

The image of a tree bearing fruit is a timeless and universal image of flourishing and abundance. Trees that are heavy with fruit appear often in the Bible as a picture of God's provision, wellbeing, and flourishing. It is easy to imagine the Church as a tree: one that is rooted and planted in God's Word and in God's very presence around us and within us.

The Mission Tree

The image of the Mission Tree is intended to help churches in two key ways:

1. It helps us see what a flourishing, healthy church looks like – it provides vision and aspiration. Some of the fruit are about potential and may not yet be in the life of our church: they are we waiting to ripen. Other fruit may be bursting into life and ripening and sweetening. All the fruit (plus one that is left blank for you as you may have something that is particular to your church or benefice) are important to a flourishing, healthy church: and all have a relationship with one another. This image gives us a vision of a Church that is growing purposefully, healthily and bearing Kingdom-shaped fruit.
2. The Mission Tree is also a tool to discern where churches need to focus their efforts and energies, as (contrary to nature), each fruit can be in a different season. This discernment feeds into Mission Action Planning (MAP) in the setting of key priorities, which is step four of the MAP cycle. See the MAP link for more information on this:
<https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/mission-action-plans/>
Also see more on this at the end of this document.

It is important to note that the fruit of the Mission Tree apply to all expressions of Church. If you have an 8am Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion service, then these fruits will help you pray, plan, and develop that worshipping community. If you have a Messy Church service once a month, you will find the fruit of the Mission Tree helpful to think about how the worshipping community develops its worship, cares for creation, or deepens discipleship.

The Seasons

Below is a description of each season, using a particular fruit as a worked example. Each season has its own characteristics and 'feel'. Identifying which

season a fruit is in requires discernment, instinct, an openness and the shared discernment of your ministry team or PCC. It is important not to compare fruit to past situations that are seen through 'rose-tinted glasses'. It is not simply about asking, 'Is this better or worse than what went before?'. Instead, this should be a tool for reflection to help you work on God's vision and make plans and changes to fulfil His call in your church/es and place. It is also important not to compare your church with the church down the road – this is about your journey and what is one season for you, may look very different in a different context or place.

Spring - Green; full of promise and potential, perhaps a bit fragile as it either ripens into summer or shrivels back to winter.

For example – '*Profound Worship*'

Perhaps a worship audit has been conducted and changes discerned and planned for. This would be spring – a time of promise and potential. The changes could go well and tip into summer and full flourishing as worship is enriched by the changes and people are moved by their experiences and draw closer to God and one another. Or, changes could divide a congregation resulting in conflict and improvements stalling, or perhaps things getting even worse than they were. Therefore, the fruit of '*Profound Worship*' tips into winter.

Summer - Pink; ripe, full, sweet fruit. The fragility to this season is keeping it ripe, continuing to nourish and feed the fruit and not assume it is a 'job done' and take your eyes and mind away from it.

For example – '*New Worshipping Communities*'

Maybe you have started a 'Forest Church' service once a month and have seen lots of parents and children come along to the first few services. The volunteer team is full of joy and energy about the new people they have met, and they have lots of ideas of how to take 'Forest Church' forward. Some want to invite new people to the 'main' church service on Sunday morning, others recognize that there is a need to create discipleship, community and worship in the 'Forest Church' context. In this summertime period it will perhaps be necessary to train and equip the volunteer team to keep things moving, and to ask the question of what is church? As well as this to already begin to think about raising up new leaders to help out, and perhaps find ways to train and encourage them in their roles.

Autumn – Orange; overripe, tired, past it's best. This season usually creeps up slowly and when we are not alert to it.

For example – *'Engaging Youth and Children's work'*

You have a thriving toddler group, Messy Church and Youth Group. They have been sustainable for a long time and new generations have passed through them. But some leaders have got tired, and some want to step back from this work: maybe one or two have left already. A new group of leaders does not look forthcoming; parents are busy working and know they cannot fulfil the roles as they had been previously fulfilled – the legacy of the 'heyday' of these group weighs heavy. A new generation feel burdened by the past and not inspired by it. The prayer here is to flip to a green spring – to find new potential and fresh ideas. To discover and nurture vocations to these roles, to imagine them in ways that time poor people can contribute to and make their own. Maybe roles need 'trimming' and sharing, maybe it is good to look for the 'surprising' or less obvious new leader? The danger is further tiredness and over-ripeness which slips into winter and a dormant season as the group deteriorates further. Being alive to this threat and nurturing new leaders is key as a summer slips to autumn. Autumn is also a time for pruning – is this a consideration when you have identified this season? Are previous events and efforts viable? Do they need reimagining for a different context and time?

Winter – Grey; Lifeless and dormant, fruitless. This is perhaps the most obvious season, and the most easily recognised.

For example – *'Effective Evangelism and Community Engagement'*

Your church used to be involved in community events; collecting for the foodbank, invited to lead prayers at the community carol singing event, there was a 'good neighbours scheme'. All of these things meant there was a large 'fringe' to the church, and it was always easy to invite people who weren't regular church attenders to come along on Easter Sunday, to Harvest Festival, and monthly 'men's curry night' where people used to share their testimonies of what Christ is doing in their lives. But over time volunteers to do these things moved away, or stepped back (often with good reason); and no one stepped forward in their place. The outreach staggered on for a while but wasn't sustainable so various projects stopped. No other initiatives rose up to engage with the community; the church and town began to feel and appear separate. The main church activity is now Sunday worship, and if you don't attend you might not know that the church is even 'open for business'. The challenge here is to breathe new life into the community; how to move to spring green and begin again, using the winter season as dormant and not dead. A rest period before new life is born – but also to adequately assess the length of rest needed, so new life doesn't become a far-off fantasy.

The Trunk of the Mission Tree:

How you can use the Mission Tree in your Leadership Teams and/or PCCs:

The Mission Tree feeds directly into your Mission Action Plan and forms a fundamental tool in the MAP process. Just as the trunk of the tree transports nutrients from the roots in the soil (rooted in God's Word and Presence) and holds a healthy tree steady in the storms and sunshine, the MAP is the process and plan that feeds your church and holds steady in the storms of life.

For more on the MAP process as a whole please see here:

<https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/mission-action-plans/>

Using the Mission Tree in the MAP process feeds directly into the priorities for your MAP (Step 4 on the MAP cycle).

Many churches find it useful to have an 'away day' or extended session using the Mission Tree to discern priorities. Other churches have used it in surveys and questionnaires. The fundamental aim though is to collectively and collaboratively draw together the insights and discernment of the church community to assess what season each fruit is in. As well as good learning and discerning that happens in these situations the other fruitful aspect is that, in bringing people together, relationships are strengthened and built up and responsibility is shared.

Officers from the Mission and Ministry department would be glad to support you in this work and can help you plan and facilitate a MAP session, or you can book onto one of our regular workshops.

Once you have the diagnosis of the fruits you can use them in your MAP to set priorities. Here's how we think it may work. This is not prescriptive but may help you plan your resources and energy levels as you implement your MAP.

Winter Fruits will be key priorities in your MAP, but may well need significant planning and resources; these fruits will be more effortful and will probably be implemented over a longer time frame.

Autumn Fruits will be secondary priorities in your MAP and may well be delicate to navigate. Pruning and acknowledging that things are tired or 'overripe' can be difficult and a bit uncomfortable; if activities and endeavors are stopped it is important to end well and with gratefulness. Autumn fruits do not have to end, but new life can be injected, and this is, in likelihood a medium effort fruit.

Summer Fruits will probably not make it onto your MAP priorities list other than as a 'keep going' footnote. Although it is important to give thanks for them and to celebrate well; they will likely be things that motivate and encourage when the going gets tough. Tell the stories of summer fruit and rejoice!

Spring Fruits will be the 'low hanging fruit'. They will need some gentle nudging and encouraging into the fullness of summer. Maybe some team building occasions, maybe some extra support or a small grant could give the energy they need to fully ripen. For churches they are perhaps a little tired or weary, starting with spring fruits will help garner energy and enthusiasm and build momentum before tackling the winter/autumn fruit. Some quick wins put a spring in everyone's step! As well as building confidence as you seek to implement the more complex and challenging priorities you have discerned.

If you would like and support or a friendly chat about any aspect of the Mission Tree or the Mission Action Planning process please do contact the Mission and Ministry department.