

# Priest Idol session 1

Seeing ourselves as other see us

## BEFORE VIEWING:

- How well known is your church in your community? What is it known for? Do most people know – where it is? – what it's doing? – what is on offer for them?  
or
- What first brought you along to church? Was it family, friends, other? Share stories.

*Start DVD at Priest Idol 1 – 0000*

### Summary

**Part 1:** St Mary Magdalene in Lundwood, near Barnsley is the last remaining place of worship in the village. It is struggling with a congregation of ten and vandalised buildings. Once a thriving mining community, Lundwood now has high unemployment and few church-goers. Strong measures are needed and the Archdeacon, Jonathan Greener advertises for a new parish priest who is willing to take risks for the sake of the gospel and put the church back at the centre of community life. Only one person applies – Revd James McCaskill, an American from Pittsburgh.

**Part 2:** James sets out to meet the locals, although understanding each other's accents is a challenge. Jonathan recognises James will need help and unveils a controversial plan – enlisting the help of a marketing company. 1000 leaflets inviting people to services are given out in the area, but only three extra people are at James' first service and two of those are his parents.

*(27 minutes)*

## AFTER VIEWING:

### Appearances, appearances

- On the first day in his new job, James finds the church notice board toppled and litter everywhere in the church grounds. How important are appearances - the outside of the church particularly? What do our church buildings, notice boards and grounds say about us to those outside?

### Leadership

- James comments, "All the eyes (are) looking on me to do something". How crucial is the leadership/the vicar in a church? How might a congregation best encourage its leadership?

### The Social Club/Community

- What do you think the Social Club is offering that the church isn't? Why is it so popular? James found the Social Club a culture shock. Would it be any less of a shock for us, if we went to our local pub/club? How do church and pub/club culture compare? Would Jesus have been found in church or in the pub in your community?

## Outside help

- Jonathan says, “Jesus went out; he engaged with people; he told them stories and he challenged them to change their lives. And we need to do that, but we’re not doing it very well so we need some help to do it”. What help might you need in your situation?
- A controversial plan is drawn up – to bring in a marketing company. Is it wise for the church to turn to secular agencies for support?

If you could get an outside expert for your church, who would you choose to do what, and why?

- The marketing company assess the church grounds. Among other comments they describe the grounds as ‘the point of purchase for potential worshippers’. Does that perspective make you want to change anything about the outside of your church?
- The marketing company start to identify the problem. “How do we get the people of Lundwood interested in their church? It just seems to have lost touch with people.” Together draw up a list of groups in your community your church has links with. If you have time, you might draw up a similar list of people in your community that you have links with as an individual.

## Leaflets and invitations

- 1000 leaflets advertising James’ first service are given out around the area. They produce one new person in church. What leaflets does your church produce, and for whom? Are leaflets a good way of letting people know what’s on offer?
- Matthew, in his gospel, writes: *‘As Jesus saw the crowds, his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were worried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. So he said to his disciples, “The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest.”’* (Matt 9:36)

How many of our church activities are easy for people in our community to join in with?

## What’s the point?

- In his first sermon James poses two questions which are essentially the same. “Is Christianity relevant to our world?” and “How will this church tell the Christian story in this community?” How might you or your church be relevant to your neighbour?

## RESEARCH

Ask three friends, work colleagues or neighbours how they usually spend their Sunday morning.