

A church that understands its context, actively engages with it and with those who might not currently go to church

A bible study from Revd Canon Dr Angus Ritchie, director of the Contextual Theology Centre at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine, London, Assistant Priest at St Peter's Church, Bethnal Green and Honorary Canon of Worcester Cathedral.

Understanding your context

The Church of England and its Church Urban Fund have produced some 'postcode tools' to help you learn more about the area in which you live.

The Church Urban Fund postcode tool has information about poverty indicators in your parish – showing life expectancy, and levels of child and elder poverty. It is online at <http://www.cuf.org.uk/poverty-england>

The Church of England has a postcode tool with information from the 2011 Census about religious affiliation in your parish, and is at <http://www.presenceandengagement.org.uk>

Using these tools, answer the following questions about your local context:

- What do the postcode tools tell us about the profile of our parish in terms of age, ethnicity and faith?
- Are there important features of the parish which these tools miss out?
- Are there significant numbers of people who work in your parish and live elsewhere? Is it part of your parish's role to minister to them too?

You might want to spend 10-15 minutes on this exercise.

Reflecting – and acting

Discuss three passages from the Gospel in turn, each of which contains a call to action for the church. The passages are:

- The call to works of mercy: **Matthew 25.31-41**
- The call to action for justice: **Luke 1.46-55**
- The call to share our faith: **Matthew 28.16-20**

For each of passage in turn, spend **20 minutes on the following group exercise:**

- Read the passage out loud, have a short silence, and read it again, so it sinks in.

- Discuss the activities of your church which respond to the challenge of the passage. (Include things done by individual church members in their workplace and neighbourhood as well as congregational activities.)
- Compare this list with the profile of the parish. Which groups are reached by these activities? Which groups are not reached?
- Think about the groups which are not reached. Why are they not reached? Does your church have the capacity, and feel the call, to reach them? (This could be done by action as a congregation and/or by supporting individuals in their workplace and neighbourhood.)
- If so, what might be a practical first step?