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Planning For Mission



Introduction

Our Diocesan vision of living God's Love focuses on;

- **Going Deeper into God**
- **Making New Disciples and**
- **Transforming Communities**

All three point to our understanding that our work is to join in with God's mission in the world. The mission of the Good News to better reach our hearts and souls; the mission of sharing the Gospel with others, and the mission of changing and challenging our communities to better reflect the love of God. All Mission is God's, and our challenge and our joy is to join in!

'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.'

Matthew 28 v19-20

In short we are called to both evangelism (go therefore... and teach) and discipleship (make disciplesbaptising them in the name of the Triune God). They are two sides of the same coin. So we have to ask what does this mean for our church? And how do we begin to think about this call to evangelism and discipleship and dare to do it?!

It is a daunting task for which we will need help and our help comes in many forms.

1. **God** – (hopefully this is obvious!) we pray and listen and discern.
2. **Each other** – we pray and talk in community and encourage one another. Listening together to the persistent and consistent word of God, checking out our discernment with each other and in love and grace challenge each other.
3. **Bible** – we study and learn and equip ourselves for the task, coming to know Christ through scripture.

When we are firmly grounded in our theology and our faith we reach out into the wider community as partners in God's mission; fuelled with passion and love and ready for courageous action for Christ.

The Plan

At this point we need a plan. As God has revealed his mission, and we have discerned a vision for our time and place and people, we now need a plan to help us join in and be effective partners in the work before us. We call these plans Mission Action Plans (MAPs) – a simple title which helps us focus on the missional work at hand.

1. **Mission** – it is God's mission; we work with God and for God. It is not our list of priorities, but God's. We seek a vision that is based on God's call.

2. **Action** – this is work, this is activity. This is being courageous and creative as we evangelise and grow disciples. We won't get very far by playing it safe and being passive, in action and in prayer. Action for God is at the centre of growth. This part of the work can feel daunting and overwhelming and it is in this section of the work that we look to the saints and the evangelists that have gone before us; their stories and their actions inspire us and encourage us. This is perhaps said best by St Paul himself:

'When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.'

1 Cor 2 v1-5

3. **Plan** – not just any action, but carefully discerned, planned action. A plan that is inspired by God, based on God's wisdom and holds to account all involved, is what we are aiming for. The planning is grounded in prayer and seeks to further God's purposes. It is not a list of what we've always done and are scared of letting go of. Nor is it a list of favourite activities that keep us in our comfort zones. It is a courageous list of activity that you feel called to by God and that in the planning you have worked out how you are going to fulfil the calling. It may include many good things you have previously done and need to repeat, and it may include new activities. Whatever action you are called to you need a plan to complete it well and with joy. A clear plan sets boundaries, protects those prone to overwork, and encourages those who have perhaps been on the sidelines. A good plan forms the basis for coherent teamwork in a timely and measured fashion.

This brief guide aims to help you think about the different stages of the MAP journey and identify where you are on the journey. At a time when the resources of time, money and people can feel scarcer than ever, clear and intentional planning becomes more important.

Research shows time and again that churches that want to grow and that have a clear plan are more likely to do so. This is not to say that the plan needs to be set in aspic (or carefully laminated and displayed in the porch), rather that it is an organic and living document. It is a work tool - not an end in itself. It is a document that helps you discern who you are in this chapter of your church's life, where you are called to be, and how you're going to get there.

As prayers, thoughts, feelings and discernments change and evolve over time, a plan that incorporates fluidity and flexibility and can adapt is alive and growing. A plan that is drawn up, never referred to again and sits shrouded in plastic, or gathering dust on a shelf, is not alive and not purposeful.

Your MAP is yours and needs to serve your needs for God's purposes! The best MAPs are annotated, a bit dog-eared and well-used (!) The best MAPs are on every agenda of the PCC to be robustly discussed. As each step is taken and each task completed it then becomes a document of celebration and encouragement as well as a place of reflection and learning.

Sometimes it is helpful to see others MAPs so you can gauge where yours might sit; looking at others work is also an inspirational activity as you can see other good ideas (and pinch them!) and then network yourselves with people that have trodden the path before you. You can find them here:
www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/mission-action-plans

The MAP Journey

With all the wonderful variety within our 339+ parishes in the diocese of St Albans we know that each MAP will necessarily be different and unique. We encourage this and applaud the rich variety of plans within our diocesan community! As we've already said this is your plan, not ours and needs to serve your purposes as discerned under God.

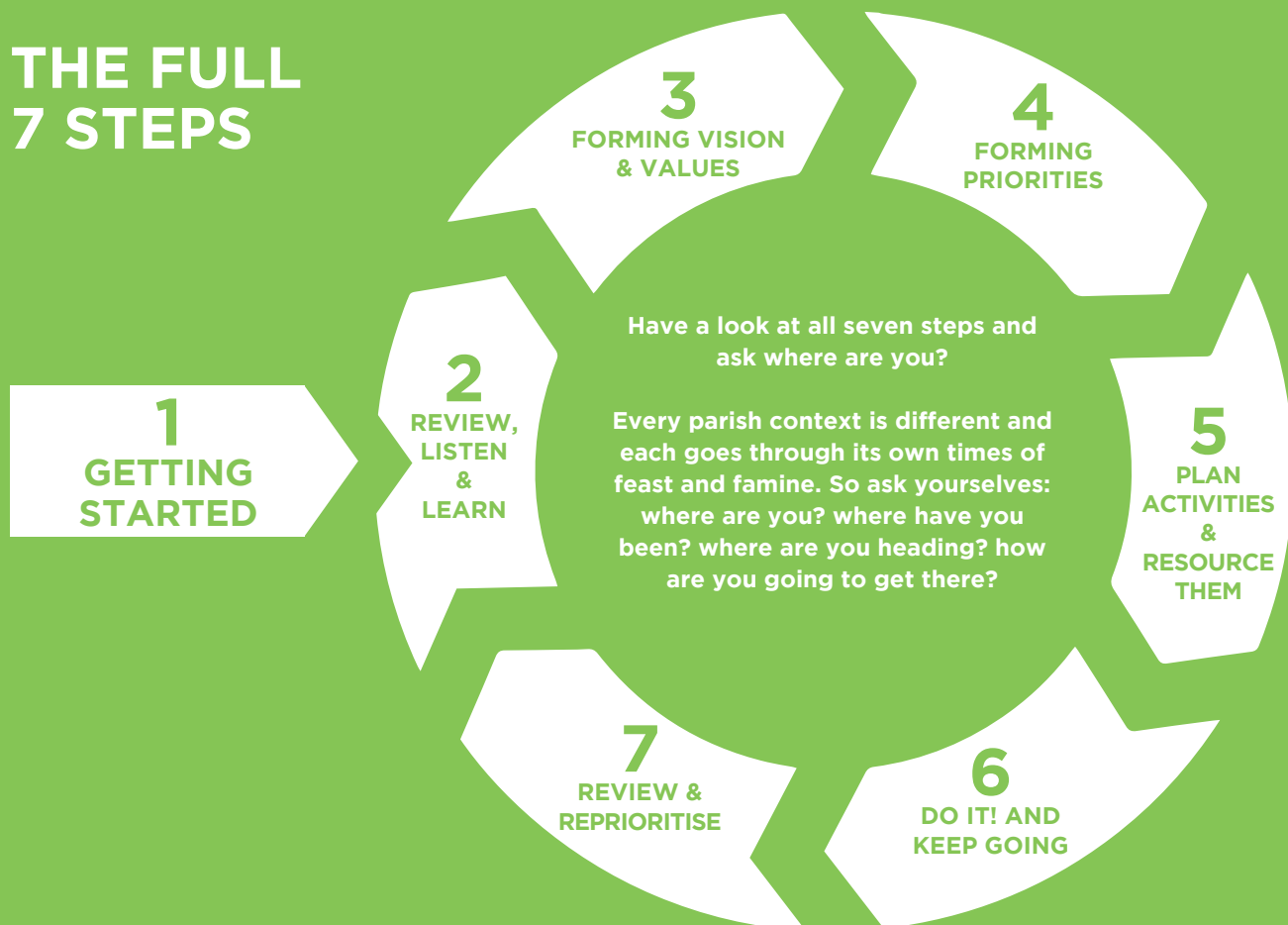
With that all said, we have looked at common themes and threads in the MAP process (not the actions) to help you gauge where you sit in the cycle and how effective your MAP might be. The MAP journey is divided into seven main stages.

Knowing where you are on the journey can help to ensure that each previous stage has been worked through thoroughly and helps you to see what your next step might be. You may be familiar with the central 4 stages of the MAP, but we have added 3 more stages to further flesh out the journey and to enable the process to be more specific and purposeful.

The centre of the cycle looks like this. It maybe that these are the 4 main steps you share with the congregation. The additional steps on the journey may just be useful for those more actively involved in the MAP process.



THE FULL 7 STEPS



Projects will change and evolve as God continues to reveal his mission. You may also need to react and change to events around you (we all know the unexpected issues that crop up in the quinquennial or what happens when the lead thieves strike...) So these questions underpin the MAP process and need

to be asked throughout all seven stages. A plan that is flexible and adaptable will be a plan you use and make the best of – this is not a document for the laminator! It's a tool, not an end in itself.

Here's some more detail on the 7 key steps.

STAGE ONE: GETTING STARTED...

Starting a MAP does not mean everything up to now was not good or missional. It is about continuing your journey in a more intentional way, knowing that what you're doing together is aiming to achieve what God is calling you to, at this time and in this place, to glorify His Name and build His Kingdom. It is good to involve a range of people from the church community for this and it may be best to start a small group.

It can be the PCC but does not have to be. Ensure there are representatives from all areas of church life e.g. youth worker, someone who will have an eye on the money and resources, music rep, children/ Sunday School person etc. It is also good to try to encourage a range of skills and personality types – all creative and 'big picture' people may struggle with detail and vice versa. Drawing together this group can be an opportunity to draw in some less likely suspects or more fringe people. We also

recommend some structured time for this group, an away day or similar. It's time to dream big and pray hard! Church Growth Officers can facilitate these sessions if you think an outside person may be useful.

Keep the wider congregation informed – allow avenues through which others can feed into the process and pray for your discernment.

Preach on God's mission – the 5 marks of mission are a helpful tool to get you started:

- to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- to teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- to respond to human need by loving service
- to seek to transform unjust structures of society
- to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain the renew the life of the earth

STAGE TWO: REVIEWING, LISTENING AND LEARNING

This stage looks in depth at the church's story and how it is changing and evolving. The questions to focus on here are:

- what is the nature and character of your church?
- what has happened in the last chapter of its life?

Statistics for mission play a part here in beginning to build a picture of activity and membership. Every year churches are sent their statistics from the Flourishing Churches team, accompanied by a prayer guide. You can also find the figures here:

www.stalbans.anglican.org/diocese/dashboards/

The Church Urban Fund also provides parish data for deprivation and wealth; this is an invaluable tool when discerning social action and community outreach. Look up your parish here:

www2.cuf.org.uk/lookup-tool

Population data can also be useful and you can look up your parish's data here:

www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/localarea

A community audit might help you flesh out the data and add local colour and narrative. Foci for this should include demography, community (social, pastoral, and contact points between church and community that already exist), church partnerships (e.g. ecumenical), geography and finances.

At the end of this process you will have collected a lot of data and stories that make up your context. Ask yourselves, what have you learnt? What has challenged you? Which pre-conceived thoughts have you had to adjust?

Now your understanding of your context is clarified a SWOT analysis might be useful.

Strengths... 'Isn't it great that...'

Weakness... 'Isn't it a pity that...'

Opportunities... 'Wouldn't it be good if...'

Threats... 'Things likely to stop/hinder us...'

A SWOT analysis can help set the scene for the next step whilst helpfully summarising the earlier statistical work and the stories that sit alongside.

STAGE THREE: ESTABLISHING VISION AND VALUES

This step can happen in either order - looking at either vision or values first- it's an organic and dynamic process. Keep praying and follow the Holy Spirit!

Sometimes having clearly identified values as a church community leads AND feeds into a simple yet effective vision. A community who know what they stand for and what their call under God is, can articulate it easily in a vision statement that inspires, grows identity and serves a purpose in helping the outsider know what they are about. The vision shows who they want to be, under God, in about 5 years time. It looks to the future and has Godly ambition, and earthly realism.

Sometimes the process works the other way up! An inspiring vision statement is aspirational, inspirational and allows others to capture the dream. From this shared sense of vision comes the values that sit behind it - these can be teased out and worked on as you journey.

Questions to ask in this section are:

- **Do we know what our values are individually and collectively as a church?**
- **Can we agree and state our values?**
- **Do we put our money where our mouth is?**
- **What causes us conflict?**
- **What does our worship and prayer life say of our values?**
- **Do we live out our values in our daily life?**
Eg. We say we are welcoming but do we really mean to all people or just people who are a bit like us?

It might be helpful to think of the vision as a compass - it points the way ahead so that everyone can get behind it and know where they are going. It is realistic in that people believe in it, yet it has courage and ambition.

Have a look at the Living God's Love vision and see where your church community fits into the Diocesan vision:

www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/living-god-s-love

STAGE FOUR: PRIORITISE; WHAT CAN YOU START? STOP? CONTINUE?

When you have reached this stage you will have spent time thinking about who you are (steps 1 & 2), explored why you are here and identified your hopes and dreams for the future as prayed about and carefully discerned (step 3). Now it is about your priorities to realise the vision.

The answers to your SWOT analysis might give insight here, as you carefully ask:

- **What do we do well (and what bears fruit – however you want to quantify this) that we want to continue?**
- **What needs changing or adapting to keep pace with the change we see around us?**

- **What has had its season and needs to draw to a close?**
- **Where are the gaps in our work? (looking at the eight common factors that lead to growth on the back of this pack)**
- **Is another task a priority right now?**

Beware of over-stretching yourselves and being spread too thin! There is a danger that too many priorities can lead not fulfilling any of them. Also - don't be too anxious and only set things you think can be easily attained.

You are aiming for a balance of challenge and comfort. A bit like the Gospel!

STAGE FIVE: SETTING GOALS

This is often seen at the 'meat' of the mission – the "what we are doing" (now we are clear of our realities, our context and what God has revealed his vision and mission to be). In short "the why". This stage is the plan; the who, what where and when and how of the work.

The plan is based on the priorities identified above in stage 4, all the while checking back to the values identified in the vision stage and asking

- **Do they marry? are the goals in line with the values and the vision?**
- **Will this plan for action further our values and aims as prayerfully discerned?**
- **Is there a common thread that connects these together?**

We suggest that each priority is broken down into goals; e.g. if your priority is to grow your work with young people → this reflects your vision to be a church community for all ages → and this is based on the seeing and listening you did in stage two – i.e. that your mission stats show a lack of young people in your worshipping community.

Step 5 now draws out the goals or the 'how' this is to be achieved. It is detailed work that needs to be broken down into manageable pieces.

Continuing the example above, your goal might be to establish a teenager group in your church community for fun and fellowship, possible confirmation preparation and to explore faith issues. With this as your goal, it is now helpful to apply the SMART acronym to the idea.

1. **S** = specific and precise objective. Name each step you need to take to set up the group. Who will be involved? Do you need further advice (e.g. from Diocesan youth officer)? Do you have the financial resources? When will it run and where? Advertising (for excellent tips on this see booklet 3)? Governance – is the PCC on board and are safeguarding requirements fulfilled? In short, this is who, what, where, when & how?
2. **M** = measurable. How will you know your objective has been met? In our example is it the setting up of the youth group or the rise in faith in the teenagers, or the number of people coming? Set your objectives thinking about growing faith and growing numbers and growing in service of your community.
3. **A** = achievable. Is your objective within reach?
4. **R** = realistic. Are you being real about your time, money and people?
5. **T** = time bound. Have you included dates in your objective? When to start? When to review? Or if it's a one off activity e.g. stewardship campaign, when will it end?

Answering these question should help you set clear objectives that achieve priorities that have been drawn out of your vision and values.

They should also help you be both realistic in terms of your resources, people and money and courageous in terms of your ambition for God's Kingdom

STAGE SIX: DO IT! AND KEEP GOING

Your plan is being actioned – this hard work and prayer is about to begin. Time to pray more, and remember to keep the congregation and whole church community informed and ask for their prayers too. We all know the many, many times we are told, ‘do not be afraid’ in scripture. Hold tight to those words and go for it!

To keep going once you’ve started is also crucial. We need a mix of ingredients to keep going:

- **Momentum** – keeping enthusiasm in the hard work; focus on your vision. Hold firm to the joys of the love of God and your desire to share it with others.

- **Morale** – encouragement to keep going. It’s especially important that this comes from the leaders. But at the same time leaders can and should give permission for others (and themselves) to take well-earned breaks.
- **Review** – Is the plan working or do tweaks need to be made? Celebrate and give thanks for any progress. Share the burdens of any stresses and problems. Remind yourselves of the Christian call to perseverance and endurance – St Paul and St James are superbly and divinely encouraging.

STAGE SEVEN: REVIEW AND RE-PRIORITISE (IF NECESSARY)

A continuing ethos of review and learning is essential as you journey through all the stages of the MAP process; but this stage is about a more thorough review – a bit like a quinquennial inspection!

This stage is more a look to your priorities – rather than a look at your goals and actions as they have been continually

reviewed and assessed with new learning taken on board. . Have your priorities stayed the same, or have they changed? Has your context changed? Should those changes inform renewed priorities? This review does not need to be as demanding as the stages outlined earlier; but a MAP group away day to refresh and renew may be a useful tool. Again Church Growth Officers can help facilitate this if useful.

OVERVIEW

In all seven stages a clear grounding in prayer is essential; God will reveal himself and His mission when we are open to hear it. Working on your MAP in this way is exciting as we draw closer to God in His mission and to each other as partners in the Gospel. Our call and ambition may surprise us, and God may open up new things and new opportunities. Equally old, familiar activities can remain strong and fruitful with an eye on reviewing and refreshment.

We hope this seven stage journey is a useful one as you plot your pathway and search out your next steps in mission. There may be times when you feel stuck at one stage or times when you leap from one to another without catching breath. We seek to work in God’s time and the only right way to do this is your way! This is your tool to plot and plan your actions for God as your context and community change, evolve and develop.

FAQS

HOW LONG SHOULD OUR MAP LAST FOR?

As long as it’s useful! Habitually around 3-5 years before a large scale review/re-write of all 7 stages. An annual mini-review (of stages 4-7) is also useful. Many parishes find that the APCM a good and exciting time to review the MAP. It adds colour to the governance and financial aspects and reminds us all why we are here!

MY PARISH HAS HAD A BRUISING EXPERIENCE OF MAPS – WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

You may need to re-frame it; call it another name. Mission Strategy Document? Actions for God? We really don’t mind – all we ask is that you pray, envision your best, plan how to achieve and resource it and attempt it!

WE ARE STUCK ON THE VISION PART? WILL WE EVER MOVE PAST THIS?

Yes! Grasping a God-given vision is crucial – dig deep and stay the course! Maybe an outside facilitator can assist you? Is the lack of consensus a symptom of a deeper issue or conflict? If so focus here – experience shows that a divided community will fail to grow and needs to prioritise its own healing. If you are really stuck on the vision, maybe leave it and look at your values. Sometimes our values lead to vision and sometimes our vision leads to values. There’s no ‘straight line’ here; do what works for your people and context.

The Church Growth Officers are here to support and assist – do give us a call to chat any of this through and to let us know how you’re getting on!

All finished MAPs can be uploaded here – www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/mission-action-plans
We look forward to reading them!

Once your MAP has been produced we ask that you assess where it sits in terms of rating it. We hope that by critically assessing your own work, you will find fresh insights and be encouraged and emboldened in God's mission. A criteria against which you check your MAP can also help avoid any gaps in your planning

and sidestep any potential threats to your actions. We have four main categories for rating MAPs: Requires Attention, Average, Good, Excellent. For each of the 10 steps mark your MAP and see which column has the most ticks – this is your overall score. Does your MAP group agree?

	CRITERIA	 REQUIRES ATTENTION	 AVERAGE	 GOOD	 EXCELLENT
1	Stage One: Getting started – this section won't be relevant for those already on the MAP journey, but is relevant for the first-timers.	Very limited 'buy-in' or participation from MAP group or PCC; possibly high levels of scepticism or apathy	Some engagement with the process, but some struggling to see the vision or purpose	Good engagement, with growing sense of purpose and understanding of mission	Good, wide-ranging engagement and clear understanding of God's Mission and a willingness to cooperate
2	What progress has been made against previous goals? (or subsequent goals if your MAP had to change due to circumstances)	Little or none	Some progress but not as much as we would like	Significant progress but not all met in all areas	The majority fully met
3	Stage Two: Reviewing, Listening and learning *Networks= schools, ecumenical partners, mother's unions etc.	Limited research and investigation into local context; maybe Mission Stats are missing or inaccurate? Local networks not considered.	Some research undertaken, and some engagement with the story of the place. The Mission Stats are used in a minimal way. And a beginning to look at the networks on the ground.	Mission Stats are fully used alongside the narrative of the context. Other data is also examined and fed in, as well as the existing networks.	All available data is used and thoroughly, considered. A community audit is undertaken and a range of views and stories heard from a wide age-range. Networks explored.
4	Stage Three: Vision and Values	A limited link between vision and values and not significantly embedded in the life of the church.	Vision and values not widely known in the life of the church and only sporadically used in PCCs, prayers etc.	Good acceptance and knowledge of the vision and values, and used widely in setting agendas and in the prayer life.	A high level of the vision and values being known and used in the parish. Fully embedded and coherent.
5	Does the Vision and Values sit well with the Diocesan Vision of living God's love and values of imagination, joy, generosity and courage	Relates very little to the Living God's Love vision.	Some degree of relating to some of the strands of the Living God's Love vision.	Good coverage of all three stands of the Living God's Love being addressed.	Very good coverage of the three stands of Living God's Love. The Diocesan vision is used to enhance and support the parish/ Church vision.
6	Stage Four: Priorities	An unclear set of priorities that do not link clearly with the vision or values of the Parish or Diocese.	A limited set of priorities; maybe too ambitious or not ambitious enough. Some links to the vision and values.	A set of priorities that links well to the vision and values.	A very clear set of priorities with clear overt links to the vision and values identified. And that draws fully on the data and stories collected in stage two.
7	Stage Five: Setting Goals and Planning	No SMART goals are set and very limited in their mission focus.	Some goals are SMART and some have a mission focus.	Most goals are SMART and most have a clear missional focus.	All goals are SMART and have a clear missional focus.
8	Resourcing the mission	No mention made of how this plan is being resourced with money or time and talents.	Some mention of resourcing is made; but not coherent and holistic.	Resourcing is planned for with most of the necessary resourced allocated.	Resourcing has been carefully thought through and allocated in terms of money, time and people.
9	Stage Six: Do it! And keep going.	Action is limited and lacks focus and drive.	Action is more wide ranging and has some momentum, but resilience is low.	Action is started and gains momentum. Resilience is present and morale is mainly high.	Action is started in time (SMART goals) and has clear momentum. Resilience and morale remain high.
10	Stage Seven: Review and Re-Prioritise	Lack of willingness to critically assess actions and plans.	Some willingness to critically assess actions and plans. Maybe find change problematic.	A good ability to critically assess the actions and the plans. Ability to make changes as needed and respond to feedback.	A very good ability to critically assess the actions and plans. Changes are made swiftly as necessary and feedback is well received.