

Providing a welcome to your local church and community



**A guide with Ten Top Tips
for welcoming residents of
new housing developments to
your church and community**

Developed for local church groups

*Produced by
Northamptonshire Churches New Communities Project*

A big challenge A wonderful opportunity



- With Northamptonshire gaining 100,000 houses between 2001 and 2021 the number of people in the county will grow by a third.
- Half of these developments will be of under 500 houses and will be served by existing church communities.
- Some of the liveliest and fastest growing churches are in areas of housing growth.
- 20% of church attenders stop attending church on moving house.
- 1 in 7 households move house each year.



Finding our vision

Our Christian faith calls us to love our neighbour, and the Bible tells the story of the people of God 'in community'.

Our relationship with God is both as individuals and in our communities so we are called to build Christian communities inspired by all that God has given to us and to our world

As members of the church we are called to be and to share this Good News of Jesus Christ with our neighbours.

A development may be 3 houses, 30 or 300 or 3,000 - whatever the size these activities can help you be the church in your community

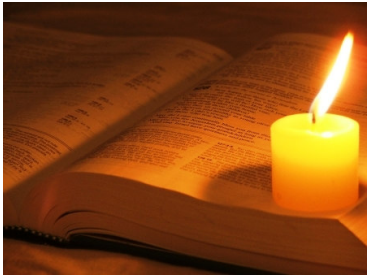
Having a new development in the area is like welcoming a new baby into the family. It will change the shape of our lives and we want to make space to accommodate, welcome and love a new arrival.

1. Draw together a group of those with a concern to welcome people to your community. This can be a group from one church, or an ecumenical group set up jointly with other churches in your area.

2. Recognise and understand what is happening
Collect basic information on the new development. It helps to start with some facts. In particular you may want to find out:

- What developments are planned and where?
- How many houses?
- Who is the developer?
- When will the first house be occupied?
- Is there to be a show house? (*This information can be found on the website of the local authority planning department.*)
- Do you know someone who has already moved into the new development?

Recognise that this will cause your community to change. We all find change difficult - regular patterns and activities may need to change. We will need to get to know and involve new people.



3. Bible study on growing pains

Read John 15:1-8

Reflect on how this makes you feel. Some questions might help you:

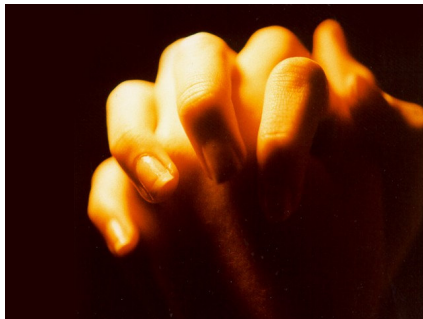
- How do we need to respond to this growth?
- Where do we need to prune?
- Do we resent the growth? Is it just one more thing?
- Do we think that people who move into the community should integrate or should we adapt what we do?

Take seriously the feelings this arouses – ask God to give you strength to work through them.

4. Soaking the whole area in prayer

Root all your plans and activities and commit them to God in prayer:

Pray regularly as part of the church intercessions and prayer and home groups.



Hold a prayer walk

- Meet in small groups in the area you are to prayer walk
- Take in the area – look and listen
- Bring to God in prayer your interests, hopes and concerns.

A useful introduction to prayer walking can be found on www.speak.org.uk/node/73

Pray where you are

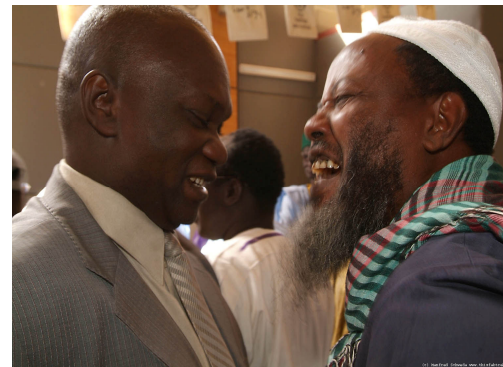
- Visualise the development:
- Have a map of the local area and draw on it the new area(s) of housing
- Collect brochures from the developer
- Take some photographs of the development
- Bring to God in prayer your interests, hopes and concerns.

5. Discover your own vision.

What is your vision for the church in these new communities? Start with this vision statement and amend it to suit your situation so you have something which excites you and focuses your hearts, minds and activities.

Our vision is to provide a loving and practical response to those newly arriving and to be the living presence (human face) of the Christian Community for them.

6. Make contact with the new residents, give people information about the church and community and listen to their experiences and needs.



- Develop a welcome leaflet or welcome pack
- Listen first and speak second!
- Take a gift from the church – a candle or a symbol representing your church.

7 . Offer places and spaces for relationships to be created

You may go to them or invite them to you!

Options could include:

- Arranging to meet at the show home,
- Set up a house group
- Visit people in their homes
- Hold a welcome evening

8. Help the local Church to prepare to respond to the needs of the new community

In responding to the needs you have identified:

- Who has moved into the area?
- Are there young families?
- Retired people?
- Single people?
- Are they local or far from their families?
- Are they wanting to give their time to groups and activities?
- Have they talked about particular needs?



How might you respond?

- Pray specifically for some of the needs you have found from listening?
- Take the PCC on a walk through the development?
- Hold an open air service?

9. Build a culture of invitation and welcome

Many people moving in will be isolated and finding their feet in a new context. We have a wonderful opportunity to invite them—to a service, to a social event, to a cup of coffee. The church calendar is full of events which show the church in a good light—from Harvests to Christingles, socials and coffee mornings and children’s activity days.

We need to invite people to appropriate events. The best culture of invitation is:

“I’m going, its going to be good, will you come with me?”

People will not come to anything unless we issue words of invitation, pick them up and go with them!

10. A list of action ideas:

- A prayer walk in the new development
- Blessing of new houses
- Visit and take a gift
- A community survey
- A prayer meeting in the new development
- An information leaflet on your church and the community
- A community event
- A children’s activity day or week
- An open afternoon to introduce people to your church
- Raise the issue with other community groups
- Hold a litter pick
- Link with Back to Church Sunday

A Prayer to use for new communities

God of our lives

You are always calling us to follow you into the future, inviting us to new ventures and new challenges.

When we are fearful of the unknown, give us courage.

When we worry that we are not up to the task, remind us that you would not call us if you did not believe in us.

When we are disappointed,

remind us that you can bring change and hope out of the most difficult situations.

Amen

Resources

Websites

Churches Together in England

- new housing areas www.cinha.net

Church Army - Sheffield www.encountersontheedge.org.uk/

Shaftesbury Society www.shaftesburysociety.org

Northamptonshire Hope 08 www.hopenorthamptonshire.org.uk

Speak www.speak.org.uk/node/73

Fresh Expressions www.freshexpressions.org.uk

Finding help and support

It can be helpful to have people to bounce your ideas off and to help spot what you've not thought of. The Churches Officer for New Communities can help here. He works across the denominations in Northamptonshire to support local churches in areas of new housing. There are also a growing number of Christian communities in Northamptonshire with experience of working in areas of new housing development.

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