**Monthly dinners**
If you are able to, you could invite a new neighbour to dinner each month, starting with a harvest meal.

**Celebrate your community**
Get out and ask people in your community what they love about where they live and what could make life in your area even better. You might be surprised by what you hear. Find ways to share your results so that everyone can see the positives.

Use the information on page X to take things a step further and really get to know your community so you know how best to approach mission activities.

**And Finally, Pray . . .**

**A Liturgical Prayer**

Our Father, who brings heaven to earth,
Merciful and mighty Son who guards our hearts,
Compassionate and counselling Spirit who walks with us,
We stand in prayer with our Christian brothers and sisters around the world,
In places where food is scarce and hunger powerful.
And with them we pray for your light to burn brightly on their work.
As we pour out our prayers, pour out your mercy to answer us.
Merciful and mighty Son,
Sender of good gifts, bringer of life, worker of miracles,
You have given your church your own heart.
Help us, through your prayers and actions, to enable local churches to lift the broken.
To release the potential which resides in even the poorest communities.
As we pour out our prayers, pour out your mercy to answer us.
Compassionate and counselling Spirit,
We commit ourselves, as part of your global church movement,
To play our part in bringing a kingdom of justice.
In bringing spiritual and material transformation
Into the darkest places.
In being part of the church – and releasing its potential to be your agent of change in the poorest of places.
As we pour out our prayers, pour out your mercy to answer us.
We pray for strength to fulfil your call to us, to care for the orphan, to feed the hungry,
to release the potential of poor communities so that they may find a better future.
Hear us, your servants.
Amen.

**Prayer idea for small groups**

Choose an evening and ask everyone to bring two or three favourite scriptures from the Bible on giving thanks. Next, start to ask everyone to make a list of the many things we receive from God, covering all the spiritual, physical, emotional, intellectual, material and relational blessings he gives. Share some of those with each other then have a time of prayer inviting everyone to share short prayers of thanksgiving: ‘Lord, I thank you for . . .’ and see how long you can keep going! Encourage everyone to have a thanksgiving week where they take time every day to thank God for all that he gives. Then when the group next meets, take time to share and pray into all that has been learnt.

**Get to Know Your Community**

We might have some brilliant ideas about how we’d like to be generous to our communities this harvest, but to build up some great relationships and make good use of our gifts it’s important to first find out what it is that our neighbours actually need and to work with them to achieve it.

**Here are some ideas . . .**

Start by drawing a large map of your community. Plot out the church, the housing estates, shops, community buildings, roads and so on. Then add to it the areas where you sense there is poverty and social issues (from bored young people to substance misuse, homelessness and isolation). Show your map to a wider group within your church – do they agree? What’s missing? Where are the neediest areas? Who are the most vulnerable groups? Do your neighbours and friends outside of church agree?

You could hold a harvest fair or supper or use your harvest service to begin to engage the thoughts and ideas of the wider community. Set up a stall and lay out pieces of paper (or postcards) with various social issues written or illustrated on them – like debt, housing, health care, unemployment, crime, education. Invite people who pass by the table to vote on which issue is the most relevant. Give them five counters and ask them to ‘spend’ the counters where they think is most need in the community by placing them onto the relevant postcards. At the end of the event you should have a good picture of what a sample of the community feel are priority issues of need.

Talk to key contacts in your community, such as doctors, community police officers, social workers, other churches, child care services and others who might have an opinion. Ask them what they think are the key issues in the community, who are the main service providers addressing these issues and what are the gaps.
Look at the statistics for your local area. Try entering your postcode into www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk or www.upmystreet.com. What does it say about public service provision in your area? What do you learn about crime, local schools, health and employment?

Design a questionnaire and carry out a community survey. You can post this out, but you are more likely to get a better response if you do this face to face, plus it allows you to start building relationships with those outside of your church.

This might involve knocking on doors so make sure you prepare yourselves properly: when is an appropriate time to door knock? Explain why you are there, and how many questions you have! Have a good balance between closed questions (yes or no answers) and open questions.

Organise a focus group meeting. This involves gathering a sample of the community together in one place and chairing a discussion about needs in the community. To encourage people to come you might want to provide food and drinks. Also, make sure you keep to time and ensure that participants understand the purpose of the meeting and how you plan to use the information afterwards. Make sure someone is taking notes on the discussion and that key points are recorded. An alternative to this would be to go out and visit other community groups, such as lunch clubs for the elderly, mum and toddler groups, youth clubs, etc. and ask the organisers if you can conduct your focus group at their meeting.

Put on a regular community meal or coffee morning. These are often great ways to get to know your community and also provide a great service for people. Once they begin to feel more comfortable with you and you have built up a good relationship you can begin to ask them about the wider needs they see in the community. What else can the church do to help them and their neighbours?

Finally, once you have conducted this period of research and relationship building, you should have a clear sense of what your community needs – as well as whom you should have a clear sense of what your community needs – as well as whom you could partner with to deliver it. You can also visit www.communitymission.org to find organisations and ideas of ways you can help meet your community’s needs through local advocacy as well as practical support.

Remember, Christianity was never meant to be a solo discipline: we were made to be connected, not only with our heavenly Father, but with our fellow humans. We were made for community, just as church was made to be a source of strength, support and hope for those living around it. To that end it’s vital that as we consider ways in which we can connect with the world beyond the doors of the church, we understand that our aim is to work with communities, not just for them.

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**Generosity**

**Rachel Jordan**

Generosity usually means giving, and often we’re quite comfortable with that, but it is equally important to be a generous receiver which is where we can often struggle. Do we ask for help from our friends and neighbours, from those we’re ministering amongst, the vulnerable? When they offer their help or their gifts do we know how to be generous receivers and bless their giving and generosity? Will we eat the food that someone else has made that might not be quite what we’re used to or accept the gift, however small, because the giver needs the blessing of giving? We need to learn the reciprocal gift of generous, vulnerable receiving.

There is a strange power balance in giving and receiving and when we receive we are often making ourselves less powerful, being open to someone else’s culture or style. We empower others when we receive their gifts, when we welcome what they offer to us. To do so without critique, without thinking that we could have given something better.

The widow in the Bible who gave her mite is a perfect picture of a generous giver who could have been overlooked. Jesus knew the value or her small offering, she gave from her poverty, her tiny monetary gift was an act of extreme generosity. Let us not miss those whose gifts look small but whose generosity is great. Let us give all people the opportunity to give and think before we judge the giver by the gift.

I have the great privilege of being friends with some women who are, or have been, homeless and now attend a day centre in a women’s hostel. One of these ladies has a roof over her head but has lost her benefits and has had no income for a year. She has been kept alive by the lady who runs the local café who has given her all the day-old sandwiches. The lady from the hostel was saying to me that she hoped the women’s hostel (where we meet) would give out presents this year because she will then be able to give away the gift she receives to the lady in the café. What an extremely generous gift that will be. And when the lady in the café receives it, she will give back some dignity to the vulnerable woman.

So be generous, be vulnerable, and allow others the power to know that you need them and appreciate them.

*Rachel is the National Adviser for Mission and Evangelism for the Church of England.*