



MAP for Derby Diocese community listening

introduction

This exercise is about listening to your community and discovering what others think and feel about where they live or work, and about the church(es) within those places.

Get a group of people who are prepared to go out into your local community in order to find out as much as they can about the place. This may seem a daunting thing to do – most people who try it find that it's both energising and revealing. This is a listening exercise, so if you feel you are all known too well in your locality, then perhaps swap with another parish and feedback to each other.

what is your community?

Before you can start the listening exercise, it's worth spending a little time considering how your community is defined – and therefore where you will carry the exercise out. For some, the parish boundary will form an obvious limit, with a sense of belonging around the town, village or area that you serve. However, as populations move, grow and change, how the community boundaries are defined and perceived by others may not be the same as how the parish system defines them.

- Do your parish boundaries accurately reflect your community boundaries? If not, how are they different, and why?
- Is there a strong sense of 'community' in your area, or does the word have negative associations for the people who live around you?
- Is your community defined by geography, or by something else (work patterns, housing areas, demographics)?
- Are your community boundaries fluid or well defined?
- Will you need to draw separate conclusions for different parts of the community you serve? when to use this resource

when to use this resource

This resource is most appropriate for use during stage two of MAP for Derby Diocese, to help the church to reflect on their journey toward God's calling so far. It is particularly helpful whilst considering the following questions in that stage:

- What is our history?
- With whom do we share our life and what do they say about us?

the process

If you have enough people, split into 4 groups with each group being given the task of finding out as much as they can for 1 of the 4 topics (see below). If you don't have that many people, then one or two groups can look at more of the topics.

Groups should try and cover as large an area as possible in the time allocated. If you have a large parish, you may need to tackle individual parts separately, or allocate them to different groups.

Ideally, go out in pairs (large groups can put people off talking to you, and it can be daunting for people to go out alone).

Clergy should join in with the exercise, but do consider whether going out wearing a dog collar will encourage people to talk or be a barrier to people being candid about the church.

Each group should then come together and reflect on what they have found. Then, come back together as a total group and feedback your findings and your ideas.

questions

While you're out and about, get chatting to people – it's a great way to find out information. Some people find this easy, but if there are those who don't, these questions can be a helpful 'starter for ten'; but don't feel that they are a script that has to be stuck to. Your observations will also give you an answer to many of the questions – have a look at notice boards, posters publications etc.

Remember that this isn't intended to be an evangelistic exercise (although if someone asks you about Jesus, you don't have to refuse to tell them)! This is just a gentle way of starting to talk to the community and understand how local people who don't come to church really feel about their community. It's about listening more than speaking.

During the conversations it may be interesting to get an impression of how people view the church and maybe get a comparison of other churches in the community too. Does the person ever go to church and if so why? Have they any links with the church?

description

The layout of the community – build an impression from what you hear.

Communications. How do people find out what is happening? What are public notice boards telling you, where are they? If you are new to the area how do you get to know the place?

Buildings – What are the key buildings etc.?

Shops – what type of shops are there and who uses them?

activity

- What's on in the next week and month?
- Where do people meet/socialise?
- Consider young people, retired, men, women and other groups.
- What and where are the schools and places of learning.
- All age learning – where are they and what do they do?
- Is there a vision for the community?

people

- Housing – what types are there and who lives in them?
- Age range of the community – look around you and get an impression of who is in the locality.

health and wealth

- How much spare time do people who live in the community have in an average week?
- Volunteering – what happens, where and by whom?
- Issues locally – what is the hot news at the moment that might be affecting the community?
- How long has the person lived in the community, is this typical?

listening

- What is it like here?
- Why are you here?
- What are the needs of the community?
- What would you like in the community?
- In what way would you like this community to be different in three years' time?
- How do you work together?
- Is this a closed or open community?