



Planning for Mission in the Deanery

The *process* outlined in this briefing used to be known as a 'mission audit'. These days the *outcome* is often labelled a 'Mission Action Plan'. Whatever labels we use, the task remains important. It is about working out how, as a deanery, we can most faithfully serve God's purposes.

Putting together a responsible plan – and going on to put it into action – requires time, perseverance and commitment. Once a deanery starts this process, it must remain its top priority until the job is done.

WHY DEANERIES?

1. Anglicans see their mission as five-fold – the '**Five Marks of Mission**')

- 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 the unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and to renew the life of the earth.

2. Some elements of these are best done

- At a **personal** level
- At **parish** level
- At **deanery** level
- At **diocesan** level

3. The deanery can demonstrate its discipleship by addressing the so-called '**Mission Quadrilateral**':

- *Growing together* - mutual support amongst parishes
- *Growing up* - training projects
- *Growing out* - interacting with the community and the wider world
- *Growing more* - new disciples

4. A deanery is well placed to engage in certain kinds of mission because its size is neither too big nor too small.

- It (sometimes) approximates to a "zone humaine"
- It has a viable interface with the community
- It can visualise working creatively outside the structures (a capacity to be 'maverick')
- It can set achievable goals
- It can muster relevant resources

THE PROCESS IN OUTLINE

A. *A survey of the area.* What are the area's needs and resources? Where are the gaps and where are its strengths?

B. *An exercise of reflection.* How can the deanery respond to what it has discovered about the area in the light of its calling and potential as indicated above?

C. *A programme of action.* What initiatives can and should the deanery undertake – given available resources? Don't be too blinkered about where the resources might be found!

D. *Setting achievable targets.* What can these initiatives realistically achieve? Don't be over-ambitious!

E. *Putting these initiatives into action.* Too many Mission Action Plans are scarcely implemented. Don't let yours gather dust!

F. *Setting a process in place for evaluation.* Plans will always need to be updated. If an initiative proves to be less than effective, learn from the experience! Serving God's purposes is a life-long endeavour.

HOW THIS MIGHT WORK IN PRACTICE

STAGE 1

Outline the proposal to the synod. Get the standing committee to propose a motion stating

- The object of the exercise
- The need for full involvement of ALL churches (A substantial majority is essential -just over 50% will not do!)
- The importance of implementing decisions taken
- A suggested timetable

STAGE 2

At the next (convenient) synod meeting – as the only item on the agenda!

- A visiting speaker on for instance "What elements of mission are most appropriately dealt with at personal, parish, deanery and diocesan levels?" (see 'Why Deaneries' – point 2)
- Followed by a structured group discussion (see below)
- Reports from the discussions to be fed back for action by Standing Committee

The group discussion: Each group should start by listing as many ways as possible in which their theme question can be answered. Only then should the group work towards deciding which answers might be most worth exploring further. Four themes should be shared between small groups as follows:

Theme 1 Growing together:

In what ways can parishes be supported?

Answers may include social events, worship events, improved communications, etc. Group members are encouraged to think laterally.

Theme 2 Growing up:

In what ways can collaborative ministry be developed?

Answers may include opportunities through which individuals and groups can be trained for pastoral care and mission to individuals and community – as a practical outworking of their discipleship.

Theme 3 Growing out:

In what ways does the wider community need to be strengthened, resourced or knit together?

Answers may include the needs of teenagers, children, pensioners, homeless, single parents etc.

Theme 4 Growing more:

In what ways can 'un-churched' areas and groups be given access to new experiences of being part of a church fellowship?

Answers may include church planting and 'fresh expressions', engagement with industry and commerce, arts and culture, and much more.

STAGE 3

The synod (or Standing Committee given powers by the synod) should set up working groups to research the ideas that came from the group discussions at synod.

These working groups will be small, and the key to their success will be finding the right people – people who are keen to tackle the task. Groups need to include only a few synod members. The best groups will include other denominations (possibly other faiths), social workers and local councillors etc. In short, work ecumenically and politically!

WORKING GROUP 1 (The Plotters)

a) *Our geography*: Map the deanery - roads, schools, railways, industry, shops, hospitals, population, churches etc. How much or how little is the deanery an area that supplies most of its people's needs?

b) *Our history*: Historical developments often have a huge impact on community life today. Plot a time-line.

WORKING GROUP 2 (The People)

c) *Our allies*: Think ecumenically – and outside the circle of the 'usual suspects'. Who in the deanery has important contacts with local government, industry, social workers, unions, schools, hospitals etc?

WORKING GROUP 3 (The Prophets)

d) *Our aspirations*: What "visions" do church people have of the place of the church in the area? What could it do? What could the deanery become? What powers could it be given by the diocese? How best could it deploy its own

ministry? How can clergy and laity work better together? Be wild and imaginative!

ALL WORKING GROUPS should set aims and objectives for the deanery, for adaptation and presentation by Standing Committee to the whole synod.

STAGE 4

Option 1: The Standing Committee to collate the sub-groups reports, summarising the data in order to compile a survey of resources of manpower, buildings, skills etc available to the churches in the deanery including

- What resources are available ecumenically?
- What resources are available outside the church?
- What are the real needs of the area?
- What can the synod and the local churches offer?

Option 2: Instead of doing this work 'behind closed doors', the Standing Committee could consider mounting an open day workshop that would allow church people in the deanery (and others) to see the evidence that the working groups had collected. An experienced facilitator would be able to draw out and summarise the conclusions in a way which answers the same four questions (as above). The advantage of this more open process will be that church people will have a much greater sense of 'ownership' of what is proposed than if the proposals came from the Standing Committee alone.

STAGE 5

By either process, the result of Stage 4 is a reasonably concise set of proposals for action that can then be taken to full synod for discussion, decision – and action!

STAGE 6

After the decision-making comes the organising of the new initiatives, including the arrangements for possibly the most important stage of all – an initial evaluation of progress. *What is happening? How is it going? It is effective? Is it making a difference that others in the wider community are beginning to notice? Is the hand of God discernible in what is going on?*

These early enquiries are important – but beware of 'pulling up the plant by the roots to see how it is growing'! A rolling programme of review is best, because it gives those managing an initiative confidence to plan ahead.

No projects, however, must be allowed to become set in stone. Circumstances change; priorities and needs change; and sooner or later, prayerfully and purposefully, attentive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the deanery will need to start the whole audit process all over again!