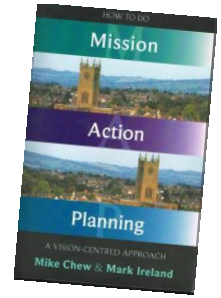


Mike Chew & Mark Ireland

Mission Action Planning – a vision-centred approach

SPCK 2009 – Notes and resource links by Alison Morgan, www.resource-arm.net



First book to be dedicated to MAP, based on research in several Anglican dioceses. Authors have both used MAP in the Diocese of Lichfield, at both parish and diocesan level.

1. Setting the scene

What is MAP? A Mission Action Plan is a document which outlines the mission activities that a local church is going to do in the coming months and years. It's about strategic planning. Origins of MAP – goes back to an initiative taken by David Hope in the diocese of London in the early 90s; he invited parishes to send mission priorities to him, and wrote to each one a year later. Part of the plan was half day visits by senior clergy to each parish/deanery, plus a Sunday preachment. 70% of parishes responded. Lichfield adopted MAP, followed by others (p7). Half the dioceses in the CofE have some kind of mission strategy initiative, and most use MAP as the tool for individual churches.

MAP is a 4 part process/cycle .It should be carried out by the church leadership.

1. Review your situation
 - Listening to God, to each other, to the local community
 - Writing down a summary of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities
 - Reflecting on the main purpose of the church
 - why does this church exist
 - what particular purpose does it serve
 - how does it relate to the community
 - what does it believe in
 - Perhaps producing a one sentence mission statement, eg StC is here to share the love of Jesus Christ with all ages in the community
2. Choose future priorities
 - Describe a vision of what the church could become in 5 years – eg St A will become a church community where all members are growing in faith and using their special gifts to spread Jesus' saving love'
 - Work out the priorities to achieve the vision (start with the long term, ie 5 yr, priorities; then break this down into priorities for the next year)
 - Consider what current activities could be stopped or trimmed (esp if not central to the church vision)
 - Write a goal statement for each of the 1st year priorities (what has to be achieved by when)
3. Make plans
 - Take each priority and identify the main actions necessary to achieve the goal – what, who and when, eg to run an Emmaus course: buy materials; X to do it; by end June
 - Write the MAP summary report – 2 sides of A4
4. Act on the plans
 - Get on with it
 - Hold regular progress reviews to encourage and support those involved, revisiting the plans as appropriate
 - Review whether the desired outcomes have been reached, and plan follow up work
 - Give thanks!

Is it just another business fad? Well, secular business writers are increasingly incorporating Christian concepts into their approaches for leadership and strategy development.

2. Reflecting on our experience at St John's Baxenden

3. Theological reflections on MAP

David Hope believed MAP is a dimension of stewardship – the pastoral epistles urge us to manage our own household. In York he began MAP with a year of prayer and worship; and viewed MAP as a tool to establish a clear missionary purpose and direction for the Church. Planning, he believes, is of the very nature of God, in his plan for creation and his plan for salvation.

Planning for mission is not a new idea. Luke shows how Jesus trained and sent out the 12 from village to village to preach and heal, and then trained 70 on a similar mission to prepare the ground in the places he himself was about to visit. Jesus told would be disciples to look ahead and count the cost (the tower parable), and Paul both made plans and changed them. Prayer and guidance are a key part of NT planning – eg Acts 13, while they are worshipping the Spirit tells them to set aside Saul and Barnabas for the work to which he has called them. Mission is God's work not ours; but a church which is committed to the MAP process is one which is more likely to recognize and respond to the missionary work of the Holy Spirit.

Removing hindrances to growth – Christian Schwarz in his *Natural Church Development Handbook* identified 8 'quality characteristics' which a church needs in order to grow:

1. Empowering leadership
2. Gift-orientated lay ministry
3. Passionate spirituality
4. Functional structures
5. Inspiring worship services
6. Holistic small groups
7. Need-orientated evangelism
8. Loving relationships

He suggested that a church will always be limited by its weakest factor. A survey of these 8 characteristics is a useful diagnostic tool within the review stage of MAP (see ch 5). A NT example is the move to appoint deacons to oversee pastoral care in the church, followed by renewed growth (Acts 6).

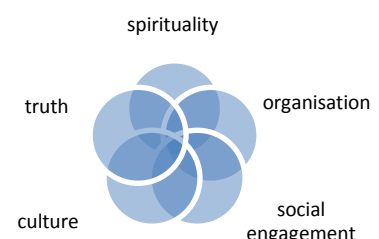
The term 'mission' is so widely used it's in danger of losing its meaning. David Bosch reminds us that 'mission is participation in God's existence in the world'. It must be understood in relation to the saving events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. A holistic view of mission must incorporate Incarnation, Cross, Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost and Second Coming. Mission is of course wider than evangelism, but it must include the call to make disciples (Matt 28.18-20); 'the mission of God is not being undertaken in all its fullness unless we are calling people to become disciples of Jesus Christ.' The Church is an instrument of mission; it exists not for its own sake but as a sign, instrument and foretaste (sacrament) of the Kingdom of God.

Mission-Shaped Church is helpful in emphasizing the values of a missionary church: it is focussed on God the Trinity; is incarnational; transformational; makes new disciples; is relational.

4. How does MAP fit with other recent approaches to mission?

Alan Smith suggests (*God-shaped Mission*) that the reason the Decade of Evangelism had little impact was that we had no consensus over the causes of church decline, so no agreement on how to respond. Was the issue truth, spirituality, organisation, culture? The current answer is that it's about culture – traditional forms/models of church are no longer appealing; hence the Fresh Expressions initiative. MAP and church planting both come under 'organisation'; but span all these areas. Now perhaps we should add a 5th issue – social engagement. Each of these 5 areas is vital if a church is to have a holistic approach to mission.

Try drawing 5 labelled circles on a flipchart, and writing in each circle what the church is doing in connection with each one. What does that reveal about the church's priorities?



5. Producing a MAP – step by step

Start with prayer. Eg have a day of prayer, or series of days; have prayer events; teach about listening to God; study the Bible; observe how God is working in other churches.

Desire. In Blackburn Bp Nicholas Reade invited all churches to produce a MAP in 2006. 85% did. Some were very functional, and without vision. Reminder: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: 'If you want to build a ship, don't summon people to buy wood, prepare tools, distribute jobs, and organize the work, rather teach people the yearning for the wide, boundless ocean'. If we want people to produce a MAP, we have to teach them to yearn to respond to Jesus' teaching and commandments.

The 4 key stages of the MAP process

The basic MAP process is described in Chapter 1. This chapter describes an *expanded* process which is used by several dioceses.

1. **Review** – using questionnaires, group discussions, visiting places where people meet already, writing to local organisations etc. Questions like:
 - What is the demographic of the church compared with the neighbourhood
 - What are the demographic trends
 - What are the social/pastoral needs
 - How is the church involved in the life of the community; what opportunities are there
 - What contact points already exist
 - What does the community expect from the church

Assess your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities – eg a SWOT analysis (identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) – through group discussion, post-it notes etc

- Do a church health survey eg Robert Warren's *7 Marks of a Healthy Church*; or a church quality survey, using the NCD quality characteristics of Christian Schwarz.
 - Invite someone in to do an audit for eg welcome, worship, buildings
 - Consider how the values of local churches are reflected in their current programmes, priorities and behaviour – eg you could use the Five Marks of Mission, or the 5 values for missionary churches in *Mission-Shaped Church* (see ch 3).
 - Review previous mission initiatives
2. **Choose** – discerning how God may want to shape the church's future.
 - Vision - Peter Senge remarks that a vision is not a shared idea, but a force in people's hearts. Stephen Cottrell (*Hit the ground kneeling*) emphasizes how critical it is for church leaders to develop their own vision: vision is the mountain top we long to reach; one of the primary roles of leadership is to articulate the vision of an organisation; the leader not only articulates the vision but also embodies it. Producing a vision statement is a crucial part of the MAP process.
 - Priorities – will naturally flow from a good vision statement. Address these in 2 stages: what are the priorities for reaching the vision; what are the practical steps to be taken in the next 12 months. No church should choose more than 5 – eg to start a FEx for mothers&toddlers; to run continuous Emmaus courses
 - Goals – use the SMART method to translate priorities into goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced; Timed). Eg to engage with young adults (18-30) so that we see a 10% increase in attendance within 12 months.
 3. **Plan** –
 - How – take each goal and consider how it will be achieved. Use the 'when' method, eg 'we will attract more young families to this church when...'
 - Actions – what is the action, when is the target date for completion, who is responsible for this action?
 - Communicate – the final MAP summary needs to permeate the church, along with the Vision and the Plan. Communicate it through themes chosen for teaching/small groups, through the notices, references in sermons, books on the bookstall.
 4. **Act** –
 - Action – teams should meet regularly for prayer, encouragement
 - Check – standing back regularly to review how things are going - monthly
 - Celebrate – recognising and giving thanks to God and to those involved when goals have been achieved

The MAP process is cyclical. The period of the cycle can vary – eg annually. An annual approach means the mission and vision statements remain living, and the assessment stage within the review process can be developed year on year.

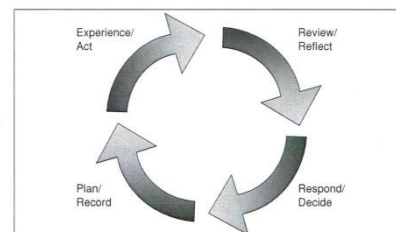


Figure 5.9 The Action-Reflection learning/theological cycle

A 10 point health check for your MAP:

1. Is it rooted in prayer?
2. Listen: Have those impacted by it been consulted/listened to – eg key community leaders (what do they think about community needs and how the church might serve the area?), a sample of non church residents; church members?
3. Assess – has a formal assessment been conducted (SWOT, Healthy Churches, NCD); have diocesan resources/other churches been approached for help; have you considered a supplementary audit eg for welcome, worship, buildings?
4. Values – are you clear about the church’s main purpose and sources of energy? Have you published the church values, agreed a mission statement, and are the church council members looking to God for direction?
5. Vision – is there a clear 5 year vision statement, developed after consultation, well communicated, owned by all, memorable and inspiring commitment and motivation?
6. Priorities – have you identified the key priorities from the vision statement, broken them down, made choices about what not to do?
7. Goals – have annual SMART goals been identified for each priority, a person been identified for each one, and are they all achievable with current resources and funding?
8. Actions – have the actions for each goal been identified, defined in terms of what, when, who; and an overall resource check been done to ensure no one is over committed?
9. Communication – has the MAP been summarised and communicated? All appropriate vehicles used for communication? Do people have the opportunity to pick up copies and ask questions?
10. Checking progress – reviewed in church council meetings? Plans updated and amended when necessary? Key people meeting together? Complete actions celebrated? People’s work recognised?

6. Case examples

7. MAP as part of a diocesan growth strategy

11 out of 19 dioceses using MAP or growth strategy initiatives showed numerical growth in weekly attendance in 2006 and/or 2007. Of the remaining 24 dioceses, 9 showed growth.

London 1993 – Bob Jackson can find no hard evidence that growth was due to the MAP initiative. But he took the view that MAP was one of the strategies which enabled growth to take place.

In York, 25% of churches adopted MAP fully, and there was overall growth in these churches.

In Lichfield, growth came from Springboard’s Travelling School in 2001 and the discovery that decline was happening in the larger churches. Larger churches conferences were held and the decline was turned into growth. Shrewsbury Area introduced parish MAPS in 2004 (Alan Smith). From 2003-08 there was no increase in usual Sunday attendance, but decline levelled out, and midweek attendance increased. Graphs for Shrewsbury and Walsall do not show overall growth (2000-2008).

Blackburn – Nicholas Reade introduced MAPS from 2005. 85% of parishes sent in a MAP. Anecdotal evidence in the first year suggested it was making a difference; uSa did not increase though. Churches whose leaders had attended leading your church into growth conferences did grow significantly.

8. MAP resources and further information

9. Conclusions

MAP is really a form of sanctified common sense. Its primary aim is not to increase the numbers in church, but to improve the health of the church.

10 MAP workshop outline

An outline programme for two 3 hour sessions, which should be preceded by a community mission audit. Templates from Blackburn, Lichfield.

Note: The dedicated website is no longer being updated as MAP has become well established. *Growing Healthy Churches*, developed by Robert Warren of Springboard, is now carried by its successor ReSource – see next page for additional resources.