



# LIVING FAITH

## MISSION ACTION PLANNING A SIMPLE GUIDE

# LIVING FAITH

Living Faith is a vision for the Diocese of Oxford, with an initial life-span of 2009-2014. It isn't prescriptive. It's an invitation to adopt five priorities and to see them as a palette of five attractive colours with which to paint a unique local picture of the Kingdom. The painting depends on local factors, so no one size fits all, but the priorities are fundamental to a Church that wants to be faithful to Jesus Christ.

## THE VISION

The transformation of all life under God. (No less!)

## THE PURPOSE

To join with God in creating a growing, caring and sustainable Christian presence in every part of the Diocese of Oxford, enabling every Christian and every Christian community to live and share the love of God, seen in the life of Jesus Christ.

## THE METHOD

Living Faith works through high trust and high support. **Trust** in the ability and imagination of the local church – people don't need to be told what to do. **Support** from the diocese in the way of people and expertise, materials and ideas, training, conferences and events – all for churches to pick up and use as works best for them.

Over the last couple of years our deaneries have been developing Mission Action Plans. This leaflet is designed to help you develop a **local Mission Action Plan for your benefice or parish**.



# WHAT IS MISSION ACTION PLANNING?

**Mission Action Planning (MAP)** is a process designed to help churches grow in depth, impact and numbers – in other words, to live out our calling under the 'Living Faith' vision.

MAP enables us to discern our vision for the future. It then helps us to **choose to do a few things well**, planning activities over months and years that allow us to achieve our vision. Plans developed through MAP are not set in stone, but subject to ongoing review, refinement and development.

## UNDERGIRDDED BY PRAYER

It's essential that MAP is undergirded by prayer that seeks to identify God's will for a church, its people and local community. MAP aims to help our churches be places where God's Kingdom of love and justice is found. It seeks to help grow the spiritual lives of churches and our service of local communities. MAP aims to help us see what God is already doing in the world around us and to join in. Growth in church numbers often follows as a result of all these things.

## THE MAP PROCESS

MAP is a process that's guided by four questions:

1. Where are we starting from? (**Review**)
2. Where are we going? (**Choose**)
3. What's the best way to get there? (**Plan**)
4. What do we need to do now? (**Act**)



## WHERE ARE WE STARTING FROM? (REVIEW)

The first step of MAP is to assess our current situation and context, and find ways of building on our strengths. This includes understanding both our internal situation and also our external environment. It's important that we try to look at ourselves and our local community with fresh eyes, putting aside any assumptions and listening to what is actually being said within and around us. Tools that can help this include:

### AT PARISH/BENEFICE LEVEL

- An audit of church life based on the five 'Living faith' priorities
- SWOT analysis, to help identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- Review of basic church data including electoral roll and attendance numbers, age and social profiles of the church and its community, financial and buildings situation, description of current church activities
- Assessment of the church's values
- A church health survey using the 'Seven Marks of a Healthy Church' in *The Healthy Churches' Handbook* by Robert Warren.
- A church quality survey using *Natural Church Development* by Christian Schwarz ([www.ncd-uk.com](http://www.ncd-uk.com))

*As part of a 'healthy churches' exercise, St Mary's Church in Hampstead Norreys invited the whole community, including children from Hampstead Norreys CE Primary School, to assess the church's strengths, future aspirations and vocation.*

### AT COMMUNITY LEVEL

- The Church of England's Research and Statistics Division 'parish spotlights' provide useful demographic information. You can find these on our website by Area and deanery ([www.oxford.anglican.org/who-we-are](http://www.oxford.anglican.org/who-we-are)).
- The Church Urban Fund's 'Church Community Value Toolkit' shows the links we already have with our communities ([www.cuf.org.uk/act/resources-projects/community-value-toolkit](http://www.cuf.org.uk/act/resources-projects/community-value-toolkit))
- Interviews and focus group discussions with people and organisations can help us understand the needs, opportunities, strengths and weaknesses of our area through the eyes of people who don't normally come to church.

## WHERE ARE WE GOING? (CHOOSE)

Having understood the context of our church and its place in the local community, the next stage of MAP invites us to identify our **vision, priorities** and **goals**.

### VISION

This is at the heart of MAP. Drawing on the understanding that has come out of the review stage, MAP asks 'How do we reflect the five Living faith priorities?' 'What would God want our church to be like in five years' time?' Once a church has defined its vision, this can act as a compass, pointing the way ahead. **When we have a vision, we can begin to plan.** But a vision must be of the heart, and owned by everyone. If not, commitment to make things happen will be limited.

*"Our vision is to be a growing vibrant church, rooted in Christ, that reaches out and serves the whole community"* **St John the Evangelist, Carterton**

*"A place for our whole community to encounter God... a church which works to reveal God today as Jesus did"* **All Saints, High Wycombe**

### PRIORITIES

For most churches, it is a considerable challenge to work out how to **do a few things well**. Having a clearly owned vision helps us decide on what our priorities should be, and what we can let go. It's helpful to think in both the short and long term. What steps do we need to take in the next 12 months? What do we need to do over five years?

### GOALS

Goals help us see if we're on track to achieve what we want to see happen – and if not, to help us rethink our approach. It's helpful if goals can be SMART:

**S**pecific  
**M**easurable  
**A**chievable  
**R**ealistic  
**T**imed

**An example of a priority:**

*"To engage more with young adults aged 18-30."*

**An example of a goal:**

*"To increase Sunday and midweek regular attendance of this age group by 10 per cent within 12 months."*

# WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO GET THERE? (PLAN)

Once we know where we want to go, the next stage of MAP is to plan how to put our priorities into action. This involves deciding:

- How will we meet our goals? How can we break them down into achievable steps?
- What do we need to do and when?
- How will we communicate this – so that everyone can find out about it, pray for it, encourage it and get behind it?
- What do we need in the way of people, time and money?

It's important that our plans reflect closely the needs of our local contexts. But we don't always have to reinvent the wheel. You can find ideas of approaches that have worked in different places here:

- HOPE in our villages towns and cities ([www.hopetogether.org.uk](http://www.hopetogether.org.uk))
- The Cinnamon Network ([www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk](http://www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk))

# WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO NOW? (ACT)

The final stage of the MAP cycle is to

- **Act** – to turn our plans into activity
- **Check** – how are things going and what needs to be adjusted?
- **Celebrate** – give thanks when we achieve our goals and thank those who made that happen.

## A LEARNING CYCLE

We need to keep listening to God. This means that MAP is designed to work as a cycle that enables us to review, assess, learn and fine-tune as we go along. Once we've set an initial five-year vision, it's good if a regular annual pattern of review takes place to check on progress.

## DEANERIES

How can MAPs support the work of churches deaneries? Important questions to ask include:

- What is our common vision as churches working together?
- What is it better to undertake individually and what should be done together?
- How can we help each other, bringing together our complementary strengths and weaknesses?
- How can sharing resources help us meet our aims, individually and together?
- How can we honour, value and celebrate the differences that exist between our churches (1 Corinthians 12)?

## RESOURCES

### WHAT TO READ?

- Mike Chew and Mark Ireland *How to do Mission Action Planning: A vision-centred approach*. (2009, SPCK; London)
- **Making a Difference in the World: A Simple Guide** and **Community Engagement: A Simple Guide** both give ideas about how churches can serve and work alongside their local communities.
- **Giving: A Simple Guide** helps churches think about the resourcing of vision and plans.

Simple Guides are available from Diocesan Church House, Oxford 01865 208200.

### WHO TO ASK?

Your Parish Development Adviser is there to help you identify people who can accompany you in the development of your MAP. These may include staff from the Diocesan Mission Department or others from around the Diocese including the Missioners Team and people from your own deanery or archdeaconry.

### WHAT NEXT?

It would be really helpful if you could share your plans to ensure joined-up thinking. Your Area Dean, Area Bishop, Parish Development Adviser would all be grateful to receive copies of your parish MAP. This helps us to understand what is going on at a local level, and gives us the chance to see how your plan fits in with the big picture that makes up the church family in the Diocese of Oxford.



# THE LIVING FAITH PRAYER

Gracious God,  
you call us to a living faith in the future as well as in the present;  
open our eyes to the opportunities before us  
in our parishes and deaneries, and in our own daily discipleship.  
May we sustain and nourish our inner lives  
so that we can serve others effectively  
and offer to all people the transforming love  
of Jesus Christ our risen Lord. Amen.