A toolkit for Deaneries

Using Parish Statistics & Data for Mission

There is a wealth of statistics and data now available on churches and their communities which can be used for planning you church's mission but there is no effortless way of getting directly from the information you have to specific actions. The PCC or the church as a whole need to take time to understand the information available and then explore what this means on a practical level.

In simple terms you need to:

- gather and share the available data on your parish and community;
- do a 'sense check' on the information – there will usually be some surprises but anything very unexpected should be checked;
- take time as a PCC or church to discuss what messages can be drawn out of the information you have available;
- decide what else you need to know (e.g. from local survey or conversations with other groups) before going on to think about mission priorities in your community and, specifically, developing a Mission Action Plan.

Used effectively, data and statistics are useful for informing the development of your parish's Mission Action Plan and mission activities.

1. Gather information on your parish – which is likely to include:

- **Parish 'Statistics for Mission' Dashboards**

These parish dashboards show a parish's 'statistics for mission' (i.e. attendance) information from 2007 to 2016 and are being sent to all Southwark parishes in December 2017. Graphs showing the trends in the number of weddings, funerals etc can give an indication of local engagement.
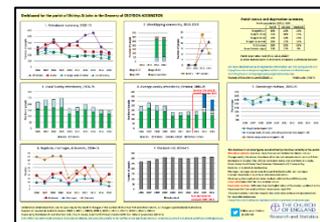
- **Parish Spotlights**

These are somewhat dated now as the most recent information included is for 2011, but can still give a useful context for thinking about mission activities in your parish. A *Parish Spotlight* for each parish in Southwark Diocese can be found on the Diocesan website here: http://southwark.anglican.org/information/resources/parish-statistics.

For each parish, the spotlights give:
1. an overview, including what look to be five of the most pressing social issues;
2. the age profile;
3. the ethnicity profile;
4. integration: English language speaking and length of UK residency;
5. religious affiliation;
6. type of households: families, dependents, one person households, temporary residents and housing tenure;
7. marital and civil partnership status;
8. employment: occupations, benefits and mobility;
9. education, CofE schools and qualification levels;
10. health data: people with health problems and carers;
11. deprivation including different types of deprivation.

- **Deprivation data**

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 (IMD) attempts to measure a broader concept of deprivation by bringing together 7 domains for a defined area. The domains are; income; employment; health and disability; education; housing and services; crime; and living environment.

IMD is a relative measure that is used to compare areas. It is not a direct measure of deprivation, but can be a useful pointer for considering mission activities and priorities.

Church Urban Fund has recently relaunched its **poverty lookup tool** which can be found here: http://www2.cuf.org.uk/lookup-tool. Entering a postcode into this tool allows you to see where a parish ranks, nationally and within a Diocese, on ten different indicators including child poverty, pensioner poverty and life expectancy. The information on a parishes includes a map showing the relative levels of poverty – with darker areas having higher levels of deprivation. This is a good place to start finding out more about the level of poverty in parts of your parish and how this compares with other parishes, both locally and nationally.

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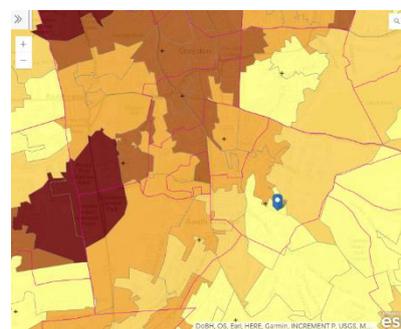
It is important to note that not every person in a deprived area will themselves be deprived. Equally, there will be some deprivation even in more affluent areas.
The diagram above shows an example parish with areas of deprivation (darkest shading) very close to areas of relative affluence (lightest yellow).

2. Check whether your data looks broadly accurate

You can expect some surprises in any set of data – but just do a quick sense check on what you see presented on your parish. For example, does the figure shown for usual Sunday attendance reflect what you see on a Sunday morning? Are the areas of relative deprivation where you would expect from your local knowledge?

3. Ask questions of the information you have – what messages can be drawn out?

Looking at your data should prompt questions you could ask about your local community and your church's activities. Some suggested questions are listed below - but don't be constrained by these.

1. Does the age profile of your congregation match that of your parish? If not, how could you engage with those age groups you're not currently interacting with?

2. Does the ethnicity profile of your congregation match that of your parish? Are you engaging with the parish's largest demographics?

3. Are services in your parish accessible to all residents? Do you offer any services in foreign languages? What can you offer those who may not have been in the UK for long?

4. How has the religious affiliation of those living in your parish changed over the past decade? Are Christians in your parish engaging with your churches? Are you engaging with other faith groups?

5. Who lives in your parish? Are there issues with access to housing? How permanent are their homes for your parishioners?

6. Who lives in your parish? Are there a lot of households with children? What about lone parent households? Are there a lot of people living alone? How is your parish supporting those in these above categories?

7. Do you hold many weddings in your parish? Do you hold many funerals? Is this a ministry that could be expanded?

8. How are your parish finances? How does this compare to the finances for those in your community profile?

9. How much free time do residents of your parish have? How accessible is your church to those with or without cars?

10. How qualified are residents of your parish? What Church of England schools are available? Are you involved in all the local schools?

11. Are there people in your parish with health problems? Is there anything you can do to assist with day-to-day activities of those who have health problems?

12. What are the particular issues that affect your parish? Are you doing anything to address these?

13. How do we feel about these vast differences in life chances illustrated by the IMD data? What can your church do to help bridge the gap?

4. Next steps

Discussion on your statistics and the questions above should lead you to a better understanding of your parish as well as giving you some initial thoughts on where your mission activity could be directed but you may need to gather more information. Share your information and ideas with other churches in your Deanery as this will help understand the context you are working in as well as build relationships within Deaneries.

Mission activities, especially in areas of social need, shouldn't be based on statistics alone and you should consider talking to people on the ground. This could involve:
- a simple survey;
- hosting a wider community conversation around a particular area of need and inviting relevant people to attend, particular those who might already be working in the context or have personal experience of this issue;
- finding out if there are local organisations already working in that area and if working with them would be a good option.

It is often not sustainable for churches to tackle social needs on their own so you should also think about whether you could recruit volunteers from the local community to get involved. This is a really good mission strategy, allowing relationships to develop and grow.

Once you've fully explored all the available information for your area, you can then go on to agree your mission priorities for your church. These priorities will then form part of your Mission Action Planning process as you develop, or enhance, your parish Mission Action Plan (MAP). Information on Mission Action Planning, including where to find support for to help you with this process, can be found on the Diocesan website here: http://southwark.anglican.org/discipleship-mission-vocation/mission-and-evangelism/mission-action-planning/

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