**Discerning a Rhythm of Life in the local church**

**Why create a church-based rhythm of life?**

Modern life is fast moving and changing constantly. The everyday demands of simply keeping a church going can easily become all consuming. Creating a shared rhythm for our life together which is rooted in our vision; context and practices is one way of helping us to keep the important things in focus. In the process we will become more aware of how our faith is currently growing and more intentional for the future. A shared rhythm means that we are not alone as we seek to follow Jesus; to serve others and transform our communities.

A shared rhythm which is named and understood is a constant reminder of why we do the things we do in church and in everyday life.

***‘Following a shared Way of Life has helped people in our church in different ways: some have been encouraged in their praying, others have learned to discern when God is speaking, and some have become more confident about their faith in the workplace.’****Rev Simon Reed, Church of the Ascension, Ealing*

These sessions can be used either as part of a day away or over a number of weeks, for example during Lent.

Note that during the day / sessions we will be working with three key themes which are rooted in our calling. Each movement is an essential part of the rhythms of our Christian calling.

**Following Jesus** – an upward movement, building faith

**Growing together** – an inward movement, serving one another

**Reaching outwards** – an outward movement, building the kingdom and transforming communities

**Begin the day or session with Worship**

Worship – choose a form of worship appropriate for your context.

You may wish to include a reflection on

Micah 6.6-8 – noticing how the prophet asks God how he should approach Him in worship. The answer which comes back reveals that worship includes the whole of our lives being aligned with what God desires.

Other passages to consider:

Acts 2.42-47 – Notice any rhythms and values in the first church community

Psalm 1 – lessons about rhythms from the seasons of the year

Ecclesiastes 3.1-8 – There is a time for everything

**Session 1 - Noticing**

1. Spend some time drawing a map of a week in the life of your church community. Then using the worksheets work through the following sections
	1. Looking at your map. Where are the places where there are signs of life and growth? (Worksheet 1)
		1. What are the things that help us to follow Jesus?
		2. Where are we encouraged by others in our journey of faith? Where are people sharing stories of faith?
		3. Where are we connecting with our communities and the wider world?
2. Thank God for all that you are observing
	1. Look back at your map. Are there things that are draining energy or stopping us from: (Worksheet 2)
		1. Following Jesus?
		2. Learning together, encouraging each other and building community?
		3. Engaging in positive ways with our communities and the wider world?
	2. Looking to the future – what do you hope for as you seek to: (Worksheet 3)
		1. Follow Jesus?
		2. Share the journey of growing in faith with others?
		3. Be a source of light and hope in your community?
3. Spend some time in quiet prayer reflecting on what you are discerning.

**Session 2 - Be inspired by others**

Using the examples from Bristol and London Dioceses. What inspires you or resonates with your own context?

Malmesbury Abbey: [Community of St Aldhelm – Malmesbury Abbey](https://www.malmesburyabbey.com/community-of-st-aldhelm/)

St Barnabas, Kensington: [Patterns — STBK](https://www.stbk.org.uk/patterns)

Church of the Ascension, Ealing: [OUR WAY OF LIFE](https://ascensionealing.org/2022/02/10/our-way-of-life/)

St Matthews, Yiewsley: [Our shared Way of Life in a time of change](https://www.london.anglican.org/articles/our-shared-way-of-life-in-times-of-change-and-transition/)

**Session 3 – Refining**

1. Using the worksheets identify the elements or marks of your church that are distinctive in each of the three key areas we have identified.
	1. Which of the following things in the life of your church are most important in helping people to encounter and follow Jesus? (Worksheet 4)
	2. Which of the following things help us to grow and walk together on our journey of faith? (Worksheet 5)
	3. Which of the following are important to us as we seek to serve and transform our community? (Worksheet 6)

**Session 4 – Crafting a rhythm**

1. Building on what you have discerned in the previous sessions. Using Worksheet 7 and the practice toolkit – try to identify some patterns and practices that will help to shape the rhythm of parish life in your context. Try to include elements that reflect the threefold framework of following Jesus, growing together and reaching out.
2. Working in groups think about how the different elements you have identified can be woven into the life of your church.
3. Begin to map out a possible framework for a rhythm of life in your church.

**Session 5 – Follow up – after the day**

You may find it helpful to include the following in your plans:

* + A small group to finalize a shared rhythm of life document.
	+ Including practical steps, commitments, and a timeline.
	+ A prayer of dedication for your shared rhythm
	+ Commissioning service
	+ How will you share it with the church?
	+ How will you build in review and evaluation?