

DIOCESE OF ELY

**MISSION
ACTION
PLANNING**

Resources for the Process

4 - "JOURNEY INTO GROWTH"

Mission Accompaniment

This leaflet is based on Terry Tennens book, "Journey into Growth", published by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (£7.99).

The book seeks to address the basic question: “How can church life grow in mission?” Ten years of research have produced an answer – the seven core values of a mission church.

It is worth pointing out that one core value stood out above all the rest in the journey of growth – an openness to receive the insights of a skilled outsider. The book uses the title “mission accompaniment” – in other documents we have used the title “facilitator”.

We are seeking to develop a network of such people – contact Malcolm Raby for further details.

What is mission accompaniment?

A term used to describe a process undertaken by a local church in conjunction with an outsider to help them develop as mission communities. There are a number of ways in which the role of the mission companion can be understood:

- the friendly stranger using the Emmaus Road story
- the skilful outsider who uses their talent as facilitator
- the enabler who releases the potential in people
- the adviser who signposts a range of available resources

Mission companions are fellow Christians whose attitude and demeanour is to serve the Lord’s people and his Church. They are not there to tell you what to do, rather to assist you in discovering afresh God’s will that is unique to your church or project and context. Therefore, servanthood is a key quality in the sense of being one who journeys alongside others.

There is no “one size fits” all approach, and this material can be used in a variety of ways – you decide!

THE SEVEN CORE VALUES OF A MISSION CHURCH

1 Focusing vision – discovering God’s pathway. Primary questions needs to be addressed: Why are we here? How shall we live together? Where is God leading us?

Your clarity of long-term purpose is unlikely to change significantly (e.g. to love God and love our neighbours). The values of your community will also remain clear (e.g. welcoming the stranger and being a community that practices forgiveness and reconciliation). However, your vision (mission statement) is usually short to medium term (two to seven years), and is profoundly influenced by your purpose and your values. So if your purpose is to share the love of Christ in witness and service in the wider community, and your values are about honesty, love and welcome, then it is incomprehensible that you would express your vision exclusively on internal church life.

Exercise

Read Matthew 17:17-21

Spend a moment freely and creatively imagining how the Lord desires your church to be fearless, involved in serving the community, partnering other groups and sharing faith. Spend some time sharing these together uncritically.

Undertake a listening survey within the congregation and wider community. Identify the nature of the needs they specify and how they perceive the value of your church.

Where do you need to grow in faith in your church?

If you are struggling with the language of vision, try this approach:

- a What would it be like if your church did not exist?
- b What would be missing? Are there any gains if the church were not present?
- c What would a local church look like that was only serving the needs of members and not people in the wider community?
- d Is God pleased with how your church is living the life and sharing the story of Christ? If so, how? If not, why not?

2 Building local partnerships – community engagement. The local church is a bridging station, a community that represents God's presence and another way of seeing life. Our calling is to be 'salt and light' in our community.

Building local partnerships as a core value is understood not simply as building inter-church relationships – as valuable as that is in the pursuit of the mission of God – but also considering what non-church agencies our churches can partner for mutual aims. Care must be taken to ensure that the distinctiveness of our Christian faith and values is not lost.

Exercise

Read John 4:6-9

'Brainstorm' the real needs in your community. You may find it helpful to talk to Social Services, local councillors etc. to find out what they think.

Are you working with any other Christian churches? Are you developing partnerships for action and mission?

What expertise exists within your church? What would you say the strengths of your church are?

In the Bible passage, Jesus crossed barriers in the heat of the day. The Samaritan woman deliberately visited the well at this time to avoid others. Who are the most unlikely partners in your community and why?

How much corporate and individual prayer is being undertaken for the building of bridges in your community?

How can you support, release and empower people for new areas of work in the wider community?

3 Sharing faith and values – what, where, and how? Sharing faith and values as a core value indicates the importance of conversation with people beyond church circles. Sharing faith and

values means “commitment to Christian integrity and being clear about our Christian roots.” It is worth considering:

- a How does what happens on a Sunday equip and empower Christians to be supported in their daily encounters to share their faith at work, in the neighbourhood and at leisure?
- b Small groups can be an ideal avenue for Christians to learn to share their faith together. Is this something you have considered?

Exercise

Read Luke 10:1-6

Prepare your own “faith story” (no more than five minutes) and tell it to someone in your church – in turn, listen to their story.

How do the “unchurched” (that is, people who have had no church links at all) in your community view the church – have you ever asked them?

Some churches send members out in pairs to intercede and pray for the homes, businesses and communities that God would bless them with peace. Is this something you could try?

Consider ways in which you can share faith with respect, meaning and dignity for the other person.

There are many “de-churched” people (that is, people who used to attend church regularly but now do not) – how might your church seek to engage with such people? Have you thought about the “Back to Church Sunday” campaign?

4 Nourishing daily living, 24/7 discipleship and formation.

For many religious faith has been relegated to the realm of private discourse – the privatisation of faith. To be effective in the 21st

century we need to see ourselves as salt and light in God's world; as agents of transformation and bridge-builders of reconciliation and hope.

The core value of nourishing daily living is probably the "hidden gem of a healthy church".

Exercise

Read Colossians 3:12 – 4:1

A reminder of the virtues and graces that are hallmarks of Christian spirituality. The bonding agent is that of perfect love. We are all called to be ambassadors for Christ, and for this we require preparation and training.

On a scale of 1 (weak) to 5 (strong) indicate your desire to grow and mature as a Christian. How might that "growth" take place?

We can wear many masks for different contexts, some for sensible reasons, some for hidden purposes. Jesus said, "*you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:32)*". Freedom is about being authentic. How authentic are you in the home, workplace, and church, in the neighbourhood and at leisure?

5 Developing shared leadership – empowering teams. Most church analysts state that the single factor that will determine the fruitfulness and impact of the Christian church is 'leadership, leadership, leadership'. But what kind of leadership are we looking for?

Exercise

Read John 13:2-8 & Ephesians 4:11-13

What do you understand by "servant leadership"? Write down some of its demonstrable characteristics in modern church life.

The New Testament combines two strands on leadership. There are those who are called and recognised for leadership by those already in authority and given the office of leadership (Titus 1;5). And then

there are those who have skills and gifts among the congregation who exude leadership (Romans 12:8) who may not have the office of leadership. Is it possible for churches to learn from both styles?

How can we empower people to use their calling and gifts in the service of God?

Ephesians 4 depicts a fivefold ministry. How evident are such ministries in your church?

What training and development policies do you have to nurture new leaders whether younger or older, and for continuing development for existing leaders?

6 Becoming communities of learning – exploration. The well-worn phrase “we’ve always done it this way” is no longer adequate as a reason to do church the way we do. Of course, if after reflection and consultation it is found that the way you do church is appropriate for your context and community, then that is appropriate. It’s the assumption-based practice that is the problem here. We need to be willing to ask tough questions of ourselves as communities and be willing to learn and to change as a result.

Are you prepared to move to a “we have more to learn” mindset in order to take on board the challenges of being a Christian in the 21st century?

Exercise

Read Jeremiah 29:1-15

This passage is set at the time of the downfall of Judah in 597 BC. Jeremiah is writing to people in exile – people who felt lost in a foreign experience. In many ways, we are a “church in exile” today, unsure of ourselves and unsure of what to make of the society in which we live. The church appears to be increasingly rejected, marginalised and misunderstood.

Are there things we need to let go of and unlearn? How do we maintain a Christian distinctiveness in a world of pluralism and relativity?

Ask people of different ages what they make of your current services and weekly programme. Include those who have no contact with you.

In the Gospels, Jesus does a lot of listening and story-telling over meals. Do meals have a significant role in the life of your church?

Is your church one which enables others to share in leadership, and are church members taking up the challenge of learning to be lay leaders?

7 Contributing to and being stimulated by wider networks – enriched by outsiders.

Mission companions offer the following skills:

- 1 Listening
- 2 Asking incisive questions
- 3 Reflecting and mirroring
- 4 Encouraging and supporting
- 5 Facilitating and interpreting the way forward

Someone from outside the immediate tradition or church structure may well see blind spots more clearly – of course, they need to be respectful, sensitive and charitable in pointing them out!

Exercise

Read Luke 24:13-25

Jesus builds a relationship bridge with the two travellers.

What hopes and dreams for your church's life and mission have as yet to happen and have left you dejected?

In a complex world and a sophisticated church we can sometimes forget the simplicity of the Christian faith (verse 25). What would you say to someone who wanted to know the basics of the Christian faith?

Read verses 33-35. Think of occasions when you have recognised the risen Christ with you. Have there been times when you have been able to share Christ's life with others?

The Spirituality of a Bridge-building Church

How we practice our faith is at the heart of the kind of community that will be developed. So what attitudes and thinking are necessary for the environment of a bridge-building church to flourish?

COMMITMENT

- 1 Commitment to God – God's call is a radical biblical call. We need to pray that we will model attractive and committed Christian lives. Consider in what ways (if any) you have grown inwardly and outwardly in your Christian commitment in the last five years.

- 2 Commitment to each other – “By this all people will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:35). The crucial ingredient for Christian community is *agape* love – as lived out through the life of Jesus and ultimately on the cross. Remember, we are called to love and not to like – a subtle and important difference! Commitment to each other is not an end in itself, but for the purpose of God's mission in the world.

What does it mean to be “one in Christ” even though we are all unique and different?

- 3 Commitment to the de-churched. Have you ever asked people why they left the church? The ministry of healing and reconciliation is a very important one. Of course, we need to make sure that we really want people who have left us to come back!

- 4 Commitment to the non-churched. What strategies do you have in place to build bridges with the non-churched? This needs to be seen as a long-term process, and you may find the complex issue of “Fresh Expressions” of church needs exploring.

GROWTH

This includes internal spiritual growth, as well as outward fruitful service using the talents and gifts given to us by God. It also includes numerical growth. With growth comes wisdom, discernment and courage to face the future sure that we are in God's hands.

- 1 Prayer. All can pray. There is no tax or restriction on praying and we know that God communicates through prayer.
- 2 Worship. We live at a time when people appreciate degrees of diversity. One size does not fit all in worship. And yet worship is at the centre of congregational life. And worship is more than what happens on a Sunday – it is a 24/7 act. We can offer our time, skills and talent as an act of worship to God. So is it right to divide our time between sacred and secular? What are the signs of a life yielded to God: in the home; at work; in the community; in the local church?
- 3 People not yet in the church. This will not be a clean process. Mission is messy! If someone asked you: "Why should I join the church? What's in it for me?" how would you answer?

CHANGE

Tradition is good. But when tradition becomes traditionalism then it is not good. The seasons remind us that life is a journey of change, and we increasingly need to have a "multiple approach" to church life. Of course, change requires confidence and security in who we are called to be as the people of God.

What do you (a) enjoy and (b) not enjoy about new people joining your church?

How open is your church to change? What one thing would you like to change about your church?

CONTEXTUALISATION

A vital key to mission is that the church must relate to its own cultural context. How does your church relate to your local community? Do you see yourself as standing within the local community or separate from it?

An important role of mission accompaniment is to facilitate the translation process between church and culture.

The Accompanied Mission Journey

How does it work in practice?

- 1 Consultation within the local congregation to agree to the purpose of appointing a mission accompanier and to identify areas to be addressed.
- 2 Terms of agreement. Usually the congregation identifies three of the seven core values to be considered.
- 3 Selection of a mission accompanier. *In the Diocese we hope to have a team of trained "facilitators".*
- 4 The journey begins ...

"Ultimately the more open you are to the accompaniment experience the greater the benefit."