



# How to ...

## Develop a parish action plan or strategy

(Including 3 example Action Plan responses to our 'Creating connections' toolkit – appendices)

### **'Where there is no vision, the people perish'. Proverbs 29: 18 (KJV)**

*It is very clear from the Bible that we worship a purposeful God - a God with a mission to reach out in love to all people, restoring his image within them, and through them, to repair the damage that was done to the created order through the rebellion of humankind. The extraordinary thing is that He calls us to work with him in that mission - to be similarly purposeful.*

*Sadly, there have been times in the church's history when it has lacked any real sense of purpose and has failed to live out its God-given calling. Such times have always been periods of decline and lifelessness. Any church, if it is to be vibrant and dynamic, needs a sense of vision and purpose. The King James translation of Proverbs 29:18 states that without a vision the people will perish. But it is not just about any vision - it is more profound and spiritually creative than that – it is about what God wants us to do – what His vision and purpose is for us. After all, we are his children and this is His church not ours.*

- Rev Ian Wallace. Rector of Yate. 2014

### **Introduction**

Developing a parish action plan, strategy or vision document is a process designed to help churches to prayerfully consider the mission and ministry that God is calling them to.

The process enables a parish to discern its vision for the future, helping it to choose to do a few things well and to plan mission and ministry that allows it to achieve its vision for this time for its community.

It is essential that any planning process is undergirded by prayer which seeks to identify God's will for a church, its people and local community. An action plan should assist a church in creating a community of wholeness with Christ at the centre, to be a place where God's Kingdom of love and justice is found and where the spiritual life of the church grows. The process should help a church to see what God is already doing in the community around them and discern how to join in.

When approached in this way an action plan can help a parish to be clear about how to invest its energy, time and resources for the growth of God's Kingdom.

### **Important Elements**

- As previously mentioned it is essential that this entire process is underpinned by prayer.
- Make sure that you involve the congregation and as many different voices as possible in the process. Your action plan must have been consulted on and be agreed by and owned by the whole church. Perhaps it would be useful to hold a commissioning service where the PCC and the church commit themselves to the plan.

- Make sure that the plan is simple, concise, understandable, achievable, relevant to your context, specific, time-bound and that specific people are nominated to take responsibility for the elements of the plan.
- Communicate the agreed plan to the congregation. Can you turn it into a poster or a leaflet that can be given to people? Are elements of the plan mentioned regularly within your church services? Is your PCC discussing the plan at each meeting? Does your APCM include updates on the plan? Communication of your plan needs to be done continually, not just when you launch it.
- Regularly review the plan: are you making progress? Does it need updating? Celebrate key markers or things that have been achieved as a result of the plan you had made.
- Keep the document alive; don't simply file it away and forget about it. It should be a working document that guides the activity, decision and actions of your church. Keep talking about it and keep working to it.

## Planning in the Diocese of Bristol

Our current process for creating a parish action plan is the 'Creating connections toolkit' which can be downloaded from [www.bristol.anglican.org/creatingconnections](http://www.bristol.anglican.org/creatingconnections) or in hard copy format by request from the Diocesan Office.

The toolkit asks a PCC to consider its plans for the coming years under our Diocesan 'Creating connections' Vision and Priorities. Each PCC is then asked to submit its response to the Bishop so that he may bless and pray for those plans. This response is in effect a Parish Action Plan or Parish Strategy and a document that the PCC can use as a guide in this way. **(3 generic examples are included as appendices to this guide.)**

In working through the toolkit, a parish may also decide to carry out a Community survey, a Parish review, a Use of buildings review or a Gifts and skills exploration exercise, all of which are available through their associated 'How to ...' guides at [www.bristol.anglican.org/how-to](http://www.bristol.anglican.org/how-to). These additional research exercises can provide additional helpful information and insight when preparing a Parish Action Plan or Strategy.

## Potential Process

A useful process to follow, underpinned by prayer throughout could be:

### Review

Listen widely, both within and beyond the church

Assess the situation, using SWOT tool or similar

What are your parish Mission Values? Are they aligned with the Five Marks of Mission?

### Choose

Vision – your vision statement should be brief and communicate your focus

Priorities – choose 3 or 4 strategic priorities to focus on

Goals should bring these priorities to life. The SMART tool can be helpful

### Plan

How will each Goal be achieved?

Actions - who will do what by when in order to achieve these goals?

Communicate the plan with people regularly

### Act

Action – start doing it

Check it's working

Celebrate success

## Checking it:

Once you have developed your document, the following check list is suggested:

1. Is it rooted in prayer?
2. Listen – Have all those who will be affected by the strategy been listened to and consulted?
3. Assess – Did a SWOT, Healthy Church or Natural Church Development survey take place?
4. Values – Have the values and mission statement been considered, drawn up and published?
5. Vision – Is there a well thought out vision owned by people?
6. Have key priorities been identified to enable the vision to be delivered?
7. Have annual Goals that are SMART been identified?
8. Actions - Have the necessary actions for each goal been identified?
9. Communication – Has the strategy been summarised and communicated? Do you have a plan for continuing this communication?
10. Review - Is progress regularly reviewed and plans amended and updated as a result?

## A Pro-Forma

The following is an adaptation of the pro-forma suggested by the Lichfield Diocese which is detailed on page 113 of “Mission Action Planning”, by Mike Chew and Mark Ireland.

We have also included 3 appendices to this guide which include some example plans.

1. **A description of the parish** – the area that God has entrusted you to care for, reflecting on its population, schools, places of work, sheltered housing and needs.
2. **A description of the church**, including its people and its resources (such as buildings, finances, people).
3. **A review of all that is already going on** in the life of the church and how each part of it may be able to evolve and develop in order to grow.
4. **A Vision Statement:** ‘Where do you believe God is leading you and what does He want you to do?’
5. **The plan** – a small number of events, courses or initiatives for growth. In particular, churches consider:
  - a. Connecting with God
  - b. Connecting with Each Other
  - c. Connecting with our Communities
  - d. Making disciples
  - e. Growing leaders
  - f. Engaging younger generations
6. **Actions** which need to be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound)
7. **A statement on the resources that will be needed** to deliver these actions and how these could be developed within the parish
8. **A statement on the financial resources that may be needed** to deliver the actions in the plan and a plan for how these will be raised to ensure the future growth and effectiveness of the parish.
9. **Details about how the plan will be communicated, monitored and reviewed.**

## Other Resources

### Mission Action Planning

This book by Mike Chew and Mark Ireland very helpfully describes the process of developing a Mission Action Plan based on the principles of: “Review, Choose, Do, Review”.

### Church Growth ‘From Evidence to Action’ Toolkit

Available as a free download from [www.fromevidencetoaction.org](http://www.fromevidencetoaction.org), this toolkit provides a series of worksheets structured around the key factors linked to growing churches.

## 5 Marks of Mission

One way to review the mission and ministry of the church is simply to look at each mark in turn and reflect on the ways in which your church, collectively and as individuals, is working in these various areas. Which marks are strong and can be built upon; which are in need of further development?

## SWOT

You could approach this process by creating a SWOT grid to help you assess the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats and from this draw up a set of priorities or actions to help you develop your church over the coming years.

## Summary

There is of course no 'correct' way to do this, the key is finding an appropriate approach for your parish. Below is an example Action Plan written by a fictitious church as its response to the Creating connections toolkit, which you may find helpful.

Finally, remember to be flexible; plans should be able to flex, adapt and change as time progresses. Remain faithful to God's leading, recognizing that He can work through our plans but is not constrained by them.

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## Appendix I. Example 'Creating connections' Toolkit Response

**Name of Church:** Saint Cornelius' Church, Parish of Kimball

**Mission Statement:** 'To love God, to make Jesus known and to serve the community.'

We will review and update this document annually.

### Who we are:

St. Cornelius' is a suburban parish in an economically diverse area. We hold a weekly traditional communion service and 10:30 family worship service. We have 1 Priest in charge supported by a 2 LLMs. We are an aging congregation with a couple of young families. We have seen small growth in the past 5 years and long to see growth in numbers and faith in the coming years.

### Consultation and feedback:

In June the congregation was invited to stay behind after a service for coffee to discuss what they liked best about the church and their thoughts for what God was calling us to in the coming 12-24 months. Feedback was given on flipchart paper and the PCC discussed it before producing this action plan which was presented to the church in September. It is now available as a leaflet in the church foyer and online.

### Connecting with God

- Sermon series will be planned with a focus on deepening people's relationship with God.
- The church notice sheet will include a bible reading reference and 2 or 3 questions each week that people can use to continue their thinking about that week's sermon theme.
- We will run Alpha in Sept 2017 with a follow up BBQ 3 weeks after the end of the course for participants.

### Connecting with each other

- We will hold a Parish Away Day in Spring 2017 where we will spend a good amount of time having fun together – building better relationships with one another. The hospitality team will organise this.
- We will host a Harvest lunch in 2016 and if successful repeat this annually.
- Monthly we will host a 'coffee morning' between the 2 services – a time to meet and share.
- We will host a new bi-monthly joint prayer evening with our neighbouring parish St Francis.

### Connecting with our community

- We will use the 'season of invitation' resources to regularly invite people to services and events in Autumn 2016 seeking to make multiple contacts with the same people.
- 2 church members will serve as foundation governors in St Mike's CofE school.
- We will build stronger links with the school inviting them to events, hosting their concert & praying for them.
- We will redecorate the Parish Hall and invite community groups to hire it to run classes and groups that will benefit the community (*Slimming World, Exercise classes, Scouts*).

### Make Disciples

- We will use the LICC Whole Life Discipleship resources during Lent 2017 and make a conscious effort to equip people to live as 24/7 disciples.
- We have 2 mid-week home groups already running. We will more actively encourage people to join.

### Grow Leaders

- The PCC will meet monthly and spend at least ½ of their meeting discussion the 'mission' of the church, our outreach and evangelism.
- Members of the PCC will attend the 2016 Parish Officers' Training Day and review further training opportunities as highlighted in the Diocesan PCC Training Opportunities Brochure.
- We will carry out a Gifts and Skills audit within the congregation to help people to explore ways that they can serve the mission of the church and ways that the church could help them to use their gifts effectively.

### Engage Younger Generations

- In 2016 we will use the season of invitation resources to invite families to our seasonal services.
- We will recruit 2 new volunteers to support the monthly 'Pizza with the vicar' youth group.
- The vicar will help to lead the Sunday School once a term – engaging with the children.
- The youth and children's ministry leader will meet with the DYCO and discuss possible training opportunities for volunteers in the church.

## Appendix 2. Example 'Creating connections' Toolkit Response

**Name of Church:** Saint Cornelius' Church, Parish of Kimball

**Mission Statement:** 'To love God, to make Jesus known and to serve the community.'

We will review and update this document annually.

**Who we are:**

St. Cornelius' is a suburban parish in an economically diverse area. We hold a weekly traditional communion service and 10:30 family worship service. We have 1 Priest in charge supported by a 2 LLMs. We are an aging congregation with a couple of young families. We have seen small growth in the past 5 years and long to see growth in numbers and faith in the coming years.

**Consultation and feedback:**

In June the congregation was invited to stay behind after a service for coffee to discuss what they liked best about the church and their thoughts for what God was calling us to in the coming 12-24 months.

Feedback was given on flipchart paper and the PCC discussed it before producing this action plan which was presented to the church in September. It is now available as a leaflet in the church foyer and online.

### Connecting with God

**We do this:**

We have a preaching rota of 5 people currently and 2 differently styled worship services that are appreciated. Christmas services are well attended and we have a good number of baptisms each year. We have 2 home groups that run each week. Alpha in 2014 was well attended with 2 people subsequently joining the church.

**We want to develop this:**

- Sermon series will be planned with a focus on deepening people's relationship with God.
- The church notice sheet will include a bible reading reference and 2 or 3 questions each week that people can use to continue their thinking about that week's sermon theme.
- We will run Alpha in Sept 2017 with a follow up BBQ 3 weeks after the end of the course for participants.

### Connecting with each other

**We do this:**

Many of the congregation have known each other for a long time so have good relationships with each other. People support one another well.

We held a good fellowship day in 2013 and host 1 or 2 special fellowship events each year.

**We want to develop this:**

- We will hold a Parish Away Day in Spring 2017 where we will spend a good amount of time having fun together – building better relationships with one another. The hospitality team will organise this.
- We will host a Harvest lunch in 2016 and if successful repeat this annually.
- Monthly we will host a 'coffee morning' between the 2 services – a time to meet and share.
- We will host a new bi-monthly joint prayer evening with our neighbouring parish St Francis.

### Connecting with our community

**We do this:**

75% of our congregation live in the local community. We see good numbers attending Christmas etc services and our building is in a good location although it could do with some smartening-up outside. Our Parish magazine prints 500 copies that are distributed via local shops. The vicar runs a monthly service in the local residential care home.

**We want to develop this:**

- We will use the 'season of invitation' resources to regularly invite people to services and events in Autumn 2016 seeking to make multiple contacts with the same people.
- 2 church members will serve as foundation governors in St Mike's CofE school.
- We will build stronger links with the school inviting them to events, hosting their concert & praying for them.
- We will redecorate the Parish Hall and invite community groups to hire it to run classes and groups that will benefit the community (Slimming World, Exercise classes, Scouts).

## Make Disciples

### We do this:

We have 2 home groups running with 10 people in each. We have previously run a seekers' service. Our preachers are very good at focusing their preaching on encouraging people to live out their faith as disciples.

### We want to develop this:

- We will use the LICC Whole Life Discipleship resources during Lent 2017 and make a conscious effort to equip people to live as 24/7 disciples.
- We have 2 mid-week home groups already running. We will more actively encourage people to join.

## Grow Leaders

### We do this:

We have 2 LLMs who we are committed to supporting and utilising the gifts of the congregation. Occasionally we hold a preaching workshop for those on the preaching rota.

### We want to develop this:

- The PCC will meet monthly and spend at least ½ of their meeting discussion the 'mission' of the church, our outreach and evangelism.
- Members of the PCC will attend the 2016 Parish Officers' Training Day and review further training opportunities as highlighted in the Diocesan PCC Training Opportunities Brochure.
- We will carry out a Gifts and Skills audit within the congregation to help people to explore ways that they can serve the mission of the church and ways that the church could help them to use their gifts effectively.

## Engage Younger Generations

### We do this:

We have a small all-age Sunday School during services twice a month with 4 volunteers making this happen and a small number of children. 6 young people attend a monthly 'Pizza with the vicar' evening. We have a minor relationship with the local CofE school. The rainbows group stopped hiring the church hall 2 years ago.

### We want to develop this:

- In 2016 we will use the season of invitation resources to invite families to our seasonal services.
- We will recruit 2 new volunteers to support the monthly 'Pizza with the vicar' youth group.
- The vicar will help to lead the Sunday School once a term – engaging with the children.
- The youth and children's ministry leader will meet with the DYCO and discuss possible training opportunities for volunteers in the church.

## Appendix 3. Example 'Creating connections' Toolkit Response

**Name of Church:** St John's, Generic town

### **Who we are:**

St John's is a welcoming and open church with a clear focus on serving our local community. The church is open regularly throughout the week for people to drop in to for a cup of tea and a supportive chat. Our main Sunday worship is at 10:30am and is usually a Holy Communion family service.

**Our vision:** St John's will be an open, welcoming, worshipping community for all.

**We will achieve this by:** Supporting people to grow in their faith; sharing God's love with the local community; and opening the church as often as possible with a warm welcome and listening ear.

### **Review**

#### **What are we best at?**

*Working with older people. Reaching out to the community. Caring for those in need. Working with young children. Offering a warm welcome.*

#### **What do we enjoy doing?**

*Traditional services and offices. Involving children. Service and outreach. Welcoming the community into the building for special events.*

#### **Where do we long to see?**

*Growth in numbers of people moving from first encounters with us to a relationship with Christ and attending our services. More opportunities to work with children as they get older. People to help us run an "Exploring Faith" course.*

### **Our plans for the future:**

#### **Outreach to 18-40s**

We will review the activities we run and the way we run them and make necessary improvements. We will ask parents what they would like us to do for their children as the children get older and look to make this happen. We will achieve Safe and Welcome Bronze award. We will look at including a space for craft activities in some of our services.

#### **Growing New leaders**

We will work on and put into practice a succession plan for all those currently in key leadership positions. We will encourage more people to be involved in leading services and preaching.

#### **Making new disciples**

We will look to run an "Exploring Faith" course in the next year and invite people to attend. We will run this with food as part of the evening.

We will run a lent course at the church using materials that help people to grow in their faith.

#### **Community Outreach**

We will use the Season of Invitation resources in Sept-Dec to invite people to our services. We will make sure there are 2 times each week when the church is open for people to drop in and receive care and a listening ear. We will train 3 people in listening skills through the Diocese training programme.

#### **Worship services**

We will work to ensure our pattern of services is engaging and supporting people's faith development. We will trial occasional new ways of doing church services, ideas include starting with breakfast, including a craft time at the end and including some newer songs.