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Growing Good Evaluation

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Executive summary

The Growing Good Toolkit is a six-session course that helps churches integrate social action and discipleship for holistic growth.

Based on three years of rigorous research conducted by Theos and Church Urban Fund across England, the Toolkit brings together practical insight and biblical reflection to equip churches to grow in faithfulness and fruitfulness.

Holistic growth encompasses quantitative growth in church participation (on Sundays and throughout the week) and qualitative growth in faithfulness, maturity, diversity, and service.


The Toolkit includes six 90-minute sessions: five built around the themes of the Growing Good research, and the sixth bringing together the learning to shape next steps. Each session includes an opening question, Bible passage and reflection, short film featuring insights from the research, group activity, time for prayer, and optional next step.

The five core sessions are:

- **Presence:** equipping churches to be a more visible and active presence in their community
- **Perseverance:** encouraging churches to learn from and invest in long-term relationships with local institutions
- **Hospitality:** shaping church culture to foster two-way relationships that lead to growth
- **Adaptability:** helping churches consider how to include people of diverse ages, cultures, and backgrounds in church life
- **Participation:** inviting churches to consider how social action can be a pathway to deeper discipleship and growth.

Since the Growing Good Toolkit was launched in October 2021, it has been accessed by over 1600 churches of different contexts, sizes, and denominations across England.

At the end of 2023, CUF commissioned an evaluation to assess the impact of the Toolkit. The evaluation has brought together insights from survey data and in-depth interviews with participating churches.

 **Churches who used Growing Good highlighted the following strengths:**

- **Integration:** the course is grounded both in Scripture and in empirical research.
- **Flexibility:** the material is adaptable for different settings and facilitates contextual reflection.
- **Engagement:** the course is participatory and effective in developing lay leadership.
- **Encouragement:** the exercises help churches to identify and celebrate what they are already doing well.
- **Practicality:** the toolkit offers simple, concrete ideas for churches to engage their communities in new ways and foster holistic growth.

Growing Good is generating positive changes in churches. The evaluation documented encouraging outcomes for churches who have used the Toolkit¹:



79% are more aware of the needs in their community.



80% are more aware of the strengths and assets in their community.



68% are more confident about sharing their faith through social action.



92% have taken action to further integrate social action and discipleship in their context.

In-depth feedback from participating churches demonstrates that the Growing Good Toolkit is helping churches to grow in knowledge of their local communities, confidence in their local mission, and intentional relationships with local people and institutions.

1 Towards growth in knowledge, church leaders shared that the Presence and Perseverance sessions were especially valuable in opening their eyes to who lives in their community, what the needs and opportunities are, and how they might engage with local institutions more intentionally. **“It helped us know who we are and who we live with.”** – lay leader in Harrow.

2 Towards growth in confidence in local mission, Growing Good participants reported that the biblical reflections, films, and group exercises gave them fresh vision that was **“theologically rooted”** and inspired new missional ideas. **“The course gave those who did it greater confidence... to be salt and light [Mt. 5:13] and make a difference in the community.”** – vicar in East Sussex.

3 Towards growth in hospitality and relationships, the Growing Good Toolkit has prompted churches to take active steps to initiate and cultivate local relationships. These steps include opening up the church building, hosting a village pop-up café, partnering with the local school to welcome newly arrived Hong Konger families, integrating songs of different styles and languages in Sunday services, and inviting more friends to church.

These areas of growth are fostering a culture of relational and incarnational mission in local churches. The Growing Good Toolkit is helping churches integrate social action and discipleship and is generating stepping stones to spiritual and numerical growth.

¹ Based on survey sent to all Growing Good subscribers

Introduction

The Growing Good Toolkit is a free, six-session course designed to help churches integrate social action and discipleship for holistic growth in their local contexts.

Growing Good treats growth as both quantitative and qualitative. Growth is about increasing the number of people who participate in the life of the church on Sundays and throughout the week. Growth is also about transformation – growing in faithfulness, maturity, diversity, and service. Underlying the Growing Good Toolkit is the assumption that holistic growth is animated by the Holy Spirit and centered on the person of Jesus Christ.

The Growing Good Toolkit is based on three years of rigorous research conducted by Theos and Church Urban Fund, including over 350 interviews in over 60 church communities across England. The Toolkit brings together practical insight and biblical reflection to equip churches to grow in faithfulness and fruitfulness.

Accessible and engaging, each of the six sessions includes a short film, group activity, Bible reflection, prayer, and practical next steps. Flexible and interactive, the Growing Good Toolkit is for local churches of all traditions that are motivated to serve their communities and experience growth.

Evaluation aims

The evaluation offers insight into the use and impact of Growing Good in churches and communities across England. Drawing on in-depth interviews and participant surveys, the evaluation captures how churches have used Growing Good in a variety of contexts; what difference Growing Good has made for church social action, discipleship, and growth; and how the materials could be further developed.

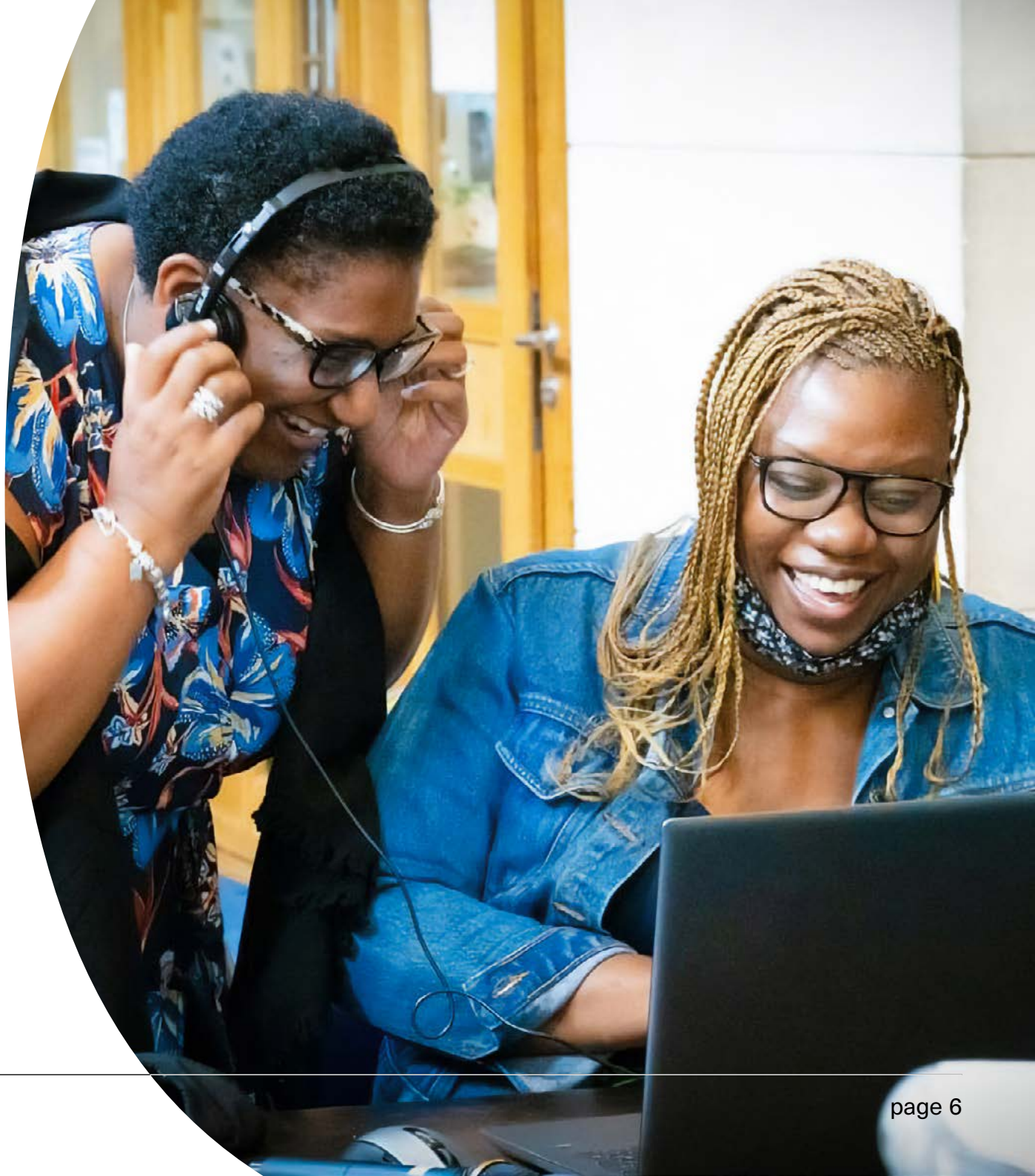
The evaluation report assesses how effectively the Growing Good Toolkit is facilitating progress towards its aims for churches, which are:

- Increased awareness of the needs and strengths of their local communities
- Increased awareness of the gifts in their congregations
- Increased confidence in making a difference in their communities
- Increased confidence in sharing their faith through social action
- Increased action to integration of social action and discipleship towards holistic growth.

Evaluation methods

The evaluation has brought together quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a fuller picture of the use, effectiveness, and impact of the Growing Good Toolkit. In October 2023 a short survey was sent to every person who had signed up to access the Growing Good Toolkit, and a total of 100 surveys were completed.

To get deeper insight into how churches have used the toolkit and what difference it has made, in-depth interviews were conducted with a mixture of clergy and lay people from 10 participating churches. The 10 case study churches include variation in region, context, church size, and tradition. These participating churches also offered more detailed feedback on the strengths of the course, applications and outcomes in their contexts, and areas for improvement. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was recorded with consent. Alongside these formal interviews, the evaluation report includes insights from additional case studies and informal feedback conversations conducted during the previous year.

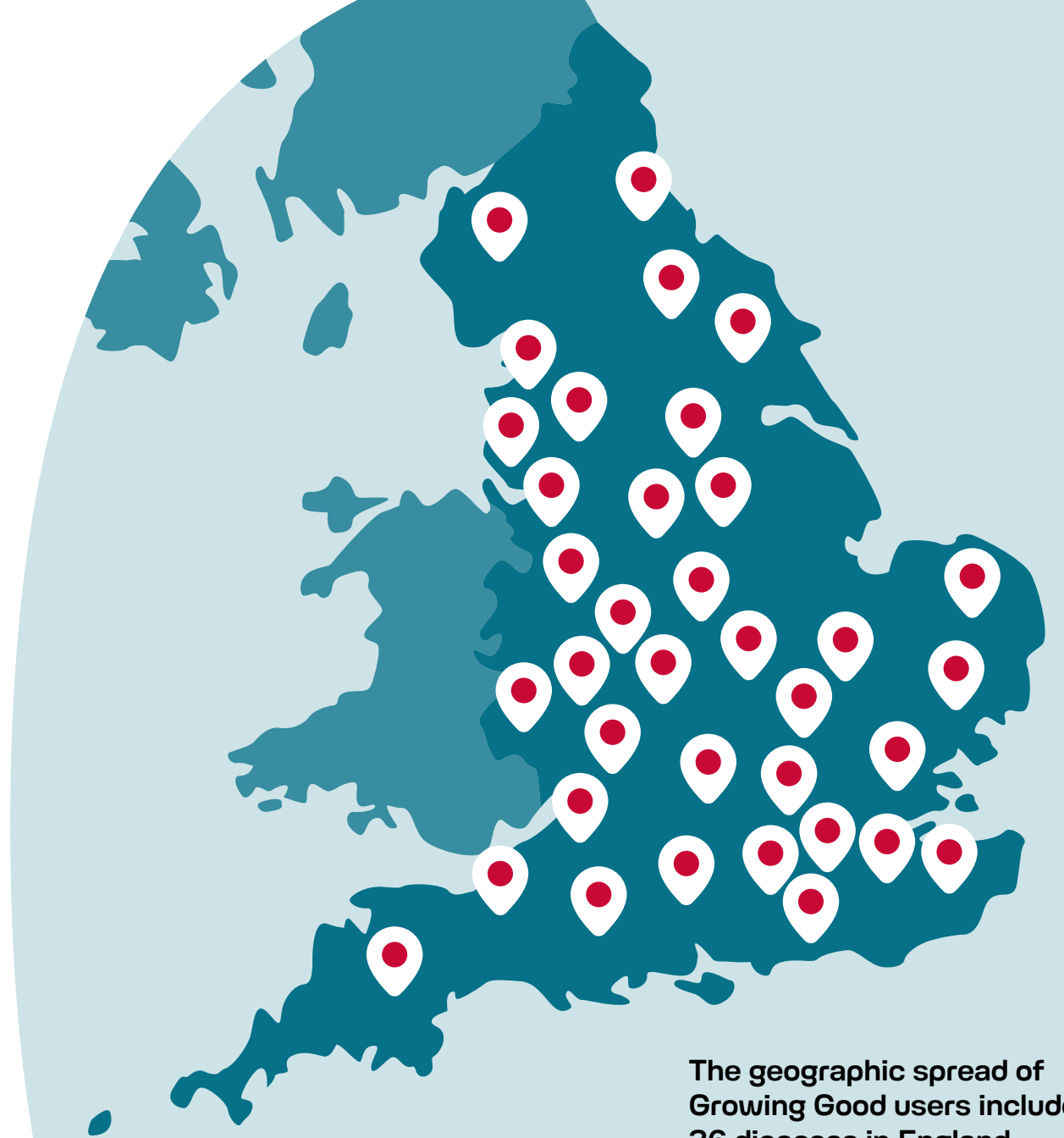


Reach

Since the full Growing Good Toolkit was launched in October 2021 the resource has been accessed by 1602 people. The geographic spread of Growing Good users includes 36 dioceses in England, as well as churches in other parts of the UK, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Antigua, and South Africa. While the Growing Good research was focused on the Church of England, the research findings around the integration of social action, discipleship, and church growth have applications across church traditions and contexts.

Thus far, the toolkit has been used by a range of denominations including Anglican, Methodist, Pentecostal, Baptist, New Frontiers, and United Reformed churches. The toolkit has also been used successfully by churches in urban, estate, suburban, and rural settings; in affluent and deprived neighbourhoods; and in large, medium, and small congregations.

As part of promoting the resource and equipping churches to use it effectively, Church Urban Fund has run a series of Growing Good workshops online and inperson across England, which have been attended by 619 people.



The geographic spread of Growing Good users includes 36 dioceses in England

Modes of use

One of the strengths of the Growing Good Toolkit is its flexibility. The course consists of six sessions: the first five each centre on a theme from the Growing Good research (Presence, Perseverance, Hospitality, Adaptability, and Participation), and the sixth a wrap-up session focusing on next steps. Churches can use all six sessions or choose the individual sessions most relevant to their context.

Of the 100 survey respondents, 84% used at least five sessions, while 55% used all six.

The two most widely used sessions were Presence (94%) and Hospitality (93%)².

- 2 Usage figures for other sessions were: Perseverance (92%), Adaptability (86%), Participation (89%), and Next Steps (62%).

The toolkit can be used either in person or online, and churches reported successfully using both modes of delivery. The Toolkit comes with a facilitator guide and a session guide for each session; no training is required to deliver the course. Churches who have used the Growing Good Toolkit described it as “very straightforward to use” and “easy to deliver.” Participants reported that the 90-minute sessions are a good length and that the session layouts are easy to follow.

While the course was designed for use in small groups, participating churches have shown that the material can be adapted for different settings including Sunday services, away days, leadership team meetings, and different types of small groups. A number of churches used Growing Good as their Lent course. Several chose to incorporate the material within Sunday services – using the toolkit’s suggested Bible readings, films, and activities and then adding songs, readings, and sermons. One congregation successfully condensed the material into a church away day, using four of the sessions that day and then running a shorter follow-up session a few weeks later.

GG Survey ratings of the Toolkit reveal consistent satisfaction with the high quality of each component. The following figures indicate the proportion of respondents who rated the Toolkit element as “good” or “very good”:

Opening questions (99%)

Biblical reflections (96%)

Films (98%)

Group discussions / activities (98%)

Optional next steps (92%)

Many participants commented that the short films, which feature case study churches from across England, are “brilliant quality,” inspiring practical ideas for their own local contexts.

Strengths of the course

In addition to the accessibility and flexibility of the course materials, participating churches shared multiple benefits of using the Growing Good Toolkit with their churches.

First, churches valued the fact that the toolkit is **grounded both in Scripture and in research**. A curate in Liverpool Diocese shared that the Bible passages and reflections helped her group to frame not only what they are doing as a church by why they are doing it. Many users appreciated that the research base for the course offers churches concrete examples of linking social action and discipleship that have been tested in multiple contexts.

Second, churches reported that the toolkit **encourages participation and lay leadership**. Users commented that the simple format, accessible language, and varied content made it easy for different types of people to participate. Participants included people of all ages, people in resource-rich and resource-poor congregations, people with learning disabilities, lay people and clergy, and newcomers to church.

A vicar in East Sussex who ran Growing Good as a Lent course reflected that **“everybody felt they could participate and offer something, which was a real positive.”**

A house group leader in rural Lancashire said, **“We used it for our very first house group meetings. It was the perfect introduction for people who had never experienced a house group before. As one of the leaders, having the good quality resources that the Toolkit provided made our task much easier and clearer.”** A number of facilitators reported that the session discussions drew out insights and ideas from congregation members who might not ordinarily be vocal in church meetings.

Third, congregations appreciated **the value of the toolkit in strengthening strategic planning**. Users commented that the course is a practical reflection and planning tool which offers **“a structured way to think about growth.”**

One congregation reflected that the course provided **“an excellent opportunity to sit back and review all we do, who we are, where we are situated, what opportunities there are for ministry.”** Several churches shared that the ideas generated by the course discussions have fed into PCC meetings and Mission Action Plan development.

Tim Jones is pastor of a New Frontiers church in Brighton who introduced Growing Good to a network of local churches. He reflected: **“We had all of these things in our DNA: social action, evangelism, mission, church growth, but we haven’t always connected them or let them inform each other... After looking at the Growing Good sessions, we each identified a mission plan for our local area, as well as thinking about our collective mission.”**

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“The small group of eight who originally did Growing Good together were motivated by a desire to do something in the village and see a change. People have been at St Peter’s for a long time and it can be hard when you’re not seeing much growth.”

Prompted by the Growing Good course to consider specific needs in their village community, a small group at St Peter’s had the idea for a pop-up café at the village hall. Presence and hospitality were key themes for the group as they considered how they could reach out into the community.

“The experience of the pop-up café has brought a new energy and a new life to people in their faith. A growing expectation of what could happen as a team working together with different skills. That has strengthened possibilities which has been a real encouragement and it’s given us a confidence as a church and a team that we didn’t have before.”

Revd Eileen Connolly is the curate at St Peter’s Church, Wawne in the Diocese of York.



Impact

Although the Growing Good Toolkit has only been available for two years, participating churches are already seeing early impacts.

Evaluation data from surveys and interviews suggest that the Growing Good Toolkit is helping churches to connect the dots between social action and discipleship towards holistic growth. This is evidenced in churches' growth in knowledge about their local communities, growth in confidence in their local mission, and growth in hospitality and intentional relationships.

1 Growth in knowledge about the local community

A consistent finding across the surveys and interviews is that Growing Good has helped churches to grow in their knowledge of the local community of which they are a part.

GG **As a result of using the toolkit, 79% of churches said they are more aware of the needs in their community, and 80% said they are more aware of the strengths and assets in their community.**

Participants reported that the Presence and Perseverance sessions were especially valuable in helping them understand their communities in greater depth. The Presence session focuses on equipping churches to be an active and visible presence in their local communities and includes a case study of a diverse urban church that has done this well.

A curate in Liverpool reflected that compared to other resources on church growth, Growing Good facilitated more contextualized analysis and helped them to ask and discern, "In our context, what is God saying?"

The parish mapping activity in this session was particularly eye-opening for their churches. Participants reflected that this group exercise helped their church to become aware of the boundaries of the area they serve, where their church members live and participate in vlocal life, and what parts of the area they are not currently reaching.

For example, a village church in East Yorkshire realised that their parish includes a housing estate that they now want to engage more intentionally. Another church in Plymouth shared that the Presence session got them **“thinking about how the church is perceived by the community and what is actually going on in our community outside of the church.”** The Perseverance session, which focuses on long-term investment in community institutions, helped churches to learn from institutions in their area (e.g. schools, community centres) and to think about how to build on their existing relationships with local institutions.

Churches expressed appreciation for the fact that the Growing Good Toolkit helped them to think very concretely about the specifics of their local area. Melanie, who ministers to five rural churches in the Diocese of York, noted that Growing Good is **“really adaptable to your own place and situation.”**



“

We reflected on letting go in some ways of the cosy and comfortable church we had been and recognising things in the Bible that are transformative, things we want to see for this area. Even at a time when we didn't have considerable resources, we were able to look at what we did have and open our doors. The benches and planters came out of the conversations around presence.”

Growing Good helped the PCC at church on the corner shape a 'parish profile', which led to the appointment of Rev Idina Dunmore: “When I started here I could see how Growing Good had played a role in articulating values and a renewed outward focus that really encouraged me to apply.”

Anthony adds: “My faith has been helped enormously by our experience over the last few years. We have seen there is something bigger at play here, seeing how God has moved has been really cool.”

PCC members Anthony Codling and Alison Lloyd with Rev Idina Dunmore, Associate Minister at Church on the Corner, Diocese of London



2 Growth in confidence in the church's local mission

A second prominent theme in the evaluation data is that the Growing Good Toolkit has increased churches' confidence in their local mission. This includes greater confidence in the calling of the church and in individual church members' gifts to contribute towards that calling.

Matthew shared that the course “gave those who did it greater confidence... to be salt and light [Mt. 5:13] and make a difference in the community. So I think that was that confidence in what Jesus has called us to do.” Participants shared that the biblical reflections contributed to a holistic vision for mission and that the films offered concrete examples of churches putting that vision into action.

Reflecting on the inspirational nature of the films, a Methodist steward commented that “seeing other churches do stuff and succeed is really encouraging.” Participants came away with renewed energy and strengthened belief that they too are called to serve their local area and draw people to the love of Christ.

GG After using Growing Good, 44% of participants took the step of preaching or teaching about the relationship between social action and discipleship in their church.

Several churches reported that the Growing Good activities and discussions helped them to see more clearly where their church members are already active in their local area, and then to celebrate, pray for, and build on those connections.

The Participation session, which focuses on how participation in social action can be a pathway to deeper discipleship and church growth, has helped churches to recognise the gifts present within their congregation and put these gifts into action in the community.

GG According to the survey data, after using Growing Good 66% of churches are more aware of the gifts in their congregation: 68% are more confident about making a difference in their community, and 68% are more confident about sharing their faith through social action.

3 Growth in hospitality and relationships

Thirdly, the findings of the evaluation show that the Growing Good Toolkit has led to growth in hospitality and local relationships.

Two-thirds of participating churches have taken one or more of these steps after completing Growing Good: started a new community project; joined a community project hosted by another organisation; made changes to their building/space to make it more welcoming; made changes to their worship services to be more inclusive. These are encouraging indicators that Growing Good has prompted not only reflection but also action.

Some of these steps have been small, while others have been larger.

Examples of small steps include:



improving church signage to make it more visible to passers-by



opening up church doors, having coffee outside after the service and tidying the church garden to make it a more inviting space.

Examples of bigger steps include:



starting a village pop-up café; partnering with the local school to welcome families from Hong Kong



integrating more hands-on ways for children to participate in services



incorporating songs and liturgies from different languages and styles.

For churches making big or small changes, Growing Good has prompted important cultural changes in how they approach hospitality and outreach. One facilitator shared: **“one lady who did the course came to me at the end of it and said, ‘I’ve realized we’ve always expected people to come to us, but it’s also about us going to them.’”**

Barbara, a minister in Surrey, was impacted by the idea of hospitality as a **“two-way process”** in which church members and community members build relationships that provide an opportunity to grow in faith. Similarly, Melanie shared: **“The toolkit encouraged us to go out of the building and to be open to receiving hospitality from others. We’ve held a quiz night with the local pub and had an open air service with 200 people. We stepped out and we accepted people’s generosity and hospitality, which led to new partnerships and a new sense of being in the community.”**

The course has also encouraged churches to consider more deeply the relationship between what they do on Sundays and what they do during the rest of the week.

For example, a Methodist church is thinking about how they might integrate a simple service into a mid-week meal that they already offer. For Lyndon, a vicar in Harrow, Growing Good has encouraged him to think more carefully about integrating discipleship through both Sunday services and mid-week outreach activities.

Prompted by the Perseverance session to reflect on their church’s activities in the community, Rev Clive Hamilton reflected: **“Recognising the perseverance behind the activities that have created stepping stones for people at St Barnabas has been important. We can see how, as people have made a connection with us through these activities, they have become present with us just as much as we have been present with them; new lasting relationships and community have been built.”**



Growing Good has helped churches to reflect, celebrate, and take further steps to build community relationships that are stepping stones to spiritual and numerical growth.

“

We used the Growing Good Toolkit during Lent in 2022. It's really adaptable to your own place and situation. And the ideas in the activities and films were simple, practical, tangible things that we could readily relate to. It affirmed what we were already doing and enabled us to look at next steps, one of which was a regular prayer walk round the village.”

Growing Good helped Melanie's church reconnect with the community after lockdown, which was particularly difficult in rural communities where lack of transport often prevents different people from coming together.

“The toolkit encouraged us to go out of the building and to be open to receiving hospitality from others. We've held a quiz night with the local pub and had an open air service with 200 people. We stepped out and we accepted people's generosity and hospitality, which led to new partnerships and a new sense of being in the community.”

Melanie Burnside is a vicar in Diocese of York



Case studies

St Ethelburga's, East Sussex

St Ethelburga's had recently made some improvements to their building and wanted some inspiration in connecting more deeply with their local community. The congregation has about 50 adults and a handful of children and is located in an area of high deprivation. The vicar, Matthew, decided to run Growing Good as a Lent course. At the end of each session, the group gathered together their ideas and later shared them with their PCC.

The Adaptability session got them thinking about a variety of ways that the church might make its services more accessible to newcomers and people involved in mid-week activities. As a result, they have simplified some of the language in their liturgies, thought more intentionally about what songs they use, and discussed how to make services more engaging for people of different learning styles.

The Presence and Perseverance sessions prompted the congregation to consider how they might get more involved in existing community groups and activities, to be a more visible and active presence outside the church building. One way they have put this into action was by joining in a local community history event, for which they contributed photos for the exhibition.

Another person decided to get involved in local beach clean-ups, serving the community and building relationships in that way. To make their own space more welcoming, the church has also taken steps to tidy up the church garden and keep the church doors open.

Matthew, who has run several different courses in this church, observed that while the course has not led to "sudden dramatic changes," it has pushed the congregation to make take up "small incremental things" that make the church a more hospitable, inclusive, and active presence in their community.

The Growing Good Toolkit is "theologically rooted," encourages "practical application," and "gave those who did it greater confidence... in what Jesus has called us to do."



St Andrew's, Roxbourne

Located in an ethnically diverse residential neighbourhood of Harrow, St Andrew's decided to run Growing Good as a Lent course and as part of Sunday services. The vicar, Lyndon, saw the course as a helpful way of feeding into Mission Action Planning. One of the most valuable sessions for St Andrew's was Adaptability, which focuses on adapting church services to be more inclusive of people from different ages, cultures, and backgrounds. The discussions from this session challenged the church to lean more into its intercultural context, for example by including more worship songs in Tamil and Hindi. The Perseverance session also prompted them to think more strategically about how they could build on their relationship with the local secondary school.

The Hospitality session inspired the church to develop plans for a community café, as a way of offering hospitality and building more relationships with neighborhood residents. The Hospitality session also encouraged them to think more about how they could learn from and collaborate with the Tamil and Korean-speaking congregations that meet in their building, both of which excel at hospitality.

Lyndon reflected that the Growing Good Toolkit is “extremely well put together,” “very accessible,” and “pitched at the right level.”

For St Andrew's, the course offered both encouragement for what they are already doing, while also challenging them to consider new ways they might better integrate social action and discipleship in their particular context. Rebecca, a lay person who participated in the course, reflected that that it has led to growth in relationships, creativity, and confidence for the church. She said that the course helped in “bringing people together that wouldn't naturally club together,” identifying the gifts that each person has, and generating new ideas in how they could serve their community together. It also challenged people to ask: “who is my neighbor?” and to take steps individually and collectively to serve their neighbors.



St Mark's Crescent Methodist, Maidenhead

St Mark's Crescent Methodist Church completed updates to their building and had a desire **“to move forward and be a more welcoming church that could invite people in.”** They decided to first use Growing Good as a Lent study and then integrated it into Sunday Services over a six-month period.

St Mark's experimented with a café-style service, supplementing the Growing Good materials with additional songs and crafts for kids and refreshments for everyone to enjoy.

They gathered up ideas as they went along, consolidating these for the annual church meeting and feeding into the five-year plan.

Given the success of the café-style service with families, they decided to explore integrating simple services into other mid-week activities that they were already running.

Growing Good also inspired them to take small but meaningful steps towards greater visibility like lighting up the cross on their roof and showing up at the combined charities fair at the town hall. Sara, a steward at the church, said that Growing Good helped their congregation to “think afresh” about how they use their own space and how they can be more involved in their local community. Sara has recommended the toolkit to other churches in the circuit because “it makes you think practically” and “is really encouraging” to learn from other churches across the country who are seeing growth through integrating social action and discipleship.



St Paul's, Marylebone

St Paul's Marylebone is an estate church with an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse congregation. The church, which operates out of a community space, already runs several activities during the week, some of which are partnerships with other organisations. The leadership team wanted to be more intentional about growth, asking **“what does growth really look like? And what does it mean for people to feel that they belong if they're newer to coming to church?”** They considered a number of missional and evangelistic courses and decided that Growing Good would be the best fit for their context.

Like several other churches, St Paul's opted to use the Growing Good materials as part of Sunday services, setting up their space in a more café style and adding songs and prayers that fit with each Growing Good theme. Each table had a person who was responsible for gathering up the group's ideas at the end of each session.

Each week ideas were posted on the walls (including the marked-up parish map), and at the end of the course these ideas fed into a PCC away day for further strategic planning. One of themes that emerged from the congregation's discussions was a desire to be more welcoming to young families and find ways for children to participate more fully in services. As a result, they have put together Sunday service packs for children – including a flag to wave during hymns, a little cross to hold while praying, and a mini chalice to hold during communion. They have also added these symbols to the service sheets so that children can follow along more easily.

The Adaptability film featuring St John's Southall also inspired St Paul's to pursue more intercultural worship, and several congregation members came forward offering to pray or teach a song in their own language.

Using Growing Good has generated “confidence in inviting” and “a sense of ownership as a whole church” of the church's local mission.

A group of Filipina ladies in the church are now spurring each other on to invite new friends each week. Another woman in the congregation has started making special effort to welcome new families, especially those who might be worried about whether their noisy children are welcome in services. Even in a short time, these efforts have led to several new women coming to church and then returning with their families, having experienced genuine welcome.



St Nicolas, Bookham

St Nicolas is a village church in an area of general affluence, with pockets of deprivation. The majority of the congregation members are elderly, but they are making intentional efforts to reach out to families. Like several other churches who used Growing Good, St Nicolas had recently updated its building and was starting to ask: “what could we do to connect us better with the community?”

The local minister, Barbara, did some research on courses related to community outreach and came across Growing Good, which was “just what I was looking for – with a focus on community action, serving your neighbourhood.”

The church adapted the material for Sunday services, and one of the home groups also used it for their regular gatherings.

Two weeks after finishing the full course, the church hosted a follow-up meeting on a Sunday evening for those who wanted to share what the course had prompted for them and how they might take forward new ideas. Barbara commented that **“it really got people thinking about what we are doing and how we’re doing it and why we’re doing it.”** Questions that stuck with people from the Presence session were: **“What is your church known for? How do people in the village who are not part of our church community on a Sunday morning know us or connect with us?”** One simple step they have taken is to open their church doors more so that local residents can see that the church is open and alive. Growing Good has also prompted church members to think more carefully about where they are already active in the community and how to build on those relationships to encourage people to grow in faith. As a result, one initial step the church has taken is to start interviewing people in church every other week about a place that they are involved in in the village.

Barbara says this is an opportunity to **“pray for them and encourage them and see it as part of our church outreach.”** Beyond this, they are also considering starting a weekly lunch, as a way of tackling loneliness in the village and building relationships. The Perseverance session encouraged them to keep investing in their relationship with the local schools, and the Adaptability session challenged them to be willing to change the way they do things rather than **“expect people to come to church and adapt to us.”** Having recently removed the pews from their small church building, St Nicolas is exploring creative ways to use the space, such as a Green Fair which they recently hosted and involved a number of people who are not regular churchgoers. Over time, the church hopes to implement more ideas that they generated through Growing Good and to see their church grow in number and in diversity.



St Peter's, Wawne

St Peter's is a small church in an affluent commuter village with a congregation of about 20. Eileen, the curate, came across Growing Good at a conference and decided to run it with a home group of nine people over six weeks. Prior to that time the church did not have home groups, but a new couple to the church, John and Diane, volunteered to host the Growing Good course in their home. Eileen says the course provided "a way of getting together" that also "gave us permission to think and, you know, to dream."

The activities of the Presence and Perseverance sessions prompted the group to think about the needs of their village. John recalls: "We were made aware that following COVID a lot of people were quite isolated because they'd had to keep themselves to themselves that had continued and we thought 'well, how can we get people out and get them together?'"

While their small, 900-year-old church does not have a kitchen or hosting facilities, they decided to reach out to the village hall to propose a pop-up café. The group then assembled a pop-up team who mobilised volunteers to make soup and cakes and issued invitations to the village.

After the first pop-up café, Eileen remembers: "the village hall was full... and the buzz – it was something special. It was, you know, about welcome. It was about hospitality. It was about chatting to people. And connecting people. That's how it started and that's how it's continued." St Peter's has carried on hosting the pop-up cafés every couple of weeks over the last year. They don't charge anything for the refreshments but accept donations.

Community members who aren't yet part of the church have volunteered to join the pop-up organising team, as they have valued the events so much and made new friends through them. Pam, a guest at the pop-up, shared "We found out about the pop-up café when we had a note through the door. We've lived in Wawne for 43 years and when we came to that first café we met people who had lived here just as long who we didn't know!... I know it's run by the group from the church (St Peter's) but it doesn't feel churchy at all, it's very informal and you feel people are here to listen and support... We'll certainly continue coming along and hope it continues to grow."

Liz, one of the volunteers, shared that the pop-up "is meant to be fun... fun for the volunteers really and fun for the people who come." She has been encouraged to see the café bringing together different segments of the community – from widowers to young families to avid bakers to students.

Recommendations for further development

In addition to highlighting the strengths and positive impacts of the Growing Good Toolkit, the evaluation also considered areas for improvement and further development. This included an analysis of the feedback from survey respondents, case study churches, and workshop attendees.

The following recommendations merit consideration by Church Urban Fund for the next stage of toolkit development:

- ➔ Integrate additional practical examples and tips from other churches, including smaller steps that are feasible for smaller or resource-poor congregations.
- ➔ Build in ways to capture ideas and learning at the end of each individual session, rather than leaving this to the final “Next Steps” session.
- ➔ Feature stories and examples from a wider variety of contexts, particularly rural contexts.
- ➔ Add a follow-up session that churches could use six months after completing the course, to review ideas and progress.
- ➔ Create further resources for churches who choose to use the material as part of Sunday services (e.g. additional readings, prayers, songs, sermon ideas).
- ➔ Consider developing a version specifically for young people.

Conclusion

The evaluation findings indicate that the Growing Good Toolkit is helping churches to grow in knowledge of their local communities, in confidence in their mission as a church, and in relationships with local people and institutions.

Feedback from participant surveys and interviews reveals that the course is generating both meaningful reflection and action in churches across diverse contexts. Growing Good participants consistently report that the toolkit materials are flexible, engaging, and easy to use within small groups or larger services.

Compared to other small-group resources around church growth, discipleship, or social action, users noted that Growing Good has several unique strengths. These include the course's grounding in Scripture and empirical research, its accessible and engaging format, its content that both encourages and challenges participants, and its usefulness for strategic planning.

As a result of using the Growing Good Toolkit, churches are more aware of the needs and assets in their communities, more aware of their own gifts as a congregation, more confident both in serving their communities and sharing their faith, and more active in building relationships between congregations and the wider community.

Churches who have used Growing Good have found it both an encouragement for the work they are already doing and a challenge to experiment with new ways of doing things as they pursue holistic growth.

“

Growing Good gave us an opportunity to think about local needs, join in with our community and open our doors. We have seen growth since we did Growing Good. It has been quite amazing for our team and seeing how God has moved has been really cool.”



Growing Good is a community of people and churches who are committed to growing fruitful churches and flourishing communities.

Church Urban Fund developed the Toolkit to help connect the dots between social action, discipleship, and growth. The Toolkit combines biblical reflection and practical insight to equip churches to grow in faithfulness and fruitfulness.

Based on three years of research the Growing Good Toolkit is a free course for churches, offering six sessions to help your congregation grow in faith and make a difference in your community.

The development of the Growing Good Toolkit was funded by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust with additional support from the Bishop Radford Trust.

Thanks to all the churches who generously shared their stories and feedback with us.

Sign up today: growing-good.org.uk

Church Urban Fund, The Foundry,
17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR

0203 752 5655 | hello@cuf.org.uk

www.cuf.org.uk | [@churchurbanfund](https://twitter.com/churchurbanfund)

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Evaluation report by Dr Jessamin Birdsall

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