

THE DIOCESE OF ELY

MISSION ACTION PLANNING

Resources for the Process

1 - GETTING STARTED

A Mission Action Plan (MAP) is a way of making sure that your church is:

- 1 **Purposeful** - you are doing the things you really believe in.

- 2 **Developing** - you are getting better at what you do.
- 3 **Focused** - you are able to keep to your set priorities.

MAP's can be created for individual parishes, or for a group of parishes working together – possibly as a local mission community; possibly as a Team Ministry.

Essentially MAP's are very practical and explain what you are planning to DO in the future, and who is going to do it. However, they are built on a clear sense of 'vision' that your church has for its life and witness in the community. This means that developing a shared vision with the whole church is of key importance.

Consulting church members

The vision of a church must be linked to the wishes of the whole church. If people don't believe in the vision; if they don't understand the vision; if they don't feel part of the vision – then the whole Plan will become ineffective. A more limited vision which carries everyone with it is therefore better than an ambitious vision which only a few are committed to.

So WIDE CONSULTATION is important and needs to include:

- regular and committed members
- those who attend regularly but seem to have little to say
- those on the fringes of church life

Questionnaires have a role to play, but they do not in themselves allow people to "hear" one another. Open meetings, with good leadership and guidance, can be very productive, and the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) is a tried and tested way to get started. A number of other approaches are offered in other leaflets in this series, "Resources for the Process".

Shaping the vision

Once people have had the opportunity to share their thoughts, it is up to a smaller group to come up with a more developed vision – an expression of what we are about; of what we think is important;

of what we would like to be doing to further the work of the kingdom of God. As always, good leadership is a vital ingredient.

A 'draft' vision can then be taken back to the congregation for 'approval'. Once people 'own' the vision they are far more likely to respond positively to it.

Once agreed, the vision will drive the MAP process. "Is what we are planning to do in accordance with our agreed vision?" is a question we must always be asking.

Developing the Mission Action Plan

If the vision is the direction in which we feel God is calling us to travel, then the Plan is the practical outworking of this. This will include:

Looking out – our mission into the wider community.

Looking in – building up the fellowship of the faith community so that we can with confidence enact the Plan.

Looking up – in prayer and worship so that our faith is sustained and strengthened.

The Plan need not be totally new. There are almost certainly things you are already doing that you want to look at – perhaps to build on or expand. There will be things you are already doing but need to review – and, if necessary, stop doing (not always easy!). And then there will be new things that you want to introduce in order to fulfil your stated vision.

The Plan must also address very practical issues:

- 1 Do we have the resources (people; building; financial) to succeed?
- 2 Do we need any form of training to help us?
- 3 How will we review progress and make changes?

“The vision can be broader and aspirational. It should stir the heart. But the Plan must stir the arms and legs.”

Communication

Those who have been closely involved in the planning will need to communicate the Plan to the whole church – and in as many ways as possible:

- weekly notice sheets
- magazine
- verbal notices
- comments in the sermon
- posters
- written material
- website
- themes chosen for bible study groups

Communication is not easy – but it is vital that the message gets through!

Examples

Two examples follow – these are based on actual work with churches in another Diocese. They are not offered as “perfect” Plans, but they reflect things that have been useful to congregations in finding a way forward for a church that is focused more on mission.

Example 1

Based on work done by a single congregation of 70-80 people. It had been a “church plant” many years ago into a ‘poorer’ suburban housing area which had very little overt Christian presence. The church still functioned as a sub-congregation of a larger church. Its numbers had been dropping for some time, and in particular it had lost many of its younger families with children to larger churches nearby (which had better children’s work). It had recently lost its

full-time incumbent and two Readers had been appointed to offer leadership. Overall it was feeling dispirited and a number of the most committed lay people had left or started to attend much more occasionally. The congregation felt it had “lost its way”.

Consulting church members

A meeting of the congregation was called, and three basic questions were posed:

- 1 What is our mission here?
- 2 What kind of congregation do we need to be to fulfil this mission?
- 3 What kind of worship do we need to sustain our life as a congregation, in order to fulfil this mission?

All views were noted down, and written comments were also invited.

Shaping a vision

The leadership team tried to weigh what had been said, and they identified the main points which emerged:

- 1 How to reach the older community – the church had, in fact, lost most of its younger families/children.
- 2 How to welcome young adults with children – by the creation of a mid-week “outreach” Family Service (initially monthly).
- 3 How to respond to the loss of clergy leadership and how could the current Leadership Team give clearer and firmer direction.

They then tried to draw this together into a vision statement that would guide the congregation forward.

Developing the Plan

There was very little opposition to the Vision, although many supported it passively, leaving most of the work to be done by a few activists. A detailed Mission Action Plan was put into action.

Communication

The Plan was summarised to the congregation, to try and help everybody remember the key action points.

Some evaluative comments

Strengths – there is some very focused activity in which people can become committed (e.g. Tuesday morning café). An attempt was made to encourage every member ministry as a means of opening up new ways of working.

Pitfalls – several areas of concern mentioned in the consultation process were completely ignored – what will this do to the issue of ownership? Much rests on the success of the café – what if it does not go well? Difficult leadership issues have not been resolved. If the congregation had been too clergy-dependent in the past, how would it stop being too leadership-team-dependent in the future?

Example 2

Nine rural parishes, each with its own church building (all listed), PCC and churchwardens, but recently formed into a 'Mission Community' with a representative 'Mission Community Council' that has taken over broader decision-making from PCC's. The total population of the parishes is around 4,000 and the average Sunday attendance is 20-70 per parish with a total of around 250.

A little over half the population is retired; there is a small farming community; the population trebles in the summer with tourists.

There is no children's work in any of the parishes. though some children come to church with their parents. Half the parishes have only BCP

services. The benefice Vicar lives in the largest village and there is an NSM priest who helps out with Sunday eucharists. A recent innovation is that on the 5th Sunday there is one service, but only about 100 have attended so far, i.e. more than half the regular congregations see it as a “day off”. There are two primary schools (one a church school) serving the villages.

Consulting church members

The Vicar called an open meeting and he particularly urged PCC members to attend. 80 people came and the Vicar reminded people of the wider Mission Community and the need to work together. He then invited them to talk together in parish groups, addressing the following issues:

- 1 What particular strengths their church brought to the Mission Community.
- 2 What they most needed to receive from others to strengthen the life and work of their church.
- 3 Things they felt the churches within the Mission Community could only achieve by working together.

Each parish church reported back to the whole meeting. It was clear that they had struggled to address these issues. The open discussion which followed mostly focused around the difficulties of providing Christian education for their children.

Shaping the vision

The Vicar then met with the wardens of each parish and the NSM priest to try and see a way forward. A Vision Statement was offered to the Mission Community Council, who endorsed it enthusiastically. It expressed the hope that in the next 3-5 years three areas should be developed:

- 1 Work with children to be focused on the church primary school.
- 2 Address the needs of the elderly and bereaved.
- 3 Offer more informal worship to reach younger adults.

Developing the Plan

A bullet-point Plan was then drawn up, so that each of these matters was taken forward. This acted as the overall guide for the Vicar, the wardens of each parish, and the Mission Community Council.

Communication

A summary of the proposals was issued. The final paragraph added a number of other issues: “We are also exploring the needs of youth, tourists and the traditional farming community, with a view to serving these needs better in the future.”

Some evaluative comments

Although short on practical things, the Plan is realistic about where this Mission Community is up to. However, there is a lot more work to be done.

There are certain ‘unknown’ factors which have not been researched:

- Will those who have ‘lost’ their BCP service actually travel to other churches – or will they simply stop attending church? Does this matter, as long as new people are drawn into the life of the church?
- There is little in the Plan as to how the vision is to be communicated and ‘sold’ to the churches as a whole. This may prove crucial to the success/failure of the Plan.