

WAYS OF ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITY

This table draws out some of the strengths and weaknesses of the three models for the church. When seeking to get involved in the community, it is important to be clear which model(s) are to be pursued. Failure to do so can create unnecessary misunderstanding and conflict, within both the church and the community.

There are different approaches to working in communities. The table ⁵ below highlights some of the distinctions between community provision, community action and community development.

COMMUNITY PROVISION

To provide caring services or activities for those who want them; they use what we offer, without being directly involved in shaping or delivering those services

Provides services for people in need

Helps people to cope with their present circumstances

Good in crisis situations

Good for building new contacts

Possibility of working with other agencies where there are common goals

More scope for overt Christian ethos and values

Clearly identifies the church/group of churches taking action

Tends to focus on effects rather than root causes of problems

Can create over-dependence on the helper

Can leave the cause of problems unaffected

POSITIVES **DRAWBACKS**

COMMUNITY ACTION

To collaborate more directly with local people/organisations to plan and deliver caring services together in some way, or to tackle more immediate needs through some form of campaigning

Tackles issues that directly affect people's lives (social, economic, political)

Organises local people to tackle the issues together

Is more responsive to 'real' local needs

Helps people work together for improvement of quality of life in the community

Sometimes focused on tasks to be done and particular issues rather than individual community needs

Can be short-term, e.g. a campaign about a particular issue which brings change to the lives of local people, but is not followed up adequately

Possible dilution of Christian ethos and values

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

To work to enable local people to take responsibility for and act in response to perceived local social needs or issues

Draws its agenda from people's immediate experiences and needs, not from the perceptions of need by others

Helps people recognise their own and their community's resources and use them for the common good

Enables people to take increased control over their own lives and to participate in the making of decisions which affect them

Provides possibility of long-term change within the community

Builds long-term links and trust with local agencies, as not just working to own agenda

Can incorporate community provision (usually by local people) and community action

Helps by focusing on community relationships

Issues can arise around how much overt Christian influence can be exercised over a project as well as questions of partnership with non-Christians