

Mission Action Planning in the diocese of St Albans

Introduction

Mission Action Planning is a central element in the new diocesan initiative *Living God's Love*. This initiative is an invitation to the people, parishes and deaneries, schools and chaplaincies to explore what it means to *Live God's Love* today by seeking to

- *Go Deeper into God,*
- *Transform Communities* and to
- *Make New Disciples.*

It is an invitation to journey, to see things from new perspectives, to discover new ways of doing things and to learn from each other as we travel together.

There are many ways in which we can explore that journey. Individuals and groups can take time to pray, reflect, study and discuss what it might mean in their lives, their homes and their work. *Living God's Love* is an invitation to a deeper and more radical discipleship. Initiatives will be developed, for example in Lent and Advent, to help parishes and people explore that invitation and strengthen their discipleship.

Alongside this each parish, school and chaplaincy is invited to ask how its own mission and ministry can be developed and shaped to *Live God's Love* more effectively, more faithfully and more joyfully in the light of the three themes. The journey needs to be discerned prayerfully and imaginatively.



Mission Action Planning and Mission Accompaniers

For parishes, in particular, two resources are offered to help in that task of discernment:

Mission Action Planning.

This is a tool which has proved effective and fruitful in many other dioceses in recent years. It is a prayerful process of looking, listening and reflection leading into planning and prioritising; seeking, with the Spirit's guidance, to discern both a vision and also a course of action. Typically that course of action might have a five year dimension and yearly priorities.

The end of this document offers a short introduction to the process of Mission Action Planning.

You can find much more detailed information from a variety of sources.

The Church Maps website www.churchmaps.co.uk has an excellent range of information and links to various diocesan websites where you will find a large number of guides and different approaches.

The recent book by Mark Ireland and Mike Chew, *How to do Mission Action Planning: A Vision Centred Approach* (SPCK 2009) is a valuable, thoughtful and practical handbook.

Mission Accompaniers.



As part of our shared commitment to this journey we are seeking to identify Mission Accompaniers to help parishes in this process. Their role will be, 'as it says on the tin', to accompany parishes as they, in their different ways, seek to discern and walk the journey. The Mission Accompaniers will, between them, offer a range of skills and experience and will be able to spend creative time with PCCs and others from parishes.

A separate guide introduces their role. You can download this from http://www.livinggodslive.org/living_gods_love/mission_accompaniers/

Making it work, helping it grow

It is recognised that parishes will want to approach this in different ways and at different speeds. Some will already be doing some sort of Mission Action Planning and will want to review their plans in the light of the three themes of *Living God's Love*. Some will need to spend time preparing the ground. Others will be ready to start right away.

Taking it forward

Finding Mission Accompaniers

Please get in touch if you have suggestions for people who could act as Mission Accompaniers. We need to find quite a large number of people, clergy and lay, who will between them have a wide range of skills.

Matching Mission Accompaniers

Mission Accompaniers will be matched carefully with parishes to create a helpful working relationship. We do want this to work well and to be creative and energising. Please get in touch to talk about the sort of Mission Accompanier who would best meet your needs.

Parish or Benefice?

It is expected that Mission Action Plans will be produced for each parish, but benefices and teams might wish to explore how plans can be developed together. Again, please get in touch if you would like to discuss what would work best for you.

Reviewing and sharing

Each parish is invited to work with a Mission Accompanier to create a Mission Action Plan. The plan will also be subject to an annual review, where what has been done can be assessed, the priorities and goals can be adjusted and an action plan for the next year agreed.

This review will be shared with a Mission Accompanier or a member of the Bishop's Senior Staff.

Equally importantly we hope to be able to make individual parish MAPs available to others across the diocese. This is so that:

- Stories and best practice can be shared.
- Diocesan Officers and others can offer particular and targeted help to parishes in order assist parishes in achieving their goals.
- Resources can be developed to meet emerging needs and priorities across the diocese.
- Deanery reviews can more easily reflect the reality and the priorities of parishes.
- Diocesan strategies can be developed using analysis gathered from the parish MAPs.

MAPs will become a very important tool for the development of the mission and ministry of the diocese.

Prayer and Response

- Please pray for this initiative and begin talking about it within the parish.
- Please do some of your own thinking about how MAP might work best for you. Have a look at some examples from other dioceses.
- Please get in touch with questions and reflections; we want to make this a fruitful and good initiative.
- Please get in touch about Mission Accompaniers and about the timing that will work best for you.

In the first instance, please contact Jeanette Gosney, Parish Development Officer, jgosney@stalbans.anglican.org or John Kiddle john.kiddle@stalbans.anglican.org telephone 01727 818141.

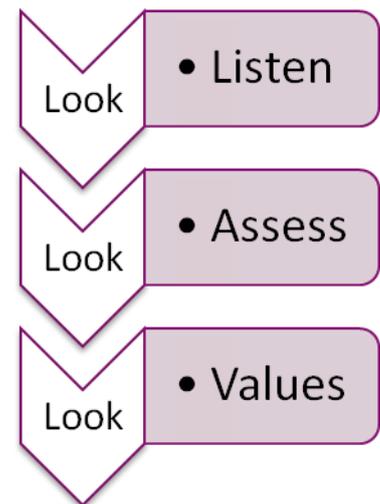
Mission Action Planning in brief

Mission Action Planning can be simply thought of as
Look and Discern
and
Plan and Act.

Look

The first stage in Mission Action Planning is to spend time looking and listening. There are several important aspects which can form part of this; it's often called an audit:

- ✓ Get out into the community to look and listen. What do you see? What do you hear?
- ✓ Back this up with good look at the social and census statistics available for the parish.
- ✓ Look beyond the local area to the world. What are the needs and concerns?
- ✓ Take a good look at the life of the church community.
 - You might want to reflect on the story of the church; where are we in the story, how does this chapter fit in?
 - You might undertake a SWOT analysis
 - You might take your look in the light of the 'Seven Marks of a Healthy Church'ⁱ
 - You might want to use an 'appreciative inquiry' approach
- ✓ Begin to discern the 'values' of the church as they are and as they might be.
 - You could do so in the light of the 5 Marks of Mission or the 5 Values of a Missionary Churchⁱⁱ
- ✓ In all of this, seek to look and listen in the light of the three themes of Living God's Love. How are these reflected in the life of the church and its engagement with the community?

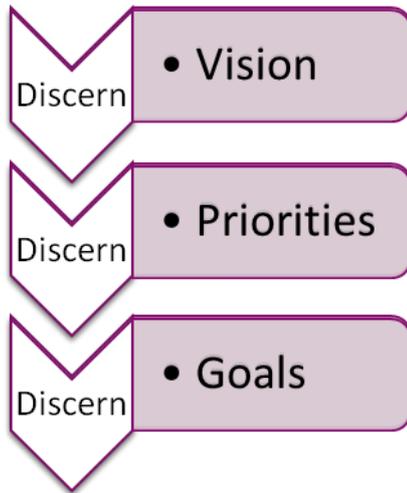


This process might need to be led by a small group but it is really important to involve as many people from the congregation and from the community as possible.

It is vital that this exercise of looking and listening is infused with prayer; seeking to look with the eyes of Christ and beginning to hear the voice of the Spirit.

and Discern

Looking and listening will begin to clarify into some key points; let this develop into a vision - a vision for what this church, at this time and this context is called to be. In other words, the *looking grows into seeing and discerning*, just as the prophets (the seers) saw a vision for God's people and for God's world. Make time to pray for God's guidance and inspiration.



Vision is vital; it energises and unites. Vision motivates and communicates. There's a real skill in articulating a vision that people will recognise as authentic and will own. It will happen when the first stage of looking and listening has been done carefully and prayerfully. It will happen when time is given for the vision to emerge, the looking then becomes seeing.

The three themes of *Living God's Love* offer a way in to thinking about vision and maybe even a structure for articulating it. *What might the future be like if we were to go deeper into God, if we were to step out and play our part in transforming communities around us and across the world, if we were to see new disciples playing a full part in the life of the church?* Let people use their imagination - it is a powerful, God given gift.

If the vision is articulated well and if it is recognised and owned then the next stages will flow naturally and easily. See the vision, see the priorities and goals.

Setting priorities means making choices. Firstly, what are the priorities for reaching the vision? These may be priorities for the next, say, 5 years. Secondly, what 2 or 3 of these can we work on in the next 12 months?

Once you've agreed the priorities, you need to set the goals for each of them. These goals need to be SMART. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced and Timed.

Plan

Prayer is as much a vital part of this stage as it was the earlier ones. If a small group, or the PCC is working on this, make sure the rest of the church knows about it and has a real feel for the vision, priorities and goals. Ask people to pray.

Once the vision, the priorities and the goals have been seen clearly, the planning can begin.

Take each goal one by one and ask 'how' is this going to be achieved. You will need to look at the different things that will need to be in place. For example:

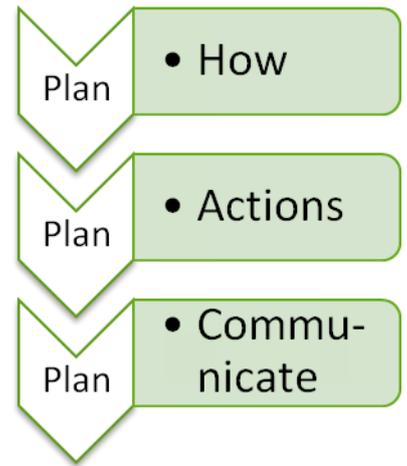
- ✓ Conditions
- ✓ Training
- ✓ Resources
- ✓ Purchases

Then look at the actions that need to happen to put these things in place. Ask what might need to be stopped in order to achieve your priorities. It might be helpful to use the following headings:

- ✓ What
- ✓ When
- ✓ Who

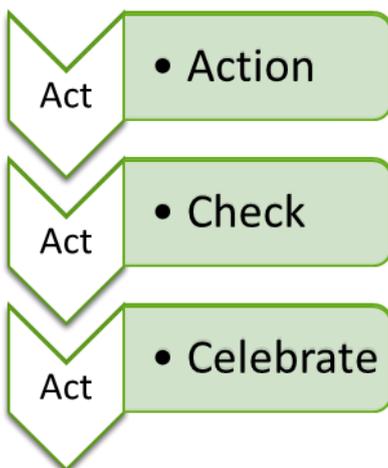
Check that the Actions make sense and that a workable programme has emerged for putting them into practice. Check you haven't missed anything and that there are no gaps. You've now got your final MAP.

Before you do anything else, communicate it to others. Make sure that people are familiar with the Vision and with the Plan. You might want to produce a simple leaflet or a PowerPoint presentation, or a video to help communicate this clearly.



and Act

So get started.



Keep praying. Keep communicating. Keep in touch with those who have been asked to get on with something.

You may need to be ready to modify the plan in the light of the reality of the situation. It is important that there is a continual system of checking how things are going.

When goals have been achieved, celebrate.

The MAP needs to continue to be owned, prayed for and celebrated by the members of the church. It is also important that this is put in context of our shared call to *Live God's Love*.

Review

Part of the essence of Mission Action Planning is its cyclic nature. As the first set of actions come to an end and goals are or aren't achieved it is important to Review things. This is where a Mission Accompanier will be very useful. It is an opportunity to assess how things have gone but also to re-View, to look again and see again the vision and so produce an adapted MAP. Restating the 5 year priorities and setting new goals and actions for the next year, for example.

ⁱ See *The Healthy Church Handbook* by Robert Warren

ⁱⁱ See Chapter 3 of *Mission Shaped Church*