

Producing a Mission Action Plan – step by step

MIKE CHEW

The Starting Point

Prayer

We start with prayer – because all mission flows from God. It is through prayer that we seek the will of God, offer him our hopes and dreams and receive his vision and the strength for the way ahead.

While we take responsibility for mission, we know that, above all, we are participating in God's creative activity in the world. 'It's not the church of God that has a mission, but the God of mission who has a church.'¹ The Christian mission that is not founded on personal and corporate prayer is likely to be wasteful and ineffective. Before you start thinking about your own hopes for your church and your own ideas about its priorities, start by listening to God.

There are many ways of doing this. For example:

- Organize a day of prayer in the church, or a series of days.
- Publish prayer guidelines and study material for individuals and groups.
- Invite groups to organize prayer events – for example an overnight prayer vigil for the youth group.

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- Teach about listening to God, and the different ways we can listen.
- Study the Bible.
- Observe how God is working in other churches today.

One diocese² suggested that on a Sunday morning the whole church could make a collage to illustrate the phrase 'The Kingdom of God is like...' and, using paint and material, everyone could have the chance to illustrate a piece of Scripture where Jesus speaks about or demonstrates the Kingdom of God. This could be followed up with 'God's dream for his world...'; and 'God's dream for our neighbourhood...'

Prayer flows through all phases of the MAP process – not just at the start.

Desire

In the diocese of Blackburn, Bishop Nicholas invited all churches to produce a MAP during 2006 – his second year in post. He addressed church leaders at one of the annual Visitations³ in May, and asked that mission should become a regular PCC agenda item, as each church prayerfully works out its priorities for mission. He requested a copy of all church MAPs by the end of the year, so that he could pray for the churches and become aware of their priorities. Around 85 per cent of churches sent their MAPs to Bishop Nicholas and he was impressed by their prayerfully thought-out plans.

However, there were exceptions: one church had held its PCC meeting during June, and dutifully found space for mission on the agenda. It was decided that this was a job for the vicar, and he was asked to produce the MAP. The vicar added this to his long list of tasks; he was taking care of three village churches and there were many demands on his time. During the week before the deadline, the vicar produced a MAP document on his own and sent it off to the Bishop. The Action Plan was:

One vicar's Action Plan		
1	To erect a notice board	PCC Spring 07
2	Produce a quarterly newsletter	PCC Spring 07
3	Research grants available to repair the hall	PCC Spring 07
4	Complete the welcome pack (started last year)	PCC Spring 07
5	Arrange meeting to consider monthly family service	PCC Spring 07

Although these actions were relevant for the life of the church, one is left feeling that an opportunity was missed. Many of these are the normal business of a PCC, and there is no mention of care of people, building faith or outreach into the community. The uniform 'who' and 'when' columns indicate that the actions are not sufficiently thought through or owned. There could be many reasons for this, but the most fundamental reason was a lack of basic desire for mission work.

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote: '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 to yearn for the wide, boundless ocean.'⁴ If we want people to produce a MAP, first, we have to teach people – especially church leaders – to yearn to respond to Jesus Christ's teachings and commandments.

The four key stages of the MAP process

In Chapter 1, we described the basic MAP process, suitable for a church new to the MAP approach. In the cycle of MAP, a church may feel that it wants to spend more time and depth in reviewing its situation, or more time to develop a Vision

statement. This section describes an expanded process which is used by several dioceses in the UK. It could be used as a whole, or parts of it could be added into the basic MAP process, depending on what is relevant. However, the two pre-requisites mentioned at the beginning of this chapter remain: *prayer* and establishing *desire* for mission work.

In Chapter 5, two case examples are described, and Appendix 1 contains a practical example programme which a church might follow. Figure 5.1 shows the MAP process in diagrammatic form.

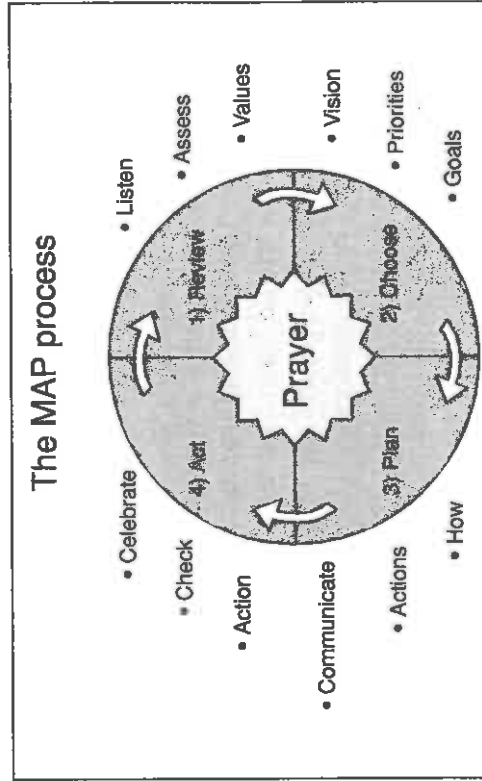


Figure 5.1 Diagram illustrating the MAP process

Phase 1 Review

In the review phase of the MAP process, a church aims to discern God's mission plan for the communities served by prayerfully looking at and understanding the situation that a church finds itself in – the location, the people, the activities that the church is engaged in and what activities could be started. There are three stages that help with this (see Figure 5.2).

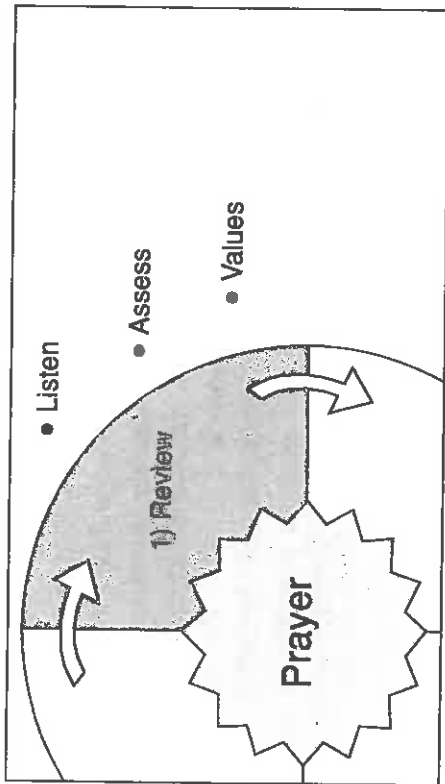


Figure 5.2 The key stages of the Review phase

(a) Listen

In the introduction to the MAP process in Chapter 1, we wrote about the ‘triple listening’ approach to emphasize that the church leaders should listen to at least two relevant populations: the church members and the local community, while listening to God. Church members will be involved in enacting the plan, so they should be involved in the MAP process from the beginning. If they can see how the plan is emerging, based on prayer and consultation, they are more likely to be enthusiastic about the plans and give their active support. A key part of listening to church members is to find out how the current mission actions are going – how they are perceived; how they are progressing; how they are contributing to the mission priorities. There could also be questions about what further mission needs there are.

The MAP plans should also take account of the needs of the local community, so it is important to become aware of these. A number of resources can be used to listen; for example: questionnaires, group discussions, visiting a sample of homes and places where people meet already, writing to local

organizations, and so on. The listening exercises will typically find answers to questions like:

- What is the demographic of the church compared with the neighbourhood served?
- What are the demographic trends?⁵
- What are the social and pastoral needs?
- How is the church involved in the life of the community and what other opportunities are there?
- What contact points or interfaces already exist between the church and community?
- What does the community expect from the church?

Although triple listening takes time to plan, carry out and summarize, it is crucial to the process because it helps to prevent the review being only introspective, and encourages a healthy balance between mission and maintenance.

(b) Assess your strengths, weaknesses and opportunities

In this part the church conducts an assessment about how things are, what is going well, and what are the sticking points or difficulties that are encountered. This is like the church holding a mirror up to itself and taking a realistic look! It has been found very useful for church leaders to do this by using one or more of the following recommended methods, perhaps with the help of an external facilitator.

- A ‘SWOT analysis’ – using group discussions to agree Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This is best done by sharing feelings in a group discussion. There are many ways to do this, but a popular method is to get people into groups, then ask individuals, working on their own, to write their feelings about church strengths on Post-It! notes – one note for each strength. After about five minutes, repeat this for weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

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Now each person is invited to stick these Post-It! notes on a wall or flipchart stand and explain his or her SWOT feelings to the rest of the group. Encourage the rest of the group to ask questions to clarify what is meant, but do not allow personal criticism. As this progresses, the leader or facilitator should move the notes into like groups, so that a consensus about the main SWOTs begins to emerge. At the end of the exercise, the leader summarizes the main SWOTs, and records these for later use – perhaps to share with other leaders or the church council – and to use in the next stages of the MAP process. This SWOT method takes about two hours to complete. It may be that some church leaders have encountered the SWOT method before, perhaps in their working life, and they may be able to facilitate this process for their church. It is helpful to use the SWOT method every time an annual review is conducted, both because new situations occur over time, and also so that people can see evidence of progress year on year. The SWOT may provide all that is necessary for the assessment part of the *Review phase* when used for the first time, but in subsequent years, it is recommended that one or more of the following surveys is also conducted.

- A church health survey – using the ‘Seven Marks of a Healthy Church’ published in *The Healthy Churches’ Handbook*, by Robert Warren.⁶ The seven marks are:
 - 1 Energized by faith
 - 2 Outward-looking focus
 - 3 Seeks to find out what God wants
 - 4 Faces the cost of change and growth
 - 5 Operates as a community
 - 6 Makes room for all
 - 7 Does a few things and does them well.

Research has found that these marks are present as strengths in healthy churches that are growing. Robert Warren suggests

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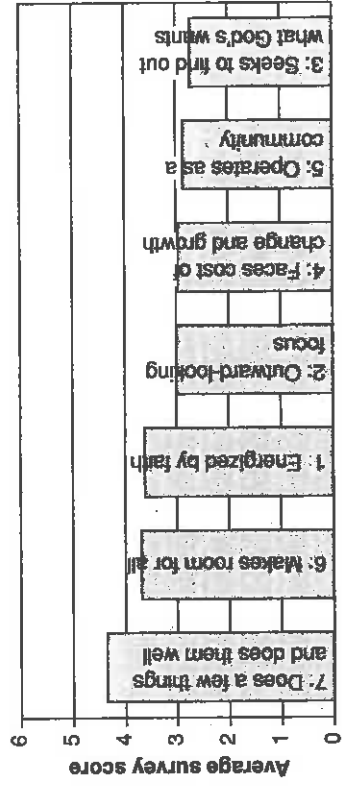


Figure 5.3 Sample ‘Healthy Church’ profile (St Anne’s 2007)

that church leaders should discover which one or two of these are weak in their own church, and work at improving these first – because it is necessary to be healthy in all seven areas, but impossible to work on all at the same time. The book describes each of the marks and contains a questionnaire that can be used to assess the church health for each one. The results are presented back to the group, and this forms the basis of the ‘Choose’ section. There are very good guidelines in the book for how to conduct the assessment. As with the SWOT method, it is possible to carry out this assessment in about two hours. Figure 5.3 shows a sample. ‘Healthy Church’ profile.

- A church quality survey – using ‘Natural Church Development’ (NCD) by Christian Schwarz⁷ and leading to an assessment of each of the ‘Eight Quality Characteristics’ of a healthy church. These are:
 - 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.

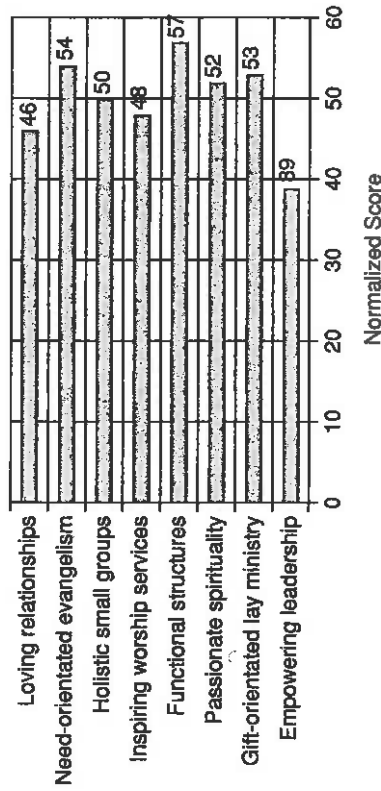


Figure 5.4 Sample NCD church profile (St Cuthbert's)

See Chapter 3 for more background about this approach. The assessment is carried out by using questionnaires for 30 church members, and a different one for the minister. The analysis has to be carried out by the NCD organization for a fee of about £125. They return a 'normalized profile' – one that has been adjusted for national characteristics – so that a score of 50 indicates that 50 per cent of the churches in the UK would be above and below that score. For the statistically minded, the normalized standard deviation is equivalent to a score of 15. So about 15 per cent of churches would have a score above 65, and below 35. The research has concluded that churches that have a minimum score of 65 for all the characteristics are growing in numbers.

Figure 5.4 gives a sample NCD church profile, which indicates that this church should work first on its weaker area – leadership – using the relevant parts of its stronger characteristics of structures, evangelism, lay ministry and passionate spirituality. Note: we recommend that this advanced approach is carried out with help from a trained consultant.⁸

The NCD approach is more cumbersome than the Healthy Churches approach and for some the language can be a barrier (e.g. 'biotic principles', 'the bipolar church concept'). The NCD handbook describes its own process for how to use the result of the survey, but this misses out some key stages of the MAP process. For example, there is little mention of the importance of developing a *Vision* for the church's future (see the next section – Choose). However, many churches have been helped by using the approach as a tool for discovering more about their state within the Review phase of the MAP process. We recommend the NCD approach as an assessment tool for churches that have used the SWOT and Healthy Churches approaches in previous review cycles, and are looking for new insights.

Other assessment methods – A church could also consider inviting someone from the diocese/district or a neighbouring church to conduct an audit for 'Welcome', 'Worship' or 'Buildings'. Another worthwhile approach is to learn from other churches, church organizations, books, websites, etc. For example in 2006, Lichfield diocese published a booklet describing 'Ten things that make a church grow' for their churches. These were:

- 1 Prayer
- 2 Focus on health, not numbers
- 3 Get your church noticed!
- 4 Use your building
- 5 Model generous hospitality
- 6 Review your service plan
- 7 Help midweek groups become church, not a bridge to church
- 8 Release the gifts of children
- 9 Tune into today's spiritual climate
- 10 Rethink Christmas.

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Each of these approaches leads to an assessment of strong areas and weak areas, and following this, the PCC can develop a consensus about what the opportunities are for the future. These might include working with ecumenical partners or neighbouring churches.

(c) Mission values

During the Review phase, a very useful exercise is to consider the local churches' values, and how these are reflected in current programmes, priorities and perceived behaviour. This will further prepare a church for the next phase of the MAP process – Choose – helping to make their approach sufficiently broad, and based on firm foundations. Values are defined as 'beliefs of a person or social group in which they have an emotional investment', or 'general guiding principles that govern all activities'. An understanding of church values can have a powerful effect on the motivation and desire of church members. The study of these values could include a discussion about 'to what extent are we engaged in each of these?'

If this is new to your church, you could make a start by discussing the values of the church organization that you belong to. For example, the five marks of mission of the worldwide Anglican Communion:

- To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom;
- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers;
- To respond to human need by loving service;
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society;
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the earth.

Or the 'Five Values for Missionary Churches' published in the report *Mission-shaped Church*, referred to in Chapter 3.⁹

- A missionary church is focused on God the Holy Trinity
– Worship lies at its heart

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- A missionary church is relational
 - Welcoming and providing hospitality; open to change
- A missionary church is incarnational
 - Shaping itself to the local culture
- A missionary church makes disciples
 - Calling people to faith; encouraging gifts; transforming individuals
- A missionary church is transformational
 - Existing for the transformation of the local church and community.

Many churches produce a 'Mission statement' to capture in a few words the purpose or values of a particular church. The statement informs people about why the church exists and what it believes in. For example: 'We are a community church – here to share the good news of Jesus Christ and to serve this community in his love.' The Mission statement should not be confused with the Vision statement – discussed in the next phase.

(d) Review completed and ongoing actions

Review how things have been progressing with previous decisions about mission plans and actions. Celebrate what has worked well and give recognition to those who have worked on them. Consider what did not work out well, and learn from this. Were resources stretched too far? Did those responsible have sufficient support? Were there sufficient reviews of progress during the last year? Was there adequate communication? Ask questions like this in order to discover what you should improve next time you identify actions – in the 'Plan' phase.

Review summary

Before moving into the Choose phase, summarize your current state – as discovered in the Review phase. The SWOT headings can be used for this summary, taking in all the learning points arrived at during the assessments also. We recommend that

the summary is written in a short document, and distributed to all those who took part in the review. Ask for comments, and make any changes that are necessary to build consensus. The summary ought to be owned by all the leaders before it is communicated more widely to church members.

Phase 2 Choose

In the Choose phase, church leaders prayerfully discern how God wants to shape the church's future. This may include: how to serve the community; how to respond to peoples' needs; how to relate to other churches and how to use its resources in the best way. Figure 5.5 shows the three stages that help to get to this point.

(a) Vision

In his landmark book about the learning organization, Peter Senge cites the example of Spartacus – the story of a Roman gladiator/slave who led an army of slaves in an uprising in 71 BC.¹⁰ They defeated the Roman legions twice, but were finally conquered by the general, Marcus Crassus, after a long siege

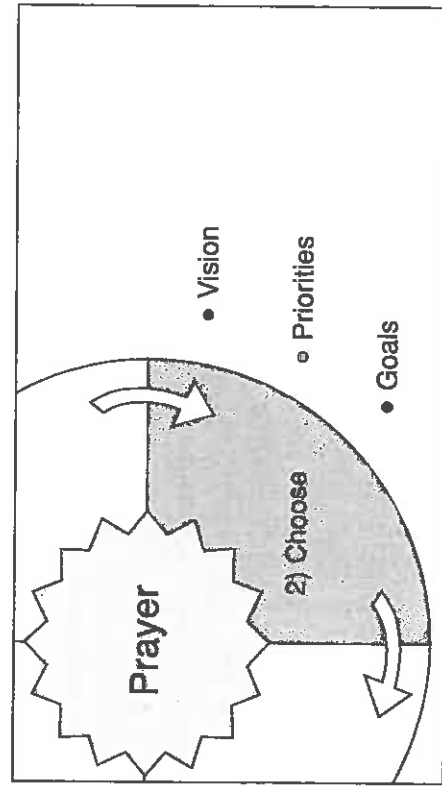


Figure 5.5 The key stages of the Choose phase

and battle. In the film, Crassus tells the thousand survivors in Spartacus's army, 'You have been slaves. You will be slaves again. But you will be spared your rightful punishment of crucifixion by the mercy of the Roman legions. All you need to do is turn over to me the slave Spartacus, because we do not know him by sight.' After a long pause, Spartacus (played by Kirk Douglas) stands up and says, 'I am Spartacus.' Then the man next to him stands up and also says, 'I am Spartacus.' Within a minute, everyone in the army is on his feet.

It does not matter whether this story is apocryphal or not; it demonstrates a deep truth. Each man, by standing up, chose death. But the loyalty of Spartacus's army was not to Spartacus the man. Their loyalty was to a shared vision which Spartacus had inspired: the idea that they could be free men. This vision was so compelling that no man could bear to give it up and return to slavery. Senge goes on to say that

A shared vision is not an idea. It is not even an important idea such as freedom. It is, rather, a force in people's hearts, a force of impressive power. It may be inspired by an idea, but once it goes further – if it is compelling enough to acquire the support of more than one person – then it is no longer an abstraction. It is palpable. People begin to see it as if it exists. Few, if any, forces in human affairs are as powerful as shared vision.¹¹

Secular organizations adopted the concept of vision from religious organizations. Now, we in the Church can see how they have used this concept so powerfully. In his book *Hit the Ground Kneeling*, Stephen Cottrell emphasizes how critical it is for church leaders to develop their own vision.¹² Here are some of the statements he makes:

'Vision is the mountain top; the destination we long to reach.'

'It is the vision of how things can be at the end that motivates and inspires everything else.'

‘One of the primary roles of leadership is to articulate the vision of the organization.’

‘The leader is the guardian and the herald of the vision.’

‘The leader not only articulates the vision but also embodies it.’

‘Every time the leader speaks it is a recollection of why the organization exists.’

Producing a Vision statement is a crucial part of the MAP process. The Vision statement goes beyond a Mission statement – it communicates the overall focus and aim of the church in the future, looking about five years ahead. A good Vision statement, shared and supported by people, can inspire them to pray about the future and to get involved in practical ways.

It acts like a compass and a magnet – pointing the way ahead, and drawing people to work together. It also helps each person to decide what is important for them as they go about their daily lives. The Vision statement should be brief – so that people can remember it. It needs to be shaped in prayerful consultation with the people – because to be inspired, they need to really believe in it, and take it to heart. This does not mean that the Vision statement should be produced by a committee! Rather, in practice, the key themes of the vision are developed through teaching, prayer and discussion, and finally, a small group of leaders turn this into a memorable short sentence.

The vision needs to be inspiring, but real – if the members don’t really believe in the vision, then they will only do their part in the Plan out of obedience or loyalty, and probably the Plan will not be effective. It is better to have a more limited vision that most people are ‘on board’ with, than an ambitious vision that no one much believes in. Example: ‘We will become a growing church where all ages can grow in faith and receive spiritual support, and with a reputation for loving service to the local community.’ See Appendix 1 for ideas about producing a vision.

(b) Priorities

If you have a good Vision statement, the priorities will naturally flow from it. The main difficulty comes when you have to balance ambition with practical resources. The word priority, which means ‘the greatest importance: the state of having most importance or urgency’, has been used deliberately in the MAP process because experience has shown that it is not possible to work on too many strategic initiatives at the same time. MAPs that contain ten priority areas for action will most likely lead to disappointment. The chosen priorities may be new things that have not been done before, or they may be things that are already being done but need building or expanding. At this stage, a ‘priority’ is not yet a fully developed SMART goal, as will be described in the next section – it is simply a statement of a *desired state*. Examples:

- ‘To be continuously running Emmaus courses for various groups, so that people can find ways to grow as disciples.’
- ‘To start a Fresh Expression for mothers and toddlers.’

Priorities can be long term or short term, so it is best to arrive at priorities in two steps. First, consider what are the priorities for reaching your vision. Then second, for each priority consider the next 12 months – what can the church work on from a practical point of view. From experience, the ideal number of strategic priorities for an average-sized church for any one year is two or three. No church should choose more than five. Is your church trying to do too much this year?

(c) Goals

Churches have discovered that in order to bring each priority to life, the priority needs to be translated into a goal statement. These are written in such a way that everyone will know what is to be achieved. To do this in the best way, we use the

SMART method to arrive at the goals. The aim is to make each goal:

Specific: Being clear about what is the goal and who it is aimed at – example: ‘engage with young adults aged 18–30’.

Measurable: Being clear about what is the overall target and how progress will be measured and assessed. It is very important to choose the right thing to measure! As a rule of thumb, try to measure the outcome that is desired, but if this is not possible or too difficult, select the most appropriate leading indicator – examples: ‘to see an increase in total attendance of the 18–30 age group of 10 per cent’; ‘to establish four home groups’.

Achievable: Ensuring that people believe that the goal is significant, but possible.

Resourced: Ensuring that there are sufficient human and financial resources.

Timed: Being clear about the timing for completing the goal – examples: ‘by the end of May’; ‘within the next year’.

So an example of a goal statement could be: ‘To engage more with young adults aged 18 to 30 so that we see an increase in Sunday and midweek regular attendance of 10 per cent within 12 months’.

Each goal is likely to have a large number of actions associated with it (see next section), so it is good practice to appoint an ‘owner’ who takes overall responsibility for coordinating the work. The owner could be the vicar/minister, but if not, the owner should keep in close contact with him/her and the PCC/council, who have overall responsibility for the MAP.

Finally, not all the goals will be new ones; some will be ongoing work. However, it is always useful to affirm these goals in the new plan, and there is the opportunity to revise wording and timing as necessary.

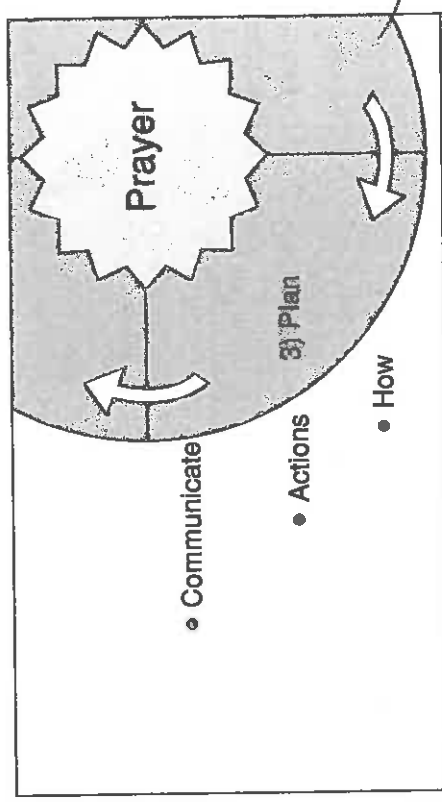


Figure 5.6 The key stages of the Plan phase

Phase 3 Plan

The key stages of the Plan phase are shown in Figure 5.6.

(a) How

The first part of the third phase – planning – is to take each priority goal one by one and to consider how it will be achieved. Start by using words to describe all the various conditions, training, resources, purchases or other items or factors that need to be in place before the goal can be achieved. Some groups approach this by using the ‘When’ method to identify the key actions and milestones. For example, if the goal is to attract more young families to the church, the PCC/council could write the following statement on a blank wall or piece of paper, and arrive at a list of conditions: ‘We will attract more young families to this church when . . .’. A number of suggestions will be made, and you can take each one, and break it down into a series of further ‘whens’, and build up a kind of tree structure (see Figure 5.7). This will help you to arrive at the required actions in the next section.

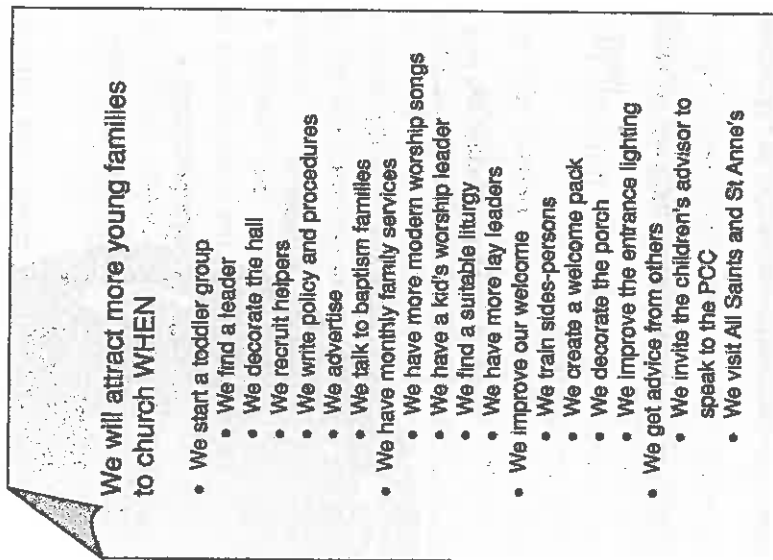


Figure 5.7 The 'When' method to identify and structure Plans

(b) Actions

There may be several levels of actions for each goal, because each main action can usually be broken down into further detail. However, for the MAP summary, a church should only list the top-level actions – otherwise there is a danger of becoming lost in the detail! It helps a great deal if the 'How' section above has been done, because all the various 'Hows' and/or 'Whens' can be considered and, usually, there is a logical way to group them together under similar headings. When the main actions have been defined, the next step is to identify owners

and timing. In practice, it is useful to record actions on paper with the following column headings:

WHAT: defining the precise action to be done.

WHEN: the target date for completion.

WHO: identifying who is responsible for the action.

At the end of the planning phase, check that the total plan has integrity with regard to content, timing and resource. The key questions are:

- 1 Looking at the **WHAT** column, will all the actions associated with a particular priority goal really deliver that goal?
- 2 Looking at the **WHEN** column, will the goals which depend on relevant actions be completed within the planned time in the right sequence?
- 3 Looking at the **WHO** column, add up how much work each named individual is taking on – can they all cope? Is the vicar/minister overloaded?

Finally, consider whether there are any training needs for each individual, and if so, produce a training plan.

(c) Communicate

It may be that many people have been involved in contributing to the MAP process, but even so, the final MAP summary needs to be widely communicated. This should be short enough to be read and understood by everyone, and detailed enough to avoid misunderstandings – two or three sides of A4 are usually enough. See Appendix 2 for example MAP summary templates. These reports can also be made available at the back of church for anyone who wants one.

There is strong evidence that a church also needs to drip-drip the Vision and the Plan through all the means of communication the church has, using such channels as:

- Themes chosen for teaching and/or for home groups
- Verbal notices in services

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- The church magazine
- References in sermons
- The weekly notice sheet
- Helpful books on a church bookstall.

Communication is not a one-off event, and despite all the above, many people will only begin to get the message when they see the MAP worked out in the daily life of the church.

Phase 4 Act

The key stages in the Act phase are illustrated by Figure 5.8.

(a) Action

Now for the action! Some new actions will be started, some existing actions will continue, and some may be modified or ended. The owners of the goals and actions will often appoint teams of people to work with them and so it is important to plan times to meet for prayer, encouragement and review of progress. It is essential that the plan is kept alive, and that the actions are progressing as planned where possible. If not, the

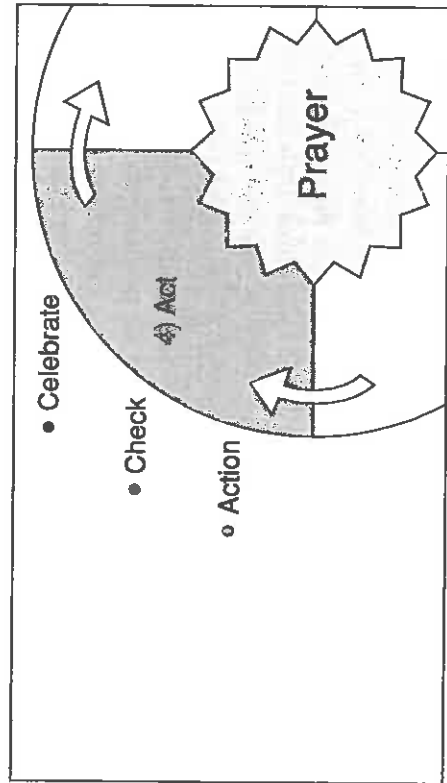


Figure 5.8 The key stages in the Act phase

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plan should be modified to reflect the reality of the situation. The MAP should be a living document.

(b) Check

Here, 'check' means standing back regularly to review how things are going. Teams that are working on one action or priority must take time – preferably every month – to review progress, and make any necessary adjustments. The church leaders should also review the overall progress of all actions – every one or two months. This is not only to inform council and team members about progress, but also to provide an opportunity for them and others to contribute with further suggestions – especially if things are not going as well as expected. The MAP progress should be communicated to all church members regularly, and leaders should listen to how people react. Wall or free-standing display boards can be used to show news of what is happening; but these must be kept up to date! For goals which generate many actions, consider using a tree structure to report activities or to show the progress of the main and related measurements.

Checking, discussing and adjusting are part of the learning cycle of life, and this applies very much to the MAP activities.

(c) Celebrate

Give thanks to God when goals have been achieved or when significant milestones have been reached successfully, and celebrate! Also, it is important to recognize and give thanks for the contribution of the people involved, especially when actions have taken a lot of effort.

The MAP process as a learning cycle

A key aspect of the MAP process is its cyclical nature, and its similarity to the so called Action–Reflection learning cycle (see Figure 5.9). The Act phase leads into a review phase when it is

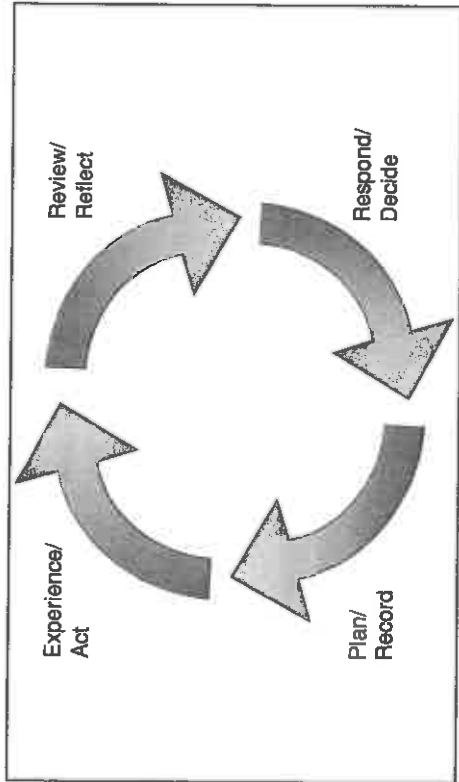


Figure 5.9 The Action-Reflection/theological cycle

time to update the overall plan. For each individual church, this means that each time the cycle is repeated, a review and assessment of the state of its activities is prayerfully conducted, and the Mission and Vision statements are revised as necessary. In the Choose phase, the five-year priorities are revisited, and the new one-year priorities and actions are developed and planned. The Review and Choose phases may take one or two months to work through, and in the meantime, current actions from the previous plan continue. This cyclical approach brings several benefits:

- The action plan is refreshed and always up to date.
- The short-term issues of the church are balanced with the long-term strategy on a continuous basis.
- Church leaders develop strategic planning skills and learn more during each cycle.

The period of the cycle

The period of the overall cycle may depend on local and diocesan/area policy. Some dioceses, for example Blackburn,

encourage churches to renew their MAP every year, using a five-year planning horizon. This is sometimes called a 'rolling five-year' approach. Some churches have chosen to do a very thorough process in year one, when the five-year vision and priorities are agreed, and for the next one or two years, a shorter annual review has been done to set one-year priorities and plan goals and actions. This is fine, especially if the annual review work has started with a reminder of the overall MAP process.

The annual cycle brings the advantages mentioned in the previous section plus some others:

- The Mission and Vision statements are living, and communicated effectively by the church leaders.
- The assessment stage within the Review phase can be developed year on year. For example, in the first year, a SWOT analysis may be conducted together with a congregational questionnaire; in the second year, a 'healthy churches' survey may be done, together with a community survey; in the third year, a repeat survey could be done to look into what has changed, and a survey of community groups could be conducted; and so on, so that the assessment is up to date and relevant, as the understanding of how the church really is increases.

- A yearly cycle provides positive learning experiences for strategic planning skills. If the cycle is longer, some aspects may be forgotten, and have to be relearned.

However, it is for each church to decide on the most appropriate period. MAP work should be joyful and not onerous. It should be fresh and not stale from overworking.

A 10-point health check for your MAP

After completing a MAP, or before starting the Review phase of the next MAP, it may be useful to do a health check. The

following checklist is based on the key stages of the MAP process; however, a church may decide to adapt this to its own circumstances. Here is a 10-point checklist.

- 1 **Rooted in prayer**
 - Has the whole MAP process been rooted in prayer – at every stage?
 - Has a whole-church prayer event been organized to discern God's calling for the church?
 - Have there been other pauses to listen to God at various stages?
 - Have relevant prayers been distributed to church members for personal prayer?
- 2 **Listen: consulting those impacted by the MAP**
 - Has a community audit been conducted?
 - Have key community leaders (for example other church leaders, police, business, council, and so on) been interviewed to find out what they think about community needs and how the church might serve the area?
 - Have a sample of the non-church community residents been interviewed to discover their views about the church?
 - Have church members been consulted to discover their thoughts and ideas about how the church might develop in future?
- 3 **Assess: taking a close look at your church**
 - As part of the assessment stage, has at least one of the following assessments been conducted by the church council:
 - A SWOT analysis?
 - A Healthy Church survey?
 - A NCD survey?
 - Have diocesan resources and/or other churches been approached to help with your assessment or to give you ideas for how to assess your state?

- Have you considered a supplementary audit, for example:

- A welcome audit?
- A worship audit?
- A buildings audit?

4 **Values: being clear about the church's main purposes and sources of energy**

- Have the church values been published?
- Is there a good, well thought out Mission statement which is owned by the church council?
- Is there a sense that the church council members look to God for inspiration, energy and direction?

5 **Vision: being clear about the future direction**

- Is there a good, well thought out five-year Vision statement?
 - Has it arisen after wide consultation?
 - Is the Vision statement being frequently communicated?
 - Is it owned by the church council?
 - Is the Vision statement really shared by all?
 - Does it paint a clear picture of the long-term future (about five years ahead)?
 - Does it inspire commitment and motivation?
 - Can church members memorize it?

6 **Priorities: the vital ingredients to deliver the vision**

- Has the church council identified the key priorities from an understanding of the Vision statement?
 - Have longer-term priorities been broken down into priorities for the next year?
 - Are there a manageable number of priorities?
 - Do they sufficiently describe a desired state?
- Has the church council made choices about what not to do?
 - Have some activities been stopped or put on hold in order to resource the priorities?

7 Goals: being smart with priorities

- Have annual SMART goals been identified for each annual priority?
- Has an owner been identified for each goal (the individual who will be responsible for actions)?
- Can all the goals be achieved with the available resources and funding?

8 Actions: planning to succeed

- Have the necessary actions for each goal been identified?
- Has each action been defined in terms of WHAT, WHEN and WHO?
- Has an overall resource check been done (to ensure that no one is over-committed)?

9 Communication: keeping everyone informed

- Has the MAP been summarized and communicated?
 - Does this include a summary of the Review and Assessment phases as well as the Choose phase?
- Have all appropriate vehicles been used for communication?
 - Notices, magazine, preaching, notice board ...
 - Are spare copies available for people to pick up in church or at meetings?
- Do people have the opportunity to ask questions to aid understanding?

10 Checking Progress: keeping control of the overall plan

- Is the overall progress regularly reviewed in church council meetings?
- Are the plans updated and amended when necessary?
- Are the plans adapted to cope with new circumstances?
- Do the owners of each priority meet with all those who are responsible for actions associated with their priority?
- Are completed actions celebrated?
- Are the efforts of those involved sufficiently recognized?

6

Case examples

St Anne, Fence-in-Pendle

REPORTED BY MIKE CHEW

Fence-in-Pendle is a rural village on the outskirts of Burnley in Lancashire. There are many towns and villages like this in the Blackburn diocese, and St Anne's Church is a 'middle of the road' church with average attendance: 75 adults and 15 children. They produced their first MAP in 2005 in response to the request from the Bishop. In late 2007, they had worked through most of the actions, and now wanted to produce a new plan based on a long-term strategy. Richard Adams, the vicar, asked me to facilitate the process, so I met with him to work out a suitable programme for an away-day. Richard is a busy priest who also leads another church in a neighbouring village. Nevertheless, he'd found the first MAP very useful, and now wanted to go through the MAP process with more thoroughness.

The Fence PCC had gone through a SWOT analysis in the first MAP, and had also revised their Mission statement. Many actions had been listed, and most of these had been completed. During the meeting with Richard, we concluded that it would be useful to go through a 'healthy churches' survey, and to develop a Vision statement. Also, Richard wanted the PCC to regard the MAP process as a spiritual journey, so the programme for the day needed to reflect this. A local Christian conference centre was booked for a Saturday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., two months ahead to give the PCC enough notice. At the