

**IMAGINE**  
**LISTEN**  
**COLLECT**  
**CONNECT**  
**ACT TOGETHER**  
**COMMUNICATE**  
**EVALUATE**  
**CELEBRATE**

# community connections

If you had three wishes for your neighbourhood or community, what would they be?

In our fast-paced and rapidly changing society, it's easy to lose a sense of close community. Today there is a real need to rebuild strong community connections that will help us deal with important issues... like isolated older people and singles, families under stress, homelessness, and those who have 'fallen through the gaps'. Stronger communities strengthen our neighbourhoods, making them safer and more fun places to live in.

Perhaps you are thinking – it's too hard, I tried but the response wasn't good. Remember in Isaiah 61:1 we are told that, "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor." When we connect with our community we do it with God's enabling.

Do you have it on your heart to 'make a difference' but don't know how to go about it? Maybe you are already contributing to your community but would like to do more. This Community Connection booklet is designed to inspire, inform and give some practical ways you can connect with your neighbours and your community.

It's about ordinary people doing the ordinary things that God has always meant for us to do.

## DEUS TE ABENCOE – GOD BLESS

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*"The local church is called to be at the heart of its community, serving and living as Jesus called us to. Only then can we see the world changed and the kingdom of God advance."*

*Malcolm Duncan*

*We make a difference by working well together and with others in our community, acknowledging cultural diversity, whilst using our resources wisely and sustainably.'*

*— Presbyterian Support Northern value.*





# imagine

Wouldn't it be great to live in a community where...

- + neighbours know each other by their first names
- + friendliness is obvious
- + children are happy and nurtured
- + no-one feels neglected or lonely
- + people know how to work hard and enjoy life
- + the wisdom of elders is respected
- + the environment is beautifully cared for
- + marriages and families are enriched

- + people know they belong
- + resources are shared
- + help is within walking distance in a crisis
- + life is celebrated regularly.

There are all sorts of ways we can overcome individualism and isolation in our communities. A good place to start is to imagine what might be possible and share that dream with others.



*"Imagination is the voice of daring. If there is anything Godlike about God it is that. He dared to imagine everything."*

*Henry Miller*



# listen

Chances are, there are others around you who have the same motivations you do, the same desire to be ‘salt and light’ in your community. Why not start by listening to others and sharing a conversation about the ‘what ifs’?

## Listen to others

Share your hopes and dreams with your friends or home group. Listen to theirs.

**Ask**

What are your three wishes for your neighbourhood? What is our church’s role in the community? How representative of the community are we?

## Listen to the community

Learn from others in the neighbourhood. Talk with the council, police, local MPs, schools, other churches, social services and others in your community about their perspectives and concerns.

**Ask**

What’s happening around us?  
Where is God already at work?

## Listen to God

Immerse your thoughts and conversations in prayer. Walk around your neighbourhood, hang out where people are and talk to God about it all. Learn how to ‘read’ your community and hear God through Scripture. Take time to practise discernment.

Listening is an act of transformation which leads churches to become more Christ-like.

**Ask**

What is on God’s heart for the people we live and worship amongst? What does Jesus want us to do?

*“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”*

*Winston Churchill*



resource

recruit

learn

research

collect

identify

gather

determine

access

bring together

pool

assemble

involve

define

engage

include

find out

discover

group



# collect

**As you talk with others, you will discover what you have in common with others in your community and how you can use the resources, skills and talents you already have to cultivate new possibilities. This is the time to gather together information, resources and the people who will act.**

## Discover your own community

Find out the gifts, talents, and passions of the congregation.

What skills do you have?

What knowledge do you have that could be shared?

What areas of expertise are represented in your congregation?

What are your strengths and weaknesses as a church community?

## Discover the community around you

Do some research on who is living in your neighbourhood. Look at the census figures for the area, the age groups, ethnicities, what sort of housing and schools are available, what social services are active in the area. Conduct an informal survey or invite feedback.

What are the hurts and hopes?

## Conversation Café

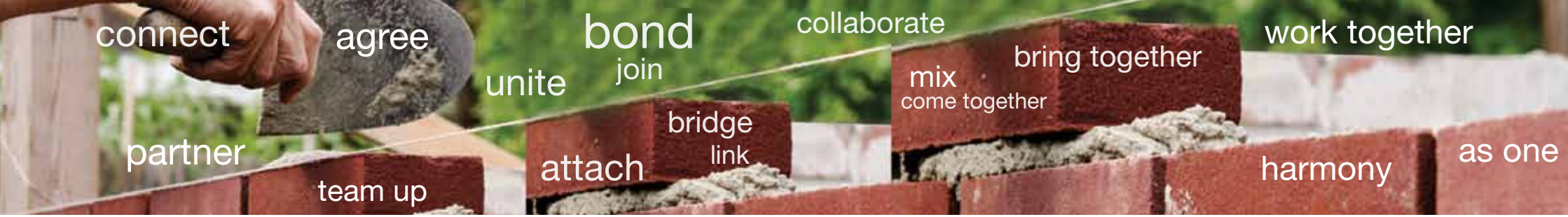
Change often begins with simple conversations. A conversation café is an exchange of ideas, feelings and thoughts between people. As the members of a community talk and share, they can reach a better understanding of one another's values and concerns.

To prepare a conversation café, set up a 'hospitable space', complete with appropriate music, good food and refreshments. People sit informally at tables with a 'menu' of questions. Discussion concludes with a simple debriefing time asking the group "How was that?"

### Good questions to ask are:

- What is special about our community that cannot be lost?
- What can we do to ensure that we protect and build on those things that we value?
- Describe what you want your community to look like, feel like, be like in two years' time.
- What can we do to make this happen?





# connect

Once you've learned who you are and what is happening around you in your community, you can begin to make the connections. In fact, you've probably already made important links through listening and talking with others.

**A relationship has begun!**

The project you come up with doesn't have to be big or flashy. You could start with a small experiment or pilot project first. What's important is that your idea realistically matches the resources you have with a particular need or interest in the community.

One church responded to a Conversation Café with three simple ideas – a street party, small acts of kindness, and freezer meals for Mainly Music mothers. Another matched young people with older people whom they visited regularly for company and conversation. No act of kindness is too small or insignificant to make a big difference in someone's life.

As you build a team, remember to encourage one another and allay fears.

- + identify assets, strengths and what works well
- + have a clear vision
- + be flexible about how to get there
- + understand the nature of the issues you're dealing with
- + how you act matters more than what you do
- + invest in people
- + anticipate 'mess', uncertainty and hard work
- + make progress visible
- + continue to learn and reflect together
- + be kind to yourself
- + have fun!

*"But Jesus immediately said to them:  
'Take courage! It is I. Don't be  
afraid.' 'Lord, if it's you,'  
Peter replied, 'tell me to come  
to you on the water.' 'Come,' he said."  
Matthew 14:27-29*



# act

**‘Stop, look, listen before you step out.’**

Remember that reminder for crossing the road safely? The same guidelines apply when it comes to connecting with your community. You need to stop, look and listen but you can't stay on the kerbside forever!

So far, you've paused, learnt about the neighbourhood, assessed the risks and opportunities, talked and listened with others. As a group you have conversed together, collected information and resources, and made connections. Now is the time to act on what you've learnt.

But what do you do exactly? In this booklet, we can't decide that for you. Your project will be unique to you, but here are some examples that might inspire you to think creatively in your own situation.

## Community garden

Some unused land in your neighbourhood could be the perfect place to develop a community garden.

- plan together with neighbours
- teach Sunday school gardening lessons
- sell seedlings or produce at church
- join the local farmers' market



## Advocacy

You may be able to join with those who have a particular community issue at heart and mobilise with them on behalf of others.

- write to your local MP
- start a petition, blog or social networking page
- write to the newspaper
- offer budgeting advice
- offer dispute resolution
- marriage counselling
- parenting courses
- environmental issues
- support organisations that deal with specific issues (see resources page)
- support Family Works in your area [www.familyworks.org.nz](http://www.familyworks.org.nz)
- foodbank or op shop
- help organise a forum, debate, march, or panel about an issue
- information stall at sports or community events



- make up fresh food parcels
- host community lunches
- 'garden to table' cooking classes
- gardening workshops
- training and work for unemployed people
- micro-finance opportunities

get done

energy

effect

advance

bring into being

realise

implement

put into practice

effort

bring about

employ

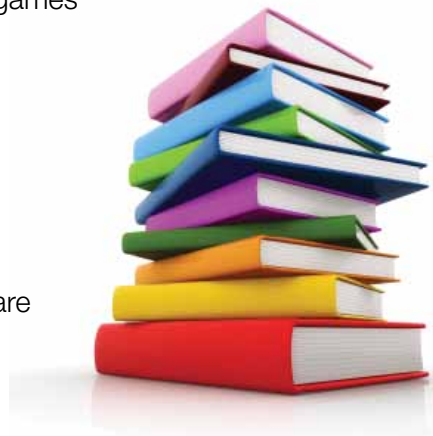
proceed

produce

### Adopt-a-school

Many schools are only too delighted to get to know their community, including the churches in their area. And they can always do with help. Here are some ideas for engaging with your local school:

- second hand school uniform shop
- coach or sponsor a sports team
- reading support
- hot drinks for parents at winter sports games
- sponsor awards or library books
- prayer and special treats for teachers
- provide art or technology materials
- working bee
- grandparents' support group
- handcrafts and cooking classes
- breakfast club or before/after school care options
- school holiday programmes
- homework clinic and tutoring
- combined church/ school fair
- supervision for school trips and camps
- build a school playground
- match senior students with older people to visit.



### Recruit-a-bloke

This scheme finds people with handyman skills to do the 'nuisance jobs' that others can't manage or afford themselves. The church acts as a go-between to match the job with the right person.

- people with practical gardening, maintenance or building skills are approached and asked to pledge (volunteer) a few hours labour a month.
- a church team identifies needs in the community that can be met by handyman labour.
- the church team matches the need with the bloke who can do the job.



### Acts of kindness

No act of kindness is too small or insignificant. Practical ways to show compassion might include:

- babysitting
- transport for older people to appointments or shops
- meals for new mothers or those who are ill
- property maintenance
- rubbish disposal after community events
- security at neighbourhood teenage parties



*"The kingdom of God is like . . . a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade."*

*Mark 4:30-32*





# communicate

Letting others know what you're doing is an important part of the process. As you share what you've experienced and learnt, others may be inspired to join you!

Remember to communicate love and respect by what you say as well as what you do. It's OK to talk about mistakes and invite help to do better next time. An inclusive attitude is the heart of community:

- 'we're in this together'
- 'this is how you've helped'
- 'would you like to join us?'
- 'thank you'

## Communicate with each other

When working with others it helps to have:

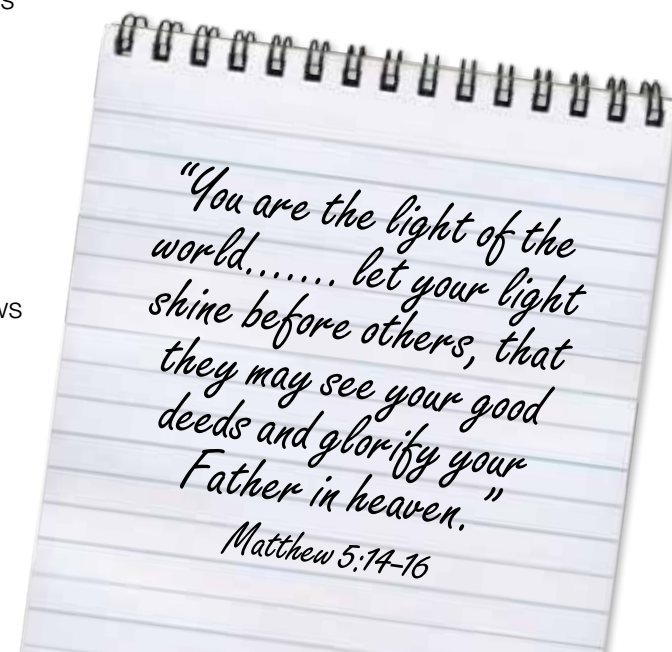
- time to plan and agree on direction
- time to build strong relationships
- clear definitions of roles and responsibilities
- shared decision-making
- ability to handle conflict constructively
- a simple written statement about goals

## Communicate with your church community

- report back to church leaders
- share stories
- introduce people to each other
- use newsletters and church notices
- invite ongoing prayer
- liaise with other churches in your area

## Communicate with the local community

- articles in local newspapers
- community noticeboards
- school newsletters
- city council websites or publications
- public meetings
- posters for local shops
- letterbox flyers
- radio talk-back or interviews
- 'What's On' columns



gauge check **decide** think through  
appraise test consider review  
weigh up assess scrutinise include  
study critique survey inspect reflect  
examine think about

# evaluate

What next? Having spent time and energy bringing your ideas to fruition, it's good to pause now and again to reassess what's happening. Remind yourselves of the purpose of your project and think about how you define 'success'. Keep imagining new possibilities. Continue being open to God.

## Ask the team questions like:

- Why are we doing this? Why would we continue with this?
- What's working and what isn't?
- How do we evaluate our success? our mistakes?
- Are there ways to do it better or differently?
- Has the 'season' for this project come to an end? Is it time to try something else?
- How could we multiply, extend, develop or grow this idea?
- Is the focus on people or programmes? relationships or events?
- How is involvement in this project for us as individuals now? Has anything changed for us personally?

*"It is what you learn  
after you know it all,  
that counts".*

*John Wooden*



# celebrate

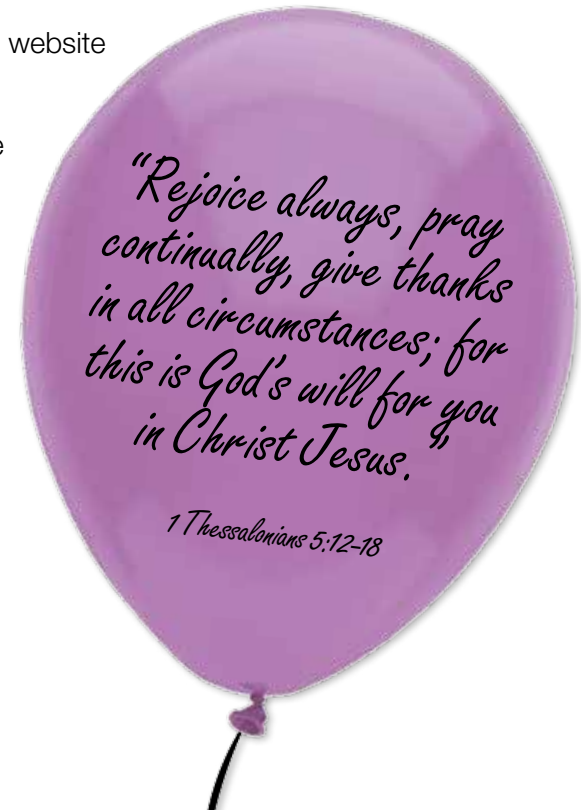
Why organise a meeting when you can organise a party? Join with the community in celebrating the good things happening around you. If you can share a meal – even better! Enjoying food together spells ‘community’ like nothing else.

- + thank each other
- + thank God
- + thank your supporters and helpers



## Some ideas to try:

- street party
- neighbourhood barbecue
- church and community picnic
- ‘Big Day In’ festival
- photos, videos on the church website
- share stories
- a special thanksgiving service
- international pot luck meal
- morning tea for the workers on site
- bake-a-thon
- special meals e.g. Christmas, Easter
- church & school fair or sports day



# resources

## Great books to read

- + **The Church of Irresistible Influence**  
Robert Lewis with Rob Wilkins
- + **Missional: Joining God in the Neighbourhood**  
Alan J Roxburgh
- + **God Next Door : Spiritually & Mission in the Neighbourhood**  
Simon Carey Holt
- + **You Were Born for This**  
Bruce Wilkinson
- + **Community Conversations**  
Paul Born
- + **Kingdom Come**  
Malcolm Duncan

## Inspirational and informative websites to browse

- + **Kids Friendly**  
[www.presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/kids-friendly](http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/national-ministries/kids-friendly)
- + **Neighbours Day Aotearoa**  
[www.neighboursday.org.nz](http://www.neighboursday.org.nz)
- + **Mentoring**  
[www.freshperspective.org.nz](http://www.freshperspective.org.nz)
- + **Urban Gardening**  
[www.urbanpantry.co.nz](http://www.urbanpantry.co.nz)
- + **Family Violence Prevention**  
[www.areyouok.org.nz](http://www.areyouok.org.nz)
- + **Bank of I.D.E.A.S.**  
[www.bankofideas.com.au](http://www.bankofideas.com.au)

## Advocacy websites

- + **Child Poverty Action Group**  
[www.cpag.org.nz](http://www.cpag.org.nz)
- + **Students Against Driving Drunk (SADD)**  
[www.sadd.org.nz](http://www.sadd.org.nz)
- + **Campaign for Action of Family Violence**  
[www.areyouok.org.nz](http://www.areyouok.org.nz)
- + **Christians Against Poverty**  
[www.capnz.org](http://www.capnz.org)
- + **Prison Fellowship**  
[www.pfnz.org.nz](http://www.pfnz.org.nz)
- + [www.closetogether.org.nz](http://www.closetogether.org.nz)

## Projects serving their community with 'acts of kindness'

- + **Streetworks – Hamilton**  
<http://www.streetworks.org.nz/>
- + **Tablesides – East Auckland**  
<http://www.tableside.co.nz/>
- + **Servolution – Manurewa, Auckland**  
<http://www.servolution.co.nz>
- + **Project Co-op – Auckland Presbyterian Youth**  
Joint project PSN & Auckland churches
- + **City Lights – Auckland**  
<http://citylights.org.nz/>
- + **Grubby Angels – St Davids, South Island**





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