurches.co.uk/>

National Churches Trust is the national, independent charity dedicated to supporting and promoting places of worship of historic, architectural and community value used by Christian denominations throughout the UK. The Trust does this through the provision of grants for repairs and modernisation, support, advice and information and campaigning to highlight the cause of church buildings and the value they provide to communities. More information at www.nationalchurchestrust.org

ChurchCare is the Church of England's national resource, adding value from the centre to support over 16,000 parish churches and 42 cathedrals. We support all those in parishes, dioceses and cathedrals caring for their buildings today and for the enjoyment of future generations.

ChurchCare is the comprehensive source of information for everyone managing a church building.

<http://www.churchcare.co.uk/>

The **Parish Resources'** website is provided by the Church of England's National Stewardship & Resources team and offers over 400 pages of resources (web & pdf) to support all aspects of stewardship, administration and management in the local church, as well as links to other sites and pages of interest. <http://www.parishresources.org.uk/>

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