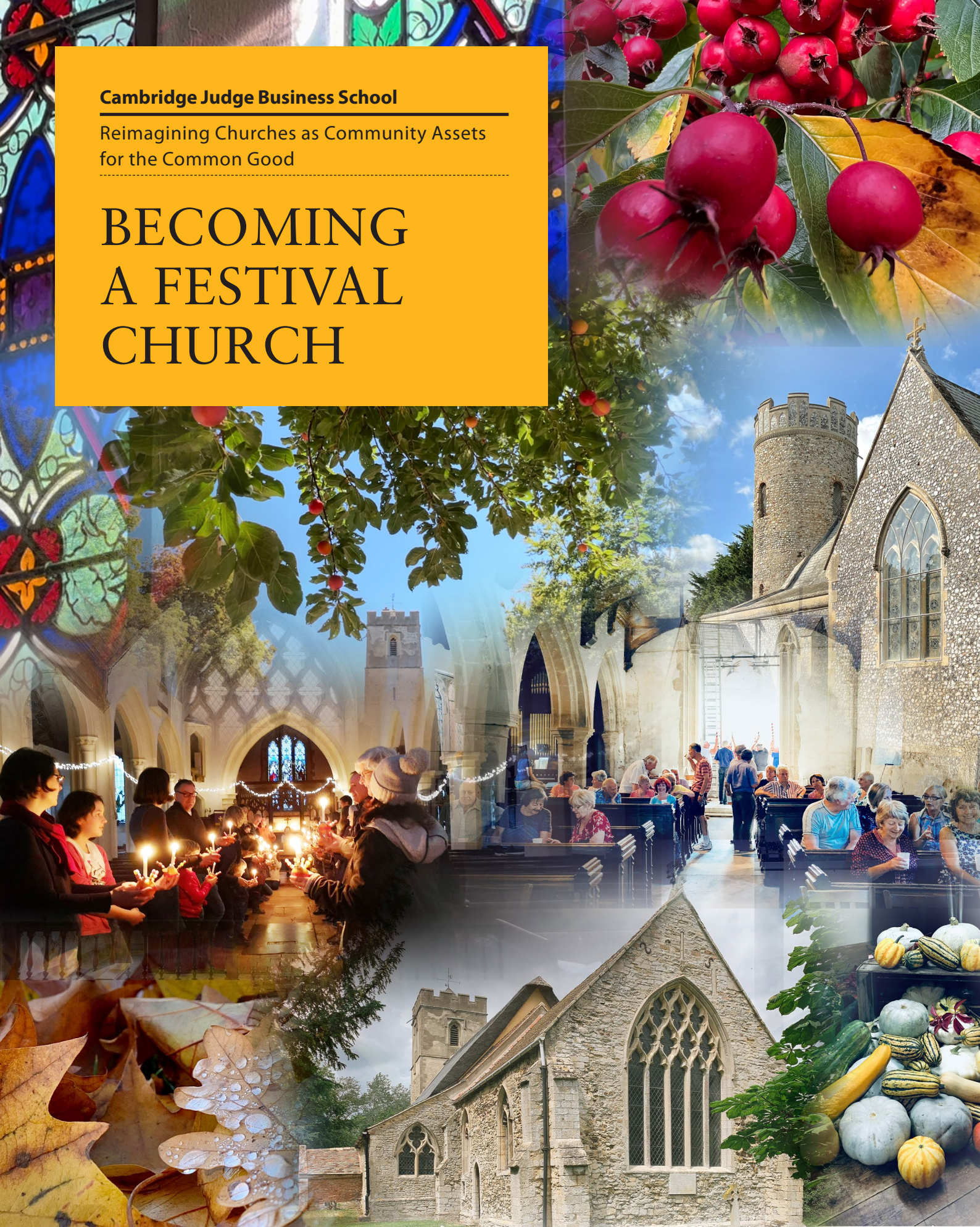


Cambridge Judge Business School

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets  
for the Common Good

# BECOMING A FESTIVAL CHURCH







# FESTIVAL CHURCHES

**A Festival Church is a church building which may no longer be needed for weekly services, but which is valued by the community for local events, festivals, weddings, funerals and baptisms.**

The “Festival Church” model is being widely adopted as a way of rejuvenating churches and parishes across the country. At its best, it has been shown to work as a “turnaround strategy” for rural parish churches. Established by the Church of England and supported by the Association of Festival Churches, the Festival Church model is both simple and flexible, and boils down to two fundamental changes in the way festival churches operate.

## **1. Worship: doing less, but doing it better:**

**Festival churches will no longer hold regular formal worship services, but will instead concentrate on pooling their resources into fewer “festival” services, which meet the needs and rouse the interest of local people.**

## **2. Management: enabling the involvement of more people:**

**Festival churches will review and adapt their management structures to enable anyone with an interest in the building to take on an active role in its care and management, regardless of whether they are regular worshippers at the church.**

There are many ways this model can be adapted to suit local resources and local needs and there are many examples around the country. At the end of this guidance there is a selection of case studies showing different ways a festival church can succeed, as well as some tools to help your church transition to the Festival Church model.

Adopting Festival status is not a one-way street. The legal status of the church does not need to change – it can remain a parish church while operating on the Festival model. Therefore, in the future, should circumstances and needs change, the way the church is run can revert to the traditional parish church model.

# WHY BECOME A FESTIVAL CHURCH?

It may be that uncertainties around the future sustainability of the church have prompted members to consider alternative options. This could be because of challenges including governance, finances, small numbers of congregation or PCC, and more recently, the impact of Covid-19. However, a decision to explore festival status can also be a very positive step of renewal, towards finding a more sustainable future as a parish church which is more engaged with its local community and receptive to their needs.

- A church where the responsibility for the church building, its care and maintenance, is shared with the local community
- A church that provides an open and safe place for contemplation and prayer
- A church which will remain available for important “life events” – baptisms, weddings, funerals and memorial services.
- A church that supports people’s wellbeing and social action through accessible activities and shared fellowship.
- A church that ceases to hold regular public services, focusing instead on fewer, special services, aimed at a wider audience, often involving non-worship activities.



# WHAT IS A 'FESTIVAL SERVICE'?

The English word *fête*, pronounced /'feit/ FAYT or /'fet/ FET, is borrowed from the Mediaeval Latin *festus* via the French *fête*, meaning 'holiday' or 'party'. The 12th-century Middle English root *fest* is shared with *feast*, *festive*, *festal* and *festival*, *festoon*, the Spanish *fiesta*, Portuguese *festa*, etc. and the proper name *Festus*.

The fact that "festival" and "fete" come from the same root is key to understanding what a festival service should be. First of all, it is an "event" – a special occasion, something that people can look forward to. Within the Church's traditional calendar we already have a number of festivals which we can view in this way – Christmas, Easter, the Harvest Festival and many others.

But we can also look much more broadly than that, taking careful note of what will be popular among the local community of each festival church. For some churches the Easter Egg Hunt brings in more people than the Easter Day service; likewise the harvest supper, or the Christingle service.

There are churches who emphasise God's creation through things like snowdrop festivals, wildflower hunts, or Plough Sunday. Other churches have invented wholly new types of festivals around other themes, 'Pimms and Hymns', pet services, scarecrow festivals, and many others.

The most important thing is to find out what will be most appealing in your particular location at that particular time.

## CHANGING OUR “MANAGEMENT MODEL” – WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

All parish churches are governed under the Church Representation Rules (CRRs). These rules lay out the longstanding constitution of the parish church, familiar to those who are already involved, centred around the Parochial Church Council. This model is also very unfamiliar to those who are not already involved in churches.

The CRRs are periodically updated. The most recent update in 2020 made some changes to bring flexibility to the way churches are governed. This includes the potential to open up membership of a PCC to people who are not communicant members of the church. This is explained further in our guidance to church governance. It also enables two or more parishes within a single benefice (or benefices held jointly by the same minister) to form a “joint council” in place of their separate PCCs.

In fact, most festival churches take a much simpler route and garner the support of an “Action Group”. Action Groups consist of people who want to help out with managing and running the church building, who may not be members of the church, and who wouldn’t want to become PCC members. These groups can be constituted as sub-committees of the PCC. They can take on many of the day-to-day tasks currently carried out by the PCC, leaving the PCC to put all its remaining energy into missional activities and the festival services – although action groups often help with them too.

Whether your church chooses to change its constitution, or simply gather an action group to help out, will depend on what people want locally – the best solution is the one which enables the most people to help out in the way that suits them.

# BECOMING A FESTIVAL CHURCH – WHERE TO START

## STEP ONE: EXPLORING THE IDEA

- a. **The impetus for becoming a festival church really needs to come from within the PCC and existing congregation – your heart needs to be in it! The conversation starts here.**
- b. **Further conversations should then be had with your Rural Dean and Archdeacon, to bring your plans to their attention.**
- c. **Once the church itself agrees to adopt festival status, this is the time to hold a wider conversation and consultation with the local community. Tools and ideas are available to help with this (see our guidance on community engagement). This consultation process needs to be appropriate for your community, but would normally follow the three following basic steps:**
  - I. **Engagement – remind your local community the church is their asset too. Engagement should be personal where possible, writing or speaking to individuals or community groups, attending events in the community, even knocking on some doors, where invited to do so. The main purpose of this is to raise the profile of the church and to plant the idea that the church needs to make some changes and is considering its options for the future. The most important thing is to keep this engagement as positive as possible.**
  - II. **Consultation – a more formal consultation exercise should then follow (a template is available in our guidance on community engagement). This can be online, or on paper, or both. This is to gather data around how people feel about the church and why it's important to them, how they would like to see the building used, what sort of things they might support personally, and how. Data of this type is important because it can be used to support the decision reached by the PCC, and also future applications for grants, faculty applications and anything which asks for "evidence".**
  - III. **Meeting – now you have succeeded in engaging and surveying your wider community, hold an open meeting to report the findings of the consultation, ideally in the church (even more ideally on a warm summer's evening with some refreshment laid on!). What does the community want or need from its church? What activities would the community welcome or support? What help does the church need in order to respond to that? At this event, provide the opportunity for people to offer their support and describe what that support could be. Don't put people on the spot. Another short written survey could be taken at the meeting (a template is available in our guidance on community engagement).**



## STEP TWO: MAKE A PLAN

### a. Take a lead from the evidence gathered in Step One:

- Does the response to the consultation give a clear picture of what the community wants and needs from its church building?
- Which events or festivals are likely to be popular with the local community?
- Choose one or more to take forward – but be careful not to overdo it; we don't want this to feel like hard work.
- Have people offered to help and with what?
- What enthusiasm or skills are on offer?
- Are there organisations wishing to partner?

### b. The most appropriate management model for the future: Does the response to the consultation give a clear picture of what the community wants and needs from its church building?

- New members come forward to join the PCC
- The PCC seeks to amend its constitution to enable wider membership
- People offer to help in an informal action group working under the PCC, but would not join the PCC (template terms of reference is available).
- People offer to form a separately constituted charity to work alongside the PCC.

### c. Gather your team and plan your first Festival.

#### ***Pause for reflection – What if it doesn't work?***

It is possible that this process will not provide the additional help or ideas that the PCC is hoping for. That doesn't mean the PCC shouldn't still opt for festival status and reduce the number of public services it holds, while also trying to make them more attractive. This will enable the PCC to put its remaining resources into "doing less, but doing it better", while the door will remain open to new volunteers in the future.

## STEP THREE: MAKING IT SUSTAINABLE – THINGS TO CONSIDER

Whether things go well, or less well, they rarely seem to turn out as planned or expected. A new festival church needs to remain flexible and adaptable and ready to amend its plans in order to take advantage of unexpected opportunities, or to avoid unexpected pitfalls. For a festival church to succeed in the long term, here are some of the things that the PCC and others involved in the running of the church should think about.

### a. Financial sustainability - where money to support the church can come from:

- **Festival Services** will hopefully attract a larger congregation, bringing more money into the offertory plate. There are now electronic card readers available which can be permanently installed in the church, or passed round the congregation during festival services.
- The **Parish Giving** service run by Church House provides the most tax-efficient and inflation-proof way of accepting donations from people who simply want to give a small amount of money on a regular basis to support your church.
- **Community events** can bring in income, but they should also be a service for the community. There are many ways of getting some income from community events – raffles, table top sales, refreshments, etc – without charging to come into the church.
- **Performance or arts events** often provide the opportunity for a more commercial approach via ticketing, a bar, or charging exhibitors.
- **Commercial partnerships** work in some places where a longer-term relationship is created, perhaps with a farmers' market, or a nursery, or a local business, using the building on a regular basis. This sort of arrangement may require a formal licence to be drawn up.
- **Social Enterprise** – perhaps with the support of Grant Funding
- **Social action services**, e.g. visits from Citizens advice, NHS, debt advice, youth and young people's services...
- **Heritage and Tourism** provides opportunities for churches in popular tourist areas, or churches which are popular with visitors as historic sites, to make some income through sales of merchandise and guidebooks. Churches with a lot of visitors can also use this as a means of building up a mailing list.

***Any or all of these things could contribute to the long-term sustainability of your church. What works will depend on what is needed or wanted in your local area (not just your immediate community). One rule of thumb is not to put all your eggs in one basket – even if your church does really well at one of these things, consider exploring something different to help diversify your income.***



## b. People sustainability

- Keep an open mind about the management structure. If it seems to be preventing people from getting involved, think about changing it.
- Inclusivity, considering a range of representation from the community, identifying any groups who aren't represented and considering why that might be and if anything could be done to change that.
- Building up a mailing list to maintain ongoing communications with the wider community
- Keeping the church building open, accessible and as welcoming as possible, using signage to publicise this.
- Volunteer succession planning

## c. Missional sustainability

- Promoting services taking place in other churches in the benefice or wider area, particularly on Sundays when there is no service at your church.
- Asking other churches in the area to promote your festival services. Consider timing your festival services to avoid clashes.
- Continuing to be an integral part of your benefice's or diocese's strategic missional planning – this is given different names in different places.

## STEP FOUR: RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR CHURCH IN ADOPTING THE FESTIVAL MODEL

In addition to this document, we have published a range of other resources which can be used to support establishing a festival church:

**Governance advice** – exploring the current options for how a church building can be governed and managed.

**Draft terms of reference for a sub-committee** – setting up a PCC sub-committee is very easy; getting its terms of reference right, so everyone knows what they should (and should not) be doing takes a little more thought. Our draft terms of reference for a PCC sub-committee lists a number of clauses which can help a church action group get off on the right foot.

**Community engagement tools** – we provide guidance and template forms for community consultation. This can also be managed online through appropriate survey web-tools.

**Formal process** – very little in the way of legal process is needed for a PCC to adopt the festival model, but the Church of England publishes a form of PCC resolution and a template letter you can use to write to the Bishop.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **Is Festival status the first step towards closure?**

Emphatically not. In some of our case studies, Festival status is what saved a church from closure. It would be more accurate to consider Festival status as a turnaround strategy for churches. In cases where it doesn't work, closure may still be the right solution.

## **Who decides that a church should become a Festival Church?**

Ultimately, this is the decision of the PCC. However, the decision should be made after consultation with the community, the wider benefice, the Deanery Leadership Team, and the Archdeacons.

## **Can we trial being a Festival Church?**

Yes. Once you have become a Festival Church, there is nothing to say that the PCC can't reverse the decision and inform the Bishop that they have established a regular worship pattern, have increased the number of worshippers and are once more in a position where they are able to support and maintain the building and its worship into the foreseeable future.

## **How can Festival Churches be used?**

Festival Churches can still be used for authorised services of their choice. A minimum of six services is required, but not all of these need to be big festival serves. Festival churches remain available for weddings, funerals and baptisms. Festival Churches should also encourage wider community use and involvement, and the threes C's, community, culture and commercial activities are all options to consider.

## **Who is responsible for the day to day running of a Festival Church?**

Becoming a Festival Church does not change the legal framework of a parish. The PCC remains in place unless other changes to its governance occur. The main principle is that the members of the PCC seek to share the actual tasks of managing the church with a wider group of people, whatever form that takes (*See our guidance on church governance*).

### **Will we still have to pay ministry costs?**

This is called different things in different places: parish share, ministry share, common fund, parish offer – these terms all refer to the contributions paid by individual PCCs towards the full cost of providing ministry in their benefice. This includes the minister's stipend, housing and pension. The way that these costs are apportioned to different churches is dealt with differently in each diocese. These costs still have to be paid from somewhere. If any church is unable to meet its costs, the PCC needs to have a conversation with their deanery treasurer in the first instance. It may be possible to negotiate a "holiday" from these contributions to help a new festival church to establish, but this will depend on the different policies of each diocese.

### **What care of the building is required?**

The PCC is still responsible for arranging a QI and to ensure that the building is well maintained. Faculty applications are still the responsibility of the PCC. It is still important that the building is well cared for and remains a safe place for all who use it.

### **Are there any changes to the use and maintenance of the churchyard?**

No, the churchyard remains the responsibility of the PCC unless it is formally closed, in which case the local authority takes over responsibility for care and maintenance of the churchyard.

### **What should we do if we want to explore becoming a Festival Church further?**

The Church of England website has some useful advice on how to become a Festival Church, plus a template for resolutions and letters that would that you would need to send to your Bishop, here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/strategic-planning-church-buildings/festival-churches>



***Prepared by:***

**Geoffrey Hunter** (*text*)

Head of Church Buildings and  
Pastoral, Diocese of Ely

**Timur Alexandrov** (*photography,  
design & typesetting*)

Consultant

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**Cambridge Centre for Social Innovation**

Cambridge Judge Business School  
University of Cambridge  
Trumpington Street  
Cambridge CB2 1AG  
socialinnovation@jbs.cam.ac.uk  
www.jbs.cam.ac.uk

**Diocese of Ely**

Ely Diocesan Office  
Bishop Woodford House  
Barton Road  
Ely CB7 4DX  
T: +44 (0) 1353 652701  
www.elydiocese.org

**[www.reachely.org](http://www.reachely.org)**