



Mission Action Planning: A Guide

General introduction

The Diocese of Canterbury is on a journey with **Three Bold Outcomes**:

- revitalising every parish in the diocese
- at least doubling the number of children and young people as active disciples, and
- forming two hundred new Christian communities

All three remind us that we are called to join in with God's mission in the world. They challenge us all:

Double the number of children and young people

How can we increase the number of children and young people in our parish? This is a question for us all, not something that we can delegate to youth workers, schools or parents of young people. We are all responsible partnering with God to grow the Kingdom for the next generation. What does this look like in your community?

Our bold outcome matches the Church of England's aim to double the number of young believers nationally.

Two hundred new Christian communities

There are 200 parishes in our diocese, so two hundred new communities is one each! What sort of new worshipping community could we create and how will we do this? It could be a community that meets in a home, a café, school or pub. And we don't have to meet on Sunday! Where do we need to be to meet the needs of our communities who are so often hungry for something spiritual and yet do not connect with traditional church?

Every parish, benefice and deanery showing signs of revitalisation.

This bold outcome underpins the others. What does new life look like? How will we notice the signs of the Holy Spirit moving, and most importantly, how will we respond?

Meeting the challenge

The Diocese is working towards providing a number of **Parish Toolkits** to assist our colleagues throughout the diocese. The toolkits will include a guide to Mission Action and Deanery Planning, present ways to grow the church, and outline ways towards financial sustainability. The rest of this document is an outline of Mission Action Planning.

How can Mission Action Planning help?

Mission Action Planning helps us and our churches to do three important things:

1. To see what God is already doing and to recognise his work in our communities.
2. To develop the collective activity of the church and our part in that. Mission is at the centre of our commitments to growing the church.
3. To plan action in our local context which helps us and others to flourish.

Planning – not just any action, but carefully discerned, planned action – means that we are better equipped to meet our aims. Mission Action Plans are inspired by God and grounded in prayer that seeks to further God’s purposes.

Research shows that churches that want to grow and that have a clear plan are more likely to do so. A Mission Action Plan is a tool to help the church to grow - spiritually, numerically and in its presence and witness in the community. A Mission Action Plan helps us prayerfully to journey forward and to be effective working towards the Three Bold Outcomes.

Here is a simple 4-stage model:

Review – Choose – Plan – Act



Noticing and naming – what is God up to?

It is God's mission in which we are co-workers. So, prayer and discernment need to be practised at *each* of the four stages, as we hold the question, 'What is God up to here?' We seek a vision that is based on what God is already up to, and what God is calling us to do.

Sometimes we can forget to ask what God is up to in the Plan and Act phases – but in truth we need to make this a habit at every point. It is what brings zest and energy, and ultimately delight and spiritual power, to mission. Mission really is God at work!

We can begin by gathering a group to engage in the planning process. We could have a PCC away day or church vision day or mission planning morning where we seek God's plans for our church. The Mission and Ministry team, along with your Archdeacons, are ready to help with these.

Review

This means listening and learning. Listening to the Holy Spirit, listening to the church, listening to the community we live in. In all of this, we are 'detectives of divinity', discerning how God is at work, and longs to work. We can give thanks for what has gone before, reflect honestly about the challenges, and understand and share with others how we feel God may be leading us.

This does take time. We need to stay with this stage much longer than we often do. If we do so, the rest will fall more easily into place.

Choose

To fulfil our hopes and make vision a reality, we must identify the priorities which will become our focus over the next period. Choosing two or three main priorities can be just right, depending on our situation and the resources we have.

Saying Yes to God always involves saying No to other really great things! Under God, those may come later, or maybe not at all, as things change. Indeed, it may be time now to let go of some things we have been doing for some time. Mission planning is not simply making a list of things we have always done.

Again, this needs time for prayerful discernment.

Plan

This stage is 'the plan' – the *who, what, where* and *how* of our mission, based on the priorities we have established. It is helpful to ensure each priority has goals attached to it. An effective way to do this is to use the acronym SMART – see the text box below.

Act

Here we work as a team, praying and moving forward with purpose, putting into practice what we have discerned. Remember that *mission is always about people and relationships*. So, it is good to

encourage those doing taking the action to keep asking where God is at work, not just in the activity, but in the lives of all involved, especially those not part of the church. We should be ready to learn from setbacks, to celebrate progress and to make any changes to the goals we have set as needed.

This leads back to the first phase of this ongoing Mission Planning spiral:

Review

Review and evaluation are essential to the success of Mission Action Planning, so make sure this happens regularly. It can be done at PCC meetings and meetings of leadership teams. An easy way to put this work in everyone's agenda is to start each PCC meeting with a review of the Mission Action Plan progress. Again, this will be life-giving if we address questions like these:

- Where have we seen God at work in this mission activity?
- What are we learning?
- How are relationships developing?
- What do we need to adjust or change?
- What do we need to stop doing?

From this point, conscious attention to the **Review – Choose – Plan – Act** spiral can be built into the church's planning, on at least an annual basis. (At the same time individual SMART actions can be reviewed more frequently – see below.)

SMART planning

When we act it helps if our actions and goals are SMART. This helps us do what we intend. It also helps us honour those we are working with, by doing what we say we will, and doing it well.

- **Specific** – actions should have a desired outcome that is clearly understood.
- **Measurable** – they should be quantifiable so that we can track progress. Decide how to measure the goal and how to collect that information.
- **Achievable and Accountable** – goals should be realistic, so we have a sense of progress. Challenging goals are good, but it is helpful to break them down into smaller, bite-sized chunks and claim some easy wins. Here we should name a person who is authorised to lead on the action and who they are accountable to (e.g., N is authorised to do this by the PCC, to whom she will report back in January and July).
- **Relevant and resourced** – goals should be properly discerned. In this way they will be expressions of the church’s mission vision, and aligned with the Three Bold Outcomes, rather than just ‘good ideas’.
- **Time-Bound** – goals should have a deadline to help us measure our success and discover what move to make next.

Conclusion

If helpful to you, we invite you to summarise your Plans on the **MAP Summary form** (below) as a way of keeping a record of your developing mission story in a way we can share with each other.

Good Mission Action Plans will help us:

- Locally, to get onto a growth footing – in numbers of disciples, depth of discipleship and the vitality of our relationship and mission with our communities.
- As deaneries, so we can discern well together how God is working across the deanery, where we need to support each other, and if there are actions we can only take together.
- As a diocese, so that we can discern how best to support each other, and what help we might need in our progress towards our Bold Outcomes.

MAP summary form

Our Mission Action Plan (MAP) details
Name of parish
Deanery
MAP Contact person (name and email)

MAP details
Start date (when MAP was adopted by PCC)
Time period (1-5 years: 12-18 months is ideal)
When MAP review is planned

Our Vision *(How we want to be described in 3-5 years' time)*

In a few words, whether you have this written down and agreed, or whether you hold it more informally.

Our Mission Priorities *(actions we are focusing on for the 12–18 months)*

If possible, please indicate which of the three Bold Outcomes these relate to

1

2

3

Our Goals *(the SMART actions for the next year)*

1

2

3

4

5

How we will share our MAP with others

Please consider how you'll share your plan with your local church/Team/benefice, with your Deanery, and with our diocese. (For the latter, see the contact at the bottom.)

Any further notes or points of information

You are invited to email this form, along with your MAP itself, to Steve Coneys, Mission and Growth Adviser at sconeys@diocant.org. Sharing your Mission Action Plan helps us all – to be encouraged and challenged, to learn from each other, and to share resources and see how we can support one another. The Diocesan team can also offer you support, including enabling your local MAP conversations. **Thank you.**

(All roadshow links and resources can be found at click.canterburydiocese.org/roadshows)