A toolkit for Deaneries

Planning for Mission

Collaboration and Conversation
Developing collaborative working for mission is part of the vision for Deaneries in the Diocese of Southwark. Collaborative working calls for common vision, leadership and trust enabled by honest and open communication.

Communication is particularly important when it comes to planning for mission. When mission planning is approached as a task or an agenda item it is much less likely to lead to action. When mission planning emerges from an ongoing conversation that engages people’s passions and interests there is more likelihood of finding relevant and meaningful goals. How you go about mission planning, allowing time for a process of conversation in which shared priorities can emerge, is crucial to the success of the enterprise.

The most obvious place to start the mission conversation is around what is happening at the parish level. Here a shared picture of what is working and not working, hopeful signs and areas of growth, frustrations and resourcing issues, needs for training and equipping, can be built up across the deanery. Out of this conversation and the review process outlined below opportunities for working together in mission can emerge.

The next step is choosing priorities and developing a realistic action plan, all of which are outlined below. Plans should not extend beyond two to three years and need to include a process for reviewing and revising during this period. Developing a culture of sharing stories, learning, resources and good practice, mission questions and challenges, encouragement and celebrating success are all important aspects of working together to serve God’s mission across the deanery.

Roles and Support
The Area Dean, the Deanery Lay Chair and other members of the Standing Committee will be key in leading the process of developing and implementing a plan. Some deaneries may wish to appoint a Leadership Working Group to lead on the vision and plan. Personnel from the mission team and the department for justice, peace and the integrity of creation can provide guidance and support in particular areas of mission.

Steps in the Process:

1. Review: where are we now as a deanery?
In order to plan well you will need to know where you are now and what your context is. The review process will involve a combination of gathering data,
surveys, focus groups, previous statements, reports and plans and then a process of reflecting on these to discern opportunities for shared mission.

Part one: gathering information and data.

- **History and current situation of deanery** - what is the history of collaborative working? A short review of previous working groups could contribute to this. How would you describe what is happening and how people are feeling? A short survey of members is one way of doing this, or organising a focus group to reflect around key questions.

- **Deanery context** - refer to Toolkit on Using Parish Statistics and Data for Mission for guidance here. Areas to gather data include demographics; employment, class and education; main people groups; poverty and marginalisation; recent and planned investment and regeneration; institutional features (schools and colleges) and other key social hubs, features and assets. A significant source of knowledge will be the community intelligence of people who have lived in the deanery over years - this will include history of key events, changes in recent years, strengths and deficits, local organisations, community feel, aspirations and life styles of people groups.

- **Parish Mission Action Plans** - as well as the paper documents, you will learn more by discussing your MAPs, asking questions and explaining the reasons for mission priorities and actions. Relevant information will include particular age groups and people groups that churches are trying to connect with, what is being learned about the local community, where partnerships are being developed and key relationships with people outside the church.

- **Mapping exercise across deanery** - plotting the key demographics and social deprivation statistics; churches with the attendance and age of worshippers; schools; current mission activities; social hubs; community facilities. This visual ‘map’ can build a picture for possible gaps and partnership opportunities in mission. Ecumenical partnerships with other churches can be part of this process.

Part two: prayer and reflection on what we have learned.
Prayer is an important part of this process and should be part of meetings to discuss and reflect on the information that has been gathered. Questions to consider are:

- What have we learned about the collaborative working process of the deanery and how do we want to develop this going forward?
- How can we support mission action planning at the parish level?
- Are there existing mission initiatives that parishes could collaborate on in order to better use time, resources and talents across the deanery?
- What are the common needs for training, equipping and resourcing?
- Where are there new mission opportunities that will require collaboration?
2. Discerning what is God’s vision for our deanery
Vision has to be found together, it cannot be imposed and should inspire a shared sense of direction and purpose. Developing a vision is likely to happen through a series of activities to enable discussion and discernment and could be facilitated externally.

3. Choosing Mission Priorities:
It is better to collaborate effectively on a few shared goals than spreading resources and energy too thinly and this means discerning a limited number of strategic priorities for the next few years that build on strengths, align with the needs and vision of parishes, and focus on opportunities for growth. A working group could develop an initial draft of the mission plan to present to the Standing Committee.

4. Planning for Action:
At this stage a number of smaller working groups or individuals may be tasked with creating detailed plans by working with key representatives across the deanery. These plans need to be specific about what needs to be done, by whom and by when.

5. Implementing plan with ongoing communication and feedback:
It is important to agree how progress against the plan will be monitored and by whom. A working group could oversee the implementation of the plan and a process for giving feedback to the Standing Committee and Deanery Synod. Consider how you will keep momentum and enthusiasm going and how you will keep alert to potential difficulties and new developments. Adjust the plan if necessary in light of performance, changing circumstances and new information. Identify advisors and experts that can come alongside and offer support. Plan for short presentations and updates on progress at Deanery Synod.

6. Reviewing and Re-prioritising:
The deanery mission plan will need to be reviewed every year and priorities and actions re-set as required. Learning from what has not worked is a vital and positive part of the review process, as well as celebrating and recognising what has been achieved. The annual review is a chance to check that you are still in line with the vision and focused on the right priorities, as well as noticing any new opportunities that have emerged through the work of the churches.

Vanessa Elston
Mission Support Officer
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