

Step One - What is mission?

Ensure that you have read "Introduction – Why Tailored Mission Strategies" before reading "Step One – What is Mission?"

Within this section I will occasionally refer to "you". The you I have in mind is a church leader (e.g. minister, or any other facilitator).

We cannot talk about developing tailored mission strategies unless we first establish some agreement about what mission is. In some churches that might seem a ridiculous and unnecessary step. It is often assumed that we all agree on certain things, and that might well include a definition of mission.

As in everything in developing tailored mission strategies the more members of a congregation that share in the process the better. Remember that the process is of value as well as the outcomes. If you are able to define a core congregation that will be helpful. So who do you normally or quite often see at your main services? For the process we are embarking upon to engage sufficiently in your church you should aim at getting 100% of your core congregation involved in the process and doing it together, rather than as separate individuals or separate groups such as home groups. If the percentage of those involved falls below 60% it will be hard to get sufficient "ownership" of the outcomes.

For this reason I prefer to work with churches through "Away days". You can go through the process on church premises but it seems that going somewhere else, not too far away, and a pleasant environment is better. However, thought has to be given for transport, accessibility for any that might be disabled, child care, and food. For example, to be sure that you get the parents with young children you will need to organise an appropriate programme with appropriate leaders to run at the same time in a different part of the building or another building nearby. As to food, you could organise this on a "bring and share" basis or use outside caterers. Whatever you choose you need to ensure that people you want to be participating in the process do not end up in the kitchen. The best solution to these situations is to ask friends from neighbouring churches to provide the practical support so all your people work through the process in an uninterrupted way as a group.

Exercise 1.

[Aim: To tease out attitudes towards mission and the diverse understanding of what the word means. A similar exercise takes place in Step Two when we look at evangelism.]

My favourite tool for this exercise is a flipchart with a bold clear pen. Write on the flipchart, "MISSION IS..." Then invite people in the group to call out single words (or not more than a very short phrase) to complete the sentence. Try to encourage everyone to contribute to this if possible without making anyone feel uncomfortable. Capture each comment on the sheet (use continuation sheets if necessary so that you do not overcrowd the page; remember it should be readable from the back row) but be careful never to react to any contribution. To give either a positive or negative response at this stage could spoil the rest of the day.

You could end up with some interesting comments. Hopefully it will contain a mixture of positive and negative comments. If people have offered what you would consider to be generally helpful but omitted any negative comments, you might like to draw attention to this by asking something like, "Didn't anyone think mission can be scary?"

Be careful not to be tempted to rush on. Take a few moments to read aloud through the list. If you have managed to obtain comments from a high percentage of the group you might be able to leave it there. If there is a significant percentage who remained silent then you will need to take it one stage more. In this case go through the list one by one inviting responses from the group where there is agreement. This could be indicated by a show of hands, or you could have some fun by getting them to shout “Yes!” Reflect the level of agreement by marking the sheet. You could use different coloured pens, add different numbers or size of star, etc.

Among the contributions I look for a comment that might state something like “the purpose for which we exist”. Again, if it is not there, you might be able to tease it out. It is always better if it comes from someone other than you.

Now that you have your sheet or sheets put them on display somewhere. Be careful not to damage the environment! Even blue tack can pull emulsion paint off walls!

In the recent past the Anglican Communion sought to define mission and ended up with five “Marks of Mission”. Since then some other denominations have also adopted them. Have some way of displaying these. They are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise 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 life of the earth.

You should note that this is intended to be a holistic list and not a picking list (don’t announce that). For this reason they are shown as bullet points and not ordered.

Exercise 2

[Aim: to make people aware that mission covers various areas of responsibility, and to start think holistically.]

Invite the members of the group to think about the list for a few moments. Then ask them individually and in silence to create two *ordered* lists. This could be done on a single sheet of paper or in a notebook. List A should be their personal understanding of order of importance. Insist that, for the purpose of this exercise, they do not put any two or more of equal importance.

When they have completed this, they should be asked to make an *ordered* list based on what they feel as a church they are best equipped to do.

When the two personal lists have been completed invite people to get into groups of three people¹ (split couples up) and discuss each person's list, taking time to listen.

Important: each person's list is valid. Take care to avoid the expression of value opinions coming either from you or anyone else. No one should find themselves criticized.

Complete this exercise by inviting people to reflect on the two lists that they made and the difference in ordering. Then in a plenary go through the list as set out above and invite people to indicate by a show of hands against each one whether they put it first, second, third, etc. You should be able to round off the exercise by summarising the two marks of mission most people felt important and then where they come in the list of what people mostly feel the church is currently able to do.

Ensure that you do inform everyone that the five marks are the responsibility of every church, and a challenge to which we should seek to respond.

[Leader Note: Most churches, no matter how small, should be able to make some response to each of the five marks of mission. However, smaller churches are more likely to feel that they do not have the human resources to undertake some aspects of mission. In developing tailored mission strategies we are primarily concerned with the appropriate use of the personalities, gifts and skills of the people who make up the local church, rather than starting from a task perspective.]

OUTCOMES:

The anticipated outcomes from Step One are that the people in your church will begin to understand that there are diverse opinions about mission: what it is, how it is valued, and how the church might respond collectively.

The most important outcome should be that mission is about God's purposes in his world today. The quote about being a God of mission who has a church might prove helpful.

BIBLE PASSAGE

A useful Bible passage to use at the close of the session would be the account of the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus responded to three discerned needs that day. He taught those who needed instruction, he healed those who were sick, and he fed those who were hungry.

1. Decide which account you want to read (I prefer John)
2. Outline the story: Jesus and the disciples seek to escape from the crowds only to find a crowd turns up at the place where they have gone to rest. Jesus is moved with compassion and sees them as sheep without a shepherd (i.e. vulnerable). He teaches. He heals. Time moves on and people are getting hungry. He asks the disciples where food can be obtained. Philip is overwhelmed by the enormity of the need (eight month's wages would not provide a mouthful for each one there). Andrew finds a supply but sees its smallness as impossible. Jesus tells the people to sit in groups of fifty. Jesus takes what is there, gives thanks and

¹ A small discussion group of three people is the ideal size. If there are two people left over ensure that they would be a useful pair to listen to each other respectfully. If there is one left over, form two pairs rather than a group of four.

begins to break it. He gives it to his disciples to distribute. Did the bread and fish multiply in their hands? Everyone ate as much as they wanted. The disciples gathered up the leftovers. The crowd want to make him king.

3. Invite people to sit quietly with eyes closed. They should be given a few moments to decide to imagine themselves to be there on that day (other than Jesus): someone in the crowd, the boy whose bread and loaves were used, one of the disciples. When they have had sufficient time to determine who they will imagine themselves to be, ask them to try to image the sights and sounds taking place and the feelings these produce in them as the Bible account is read to them.
4. Read the passage from the Bible slowly. Pauses at key points can be helpful.
5. After the passage has been read (please do not add anything such as hear begins the reading, this is the word of the Lord, or the Lord will bless his word; just read the text), give a few moments of quietness before inviting everyone to open their eyes.
6. Invite anyone who is willing to do so to share who they imagined themselves to be and what that experience produced as they listened to the story.

SUMMARISE

Briefly summarise what you have done, what you think has been learned, and then close with prayer.