



hope
23-24

LISTENING



LISTENING

is not separate from prayer, we listen prayerfully. We are listening to God for our community and listening to our communities to discern where God is at work. Prayer and listening go hand in hand. This symbiotic relationship informs our prayers.

Listening is active and intentional. Active because it involves doing; we hear and keep the information of the sharer, but this is not the mission yet. Intentional because we need to prioritise it and find everyday opportunities to listen to people around us. Listening is crucial to a mission, it shapes it. As we listen to our context and sense what God is already doing, we can then respond to it. A mission needs to be contextually appropriate. Given the importance of listening prayerfully to the context, we have outlined a few ways for you to start here.

Ways of Listening

Listen With

When we are not doing something 'to' or 'for' people, we listen 'with' them, we come alongside people so there's no power imbalance. We listen with when the relationship is mutual, immersive and in context. Listening with is about a 'going to' rather than a 'come to' approach.

How can you listen with?

- Are you part of a WhatsApp group or other social media network which includes non-Christians perhaps linked to a school, a hobby or work?
- If you have children at school, think about conversations at the school gates or get involved in parent-teacher groups and fundraising committees.
- Do you have any hobbies which include non-Christians? Apply listening prayerfully during chats at the gym, whilst dog walking, at a choir, class or on the sports field.
- How about at work? What do people talk about? Can you get a sense of how life is for them?

Listen Deep

- This approach to listening goes deeper with fewer people, think 'focus group'. Decide who you want to listen to, is it non-Christians or is it a Christian discipleship issue you want to investigate e.g. how easy do you find it to talk to non-Christian friends about Jesus?
- Decide who you will ask. You need a sizeable sample e.g.30 to get a sense of whether what you are hearing is typical.
- Decide on the questions you want to ask. Try to use open questions so that the conversation flows, rather than it feeling like an interview. If you are talking to non-Christians, the conversation is not necessarily about why they don't come to church. The most useful conversation is one that helps you to understand what life is like for them, what makes them happy and what they are concerned about.
- Structure your conversation, letting people know why you want to talk to them; what it will be about and how long it will take. This way they know what to expect and you get to ask your questions.
- You might want a group to conduct this listening, but try not to make it too big because the more consistent your approach the more valid the feedback will be.
- As you begin having conversations there might be other useful issues that you may decide to include in future conversations.
- Decide how you will take notes with the rest of the team and agree with the people you are talking to what notes you will keep and how they will be used. It's a good idea to avoid names and personal information.

- When all the listening is complete, analyse your notes and look for common themes; things that lots of people/families have said. These are the significant threads that you might want to take forward.

Listen Big

Community Mapping - Big Picture

Draw your area. Don't worry about scale and artistic ability. What are the key features? Think about roads, transport links, schools, shops, health facilities, parks, and care homes. Think about ways into and out of your area. Where is everyone coming from or going to/ What do you notice? What stands out?

Community Mapping - Demographic Profiling

This approach to listening uses demographic data from the government census and other sources, which gives information about what an area is like. You can find out things such as population size/density, types of demographic groups who live there, deprivation and some common habits e.g. how people shop, use technology and exercise. These are summary snapshots but do provide useful insight into an area. Free access data is older as it uses an older census e.g. 2011 is what is available at the moment. In demographic terms, ten years is not long and it would be unusual to see really significant changes unless there are other known factors linked to e.g. a large new estate/town, immigration, and large new employers in an area. All the websites draw on the same census data and just present it in different ways. Be warned, they can be something of a rabbit hole!

Key Listening Websites

Experion/Mosaic Data

Mosaic Portrait - Experian Consumer Information Portal

[CLICK HERE](#) 

This data uses the government census returns. Use of the full data set costs thousands of pounds to subscribe to and is usually the remit of a local authority or large organisation. Access to data from a previous older census is free for a limited amount. A single IP address (computer) can usually access 10 postcodes, this scope is enough to take a snapshot of a small area, e.g. a village. However, a scope of 30 postcodes is better for towns, so you would need 3 different computers/people working together.

When the census is analysed, people are categorised into demographic groups and a portrait is written for each group. Input a postcode into this website and it shows the primary demographic groups who live in that postcode area.

In a typical town or parish, you ideally want to look at 30 streets/postcodes. It's also useful to look at a few streets just beyond your area to see whether the demography changes quickly. This is especially important if you are looking at a 'hub' area that people travel into for school/work/church.

This recourse helps to identify the most prevalent demographic groups in an area, providing clearer insight into what life is like for them.

Datashine

DataShine: Census

[CLICK HERE](#) 

This gives you an overview of an area based on the Census data. It's more of an infographic summary than Experion/Mosaic. Datashine is presented as a map which you need to zoom in on to find your area.

Arcgis

ArcGIS - Church of England parish map

[CLICK HERE](#) 

This is another website, collated for the Church of England, which uses Census data to show information about parishes. You can find an individual Church of England parish and its key demographic data.

How To Use the Data

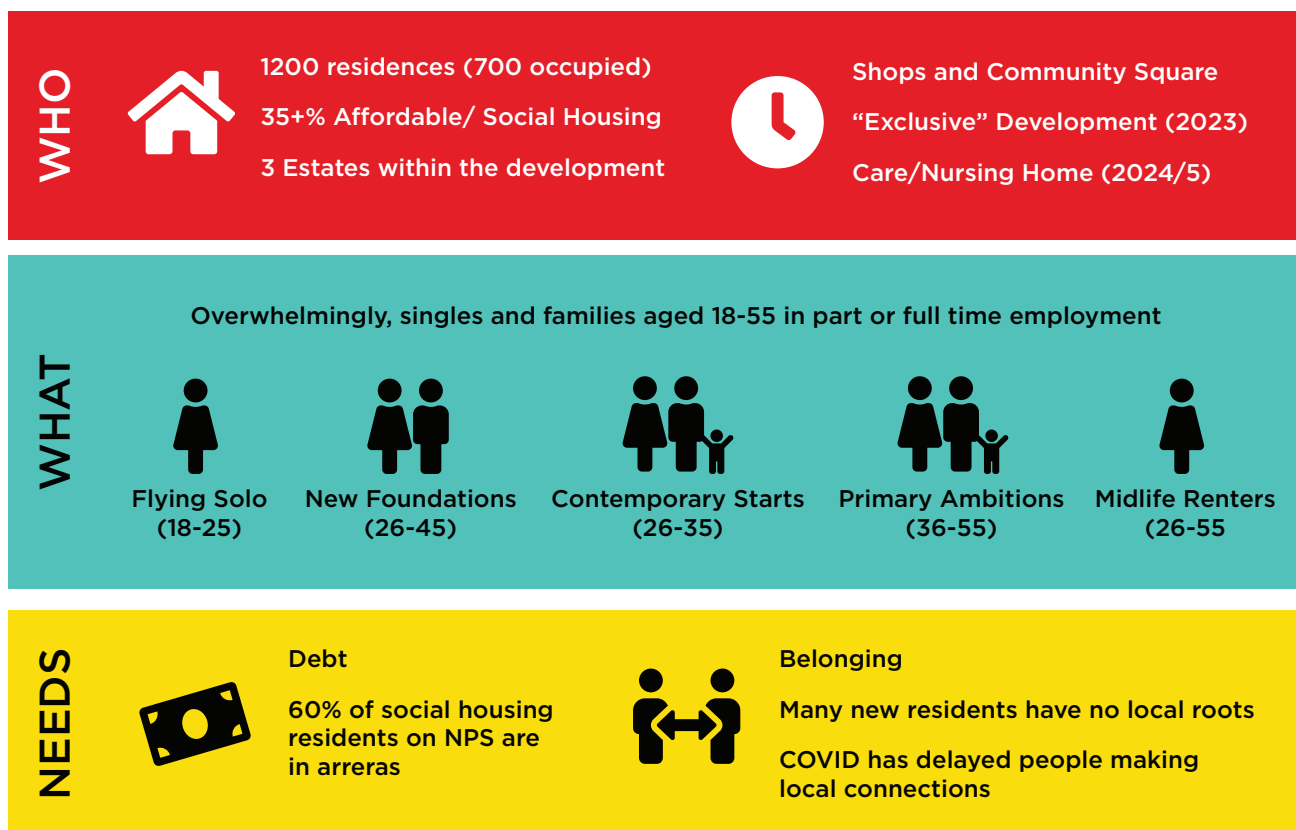
As you look at the data, particularly the demographic ‘types’ who live in an area, think about:

- Are the people you are reading about represented in your church?
- Is anyone missing? If you are a hub church that people travel to, you might have demographic groups in your community who are not part of your church and groups in your church not represented in your community.
- If there are groups of people missing you could consider creating your own demographic profile for them. It will help you at the next stage.
- Be clear about who you are trying to reach; is it the people in your church or the groups in your community?

Summarising Your Findings

Consider summarising your findings in a simple chart. It will help you document your listening journey and focus your thoughts for the next stage.

- What** Describes the area of focus, an example is a new build estate.
- Who** Summarises the demographic groups in the area of focus.
- Needs** Extrapolates key needs from the listening and demography.



The Five Circles of Commitment Approach

There are lots of ways to describe the discipleship journey and this is just one of them.

Core

People who are always at church and can be relied upon to serve and give. These are the leaders of ministries and key volunteers.

Committed

People who attend regularly, twice a month or more, who might be in a small group and will both serve and give from time to time.

Congregation

People who attend church and regard it as 'their church' but do so infrequently e.g. once a month or less. Not usually involved in small groups, serving or giving.

Community

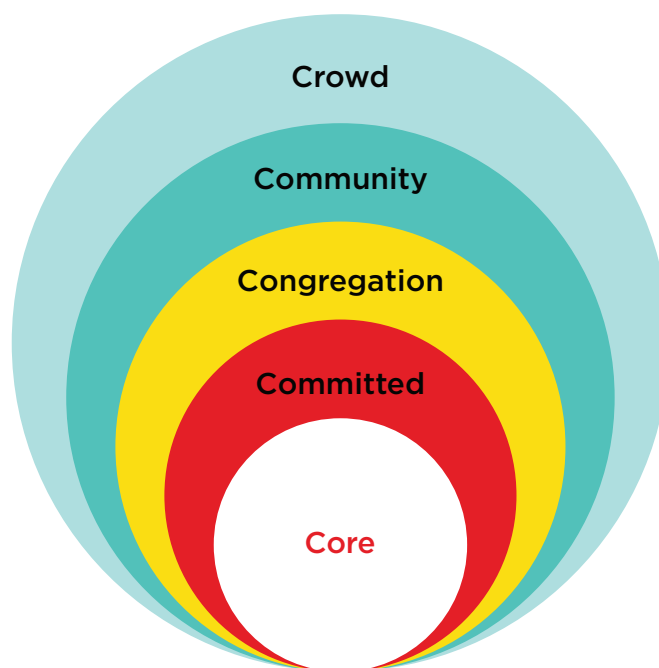
People in the community, within driving distance with some albeit limited contact which might extend to occasional events e.g. Christmas, Easter, holiday club

Crowd

People in the wider community with limited contact with the church

The Ultimate C

The ultimate aim of a disciple is to become more like Jesus so all the C's lead to Christ!



Flow

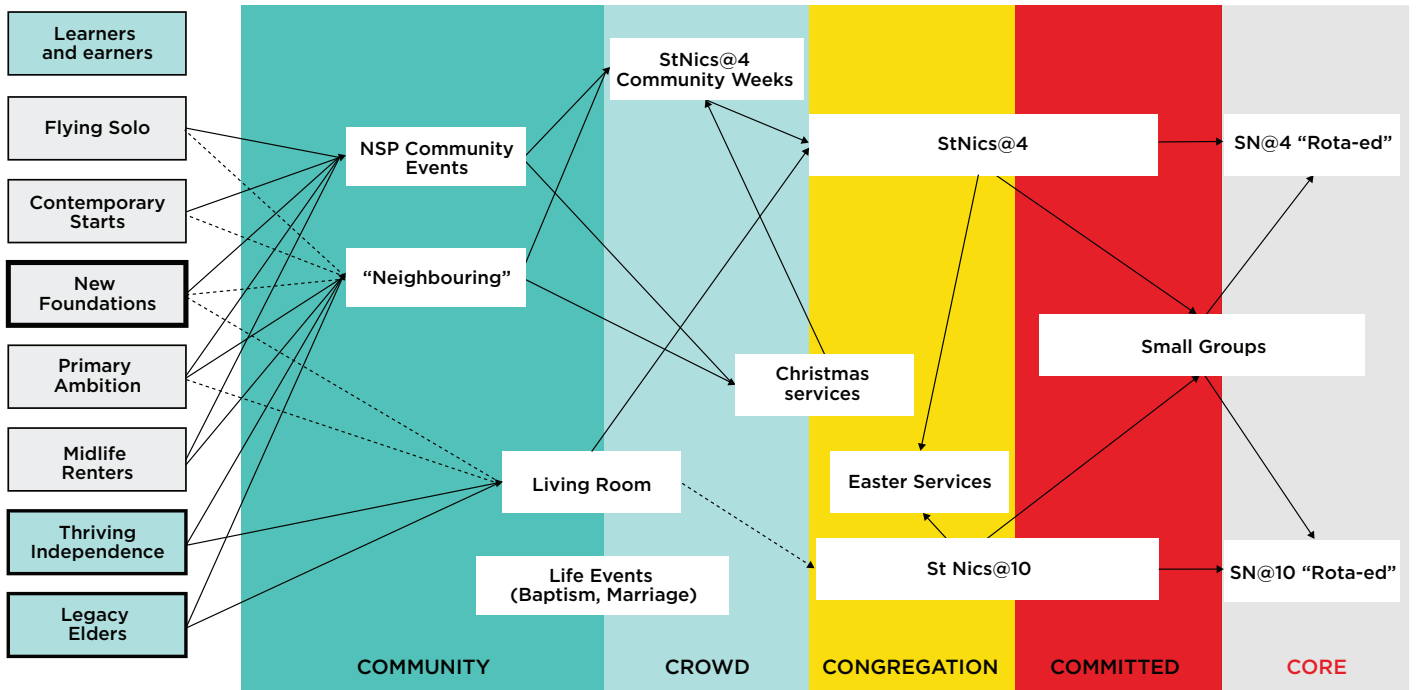
Mapping Flow

Mapping your flow will enable a church to see how its offer (ministry) is meeting the needs of different demographic groups in the community at different stages of discipleship.

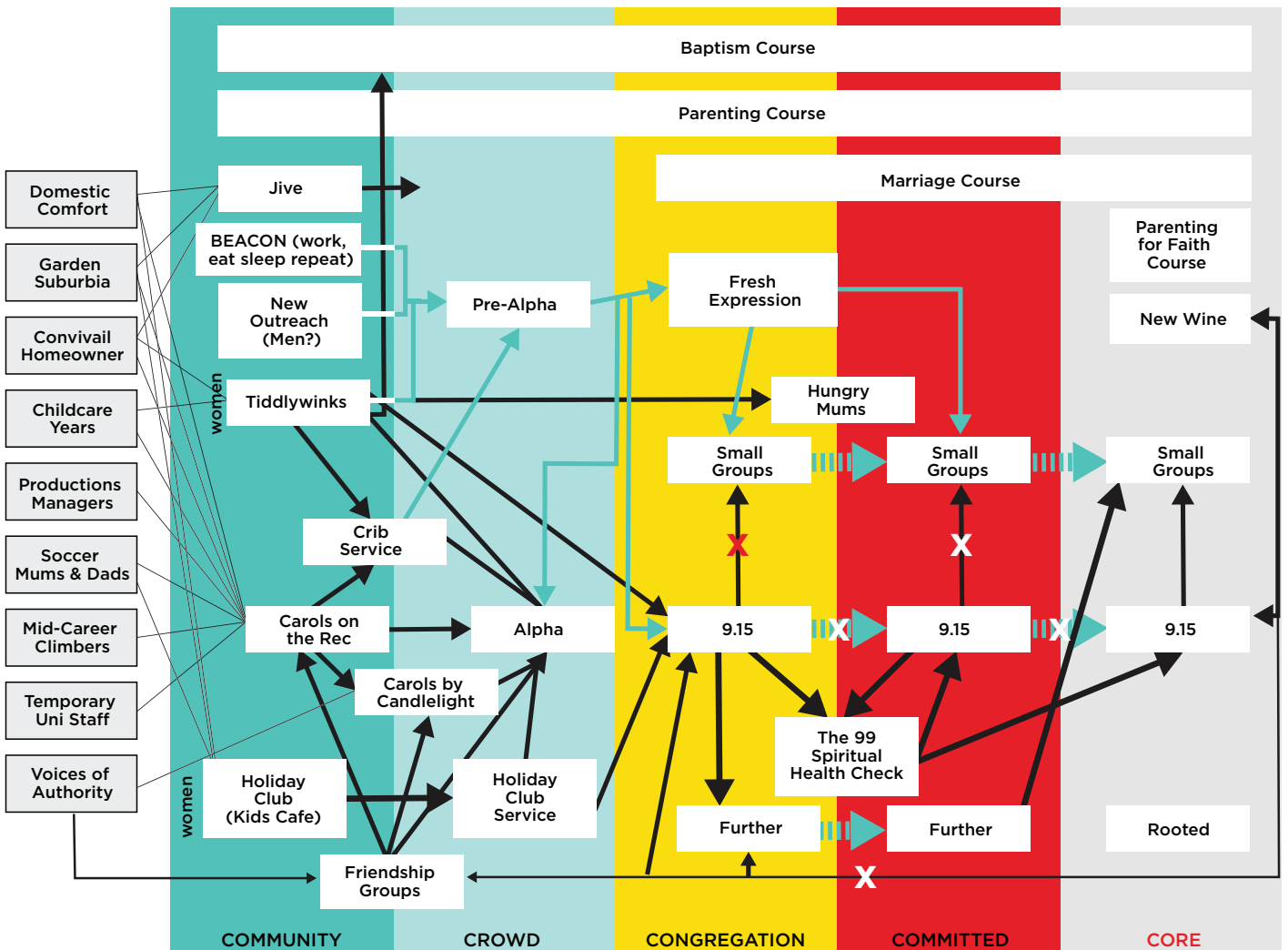
To map your flow involves producing a graph/chart.

- On the X axis (the upwards line) plot the different demographic groups in your community.
- Make sure that you clearly understand what characterises each demographic group and what life is like for them.
- On the Y axis (the line along the bottom) plot the 5 C's.
- To fill in your graph think of everything your church does and decide where it fits. Which discipleship C is it aimed at (if you don't know, why are you doing it)? Which demographic groups are most likely to engage with it? Put your ministry activity on the graph. If more than one demographic group will engage with it you can draw arrows from the group to the activity.
- As you are doing this you need to keep clearly in your mind what you know about the different demographic groups and ask yourself, 'based on what I know about them WHY would they come to this?'
- Then think about the flow between different ministry activities. Can you make connections between them? If someone came to an outdoor carol service what might be the one obvious next step for them? If a family attends a toddler group what could you signpost to them that would be a natural next step? The next steps are small and not too threatening.
- Keep asking yourself why would these people come to this?
- If you find that you don't have anything to signpost people on to, mark an X on your map. This shows that the flow is broken at this point.
- If you find that you have a ministry activity that isn't connected to anything, that isn't part of the flow, ask yourself why that is. It might be that it can be adapted slightly to meet the needs of the flow, or it might be that it needs to stop to create room for something new which does create flow and meet community needs.

In the example below the black arrows show where the flow works, the red crosses show where the flow is broken and the items in blue are the new things that could emerge which might improve flow.



The graph below is another example of this approach. This example is linked to the summary of the findings chart above. The bolder the outline around the demographic group, the greater the number represented locally.



Next Steps

Consider distilling your listening in another chart, this time what filling in some of the gaps and broken flow might look like. This chart links with the one on the previous page.



Other Ways of Listening

- Community bunting at a community/school fair – on one side invite people to write something they love about their area/life and on the other something they long for.
- Look at responses to posts on social media groups e.g. a neighbourhood Facebook or WhatsApp group. What are the common issues? What impression do you get of local life?
- Chat Sofa – put a sofa in a public place and invite people to sit and chat.
- Give out free coffees/ice creams from a van in return for people chatting and answering a couple of questions.
- Invite neighbours round for dinner or a BBQ, chat and listen.
- Community picnics.
- If your church is holding a 'community event' or something for children and families include a café, sit in it and listen. People talk over coffee and cake!