

# Equipping For Rural Mission

## Understanding your local congregation and the community you serve

*'Don't be afraid little flock.  
Your Father is delighted to give you the kingdom.'*

**Luke 12: 32**



## Introduction

This course is designed for any rural church, however small or remote, resulting in specific priorities for community action. It would normally take place over a six week period, involving four half day/full day sessions with some homework and research. It has the potential to involve the whole congregation but can be initiated by a small group. It aims to enable your church's mission through **Listening** and **Reviewing, Planning** and **Acting**.

It can be used by a single church or by a group of small churches working together.

The exercises can also be used as part of a Mission Action Planning (MAP) process or any other more formal mission planning tools. The course begins by helping you to gather information about your church or churches and their participation in the wider community. You listen, applying spiritual discernment and prayer, then carefully decide what you might do next, or change, because of what you hear or discover.

**You may be hoping for specific change in your church.** These 'dream solutions' may be something that you've hoped and prayed for over time and you may feel frustrated in your prayers or activity. This toolkit aims to help each church act to plan to make changes, step by step, towards accomplishing a vision or dream.

This toolkit assumes that:-

- the church exists because of God's mission in the world.
- your church is committed to that mission and to God.
- you want to make mission a priority.
- you are looking for help to be more deliberate in that mission and to remain honest and systematic in reviewing what you go on to do.
- you will reflect on how you are doing as a church and in connection with community.
- you will revisit the process to further develop your part in God's mission.

Those engaging in mission in rural communities may have significant challenges to work with.

- Church leaders are likely to have responsibility for several churches and may not live in the community.
- Responsibility for running rural churches often rests with local lay people.
- Capacity available in small churches is varied: some will have financial reserves and lots of volunteers, but others may be less well off in terms of money or people.
- New residents and their varied occupations can change the 'character' of a place.
- Expensive housing leads to dislocation of young families and older people away from their key networks of support.
- Tourism may impact on the availability of property and other services which are used only during a limited season.
- Poverty and inequality are as present in rural locations as in towns and cities.

This toolkit also assumes

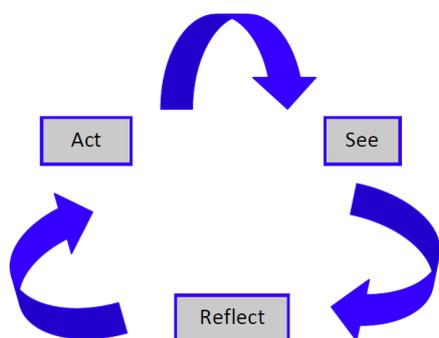
- that all churches, no matter how small, should and can have a plan to develop local mission and activity.
- that small churches often focus predominantly on survival and necessary tasks and this can take priority over mission activity developing.
- that some church members may have a deep seated resistance to change.
- past success, or failure, can inhibit change or development in a church.

There are some practical suggestions leading from these assumptions. When you use this toolkit

- be consciously spiritual - stay open but also realistic.
- fix a planned departure from your normal church programme to allow time and resources to go through the toolkit.
- ask an individual as a leader or facilitator, or even a small group to lead the group through the process and support them. This person does not need to be the minister. They do need to be organised, be confident to lead exercises and keep pace of the process until priorities for change are agreed.
- encourage the whole church to join in at key points so you can share the plan and implement it together.
- agree a timetable for using the toolkit but build in some flexibility: don't go so slowly that it stagnates. Equally, you are not trying to tackle everything at once.
- remember that every church, however small, has assets which include gifts, skills, time and interests of church members. These can all be utilised in your church's mission.

## How the Toolkit Works

If you use this toolkit from start to finish, the process is like other tools for Mission Action Planning based on the pastoral cycle or spiral: 'See, Reflect and Act' illustrated below:



You begin at **See**, looking at your church and its context.

Next you **Reflect** on what you saw and what you believe.

Finally you decide how that will impact as you plan to **Act** in the light of it.

The toolkit is a series of simple exercises carried out over four sessions. The exercises help you to **see, listen, reflect and plan**.

- Session 1: Appreciate your church**
- Session 2: Investigate your community context**
- Session 3: Deliberate over what you hear**
- Session 4: Make a plan**

The sessions contain exercises that encourage you to record, often through visual means, what you think about your church or understand about the place it is in. By the end of the process you will have a clearer picture of your church and your community connections and context. You will have thought and prayed about this and decided where you need to make changes.

The whole course ideally takes place over six weeks but you may like to do more exercises or use more time to research and explore options.

The timetable for the sessions is flexible to suit you and your planning group. *Session 1* and *Session 2* can be done over a couple of weeks - you might choose to do them on two consecutive half days, or even in one day. If you only have 6 weeks available allow up to two weeks for *Sessions 1* and *2* then have a gap of a couple of weeks so the facilitator can prepare his or her presentation for *Session 3*. This also gives you time to do any required research and perhaps survey a little wider. You then share what you found with the whole church, or a bigger group, in advance of meeting together in *Sessions 3 and 4*. *Session 3* and *Session 4* should be done soon after each other. It's up to you how you manage the time and the numbers.

If you select a lay person, or people, to lead the sessions your church leader should endorse this process. This includes giving the facilitator scope to plan any agreed changes and also a willingness to be led by them at certain points. Where churches are part of a team or church partnership there is opportunity to combine resources, share the listening exercises and discuss what you find.

Agree your own timetable for planning and delivering the course based on the following:

## Checklist for a Church Using 'Equipping for Rural Mission'

No.	ACTION	CHECK
1	Read through the toolkit thoroughly to familiarise yourself with the course.	
2	Discuss and agree how you intend using the toolkit at your PCC or local decision making body. Appoint a facilitator. Discuss who to approach to be participants on the course or invite expressions of interest from within the church congregation.	
3	Fix a date to begin using the toolkit and a target date for producing the plan over a minimum 6 week period. Agree a neutral venue.	
4	Tell church members that you intend to deliver the EFRM course and what you hope to achieve. Release invitations for key dates, especially for Session 3 if you intend to engage with a wider group at this point. Ask people to commit to support you by attending.	
5	Prepare for exercises in Session 1 and Session 2. Obtain any materials needed.	
6	Deliver <b>Session 1: Appreciate</b> your church	
7	Deliver <b>Session 2: Investigate</b> your community context. This can happen side by side with week 1.	
8	Facilitator to summarise the results and findings of Sessions 1 and 2. Circulate the report to wider church members or display it for their viewing depending on what is suitable for public display. Remind members about Session 3.	
9	Plan your meeting for Session 3: deliberate over what you hear.	
10	Deliver <b>Session 3: Deliberate</b> over what you've heard and seen .	
11	After Session 3 revise the summary and add new material from discussion. Note the priority/priorities that emerge. If you didn't reach this point plan a way to get to a priority (see above).	
12	<b>Pray.</b> You could ask church members to support a day of prayer or the leaders could take time out to pray on retreat.	
13	Begin <b>Session 4: Make a Plan</b> Draft a plan with your spiritual senses alert. Write possible actions for your priority/priorities. When could the actions could be undertaken? What might need to be cut back to allow this to happen? Consult key church members.	
14	Continue to share and discuss draft with stakeholders. Edit if necessary.	
15	Agree and firm up your plan. Share with and gain approval from your local decision making body or agreement from church members. Is your plan realistic in your current circumstances? Can you sustain the effort required? Edit if necessary.	
16	Decide where and when you will review your plan and prayerfully act together.	