



MAP for Derby Diocese

MAP church health check leader's guide

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measuring the health of the church

it's not all about numbers

When we reflect on the health of a church, we will often focus on its numerical growth or decline. Certainly, we would expect a healthy church to grow in this way much of the time. All the pictures of the church and the Kingdom in the New Testament are organic ones – the body (1 Corinthians 12:27), the vine (John 15:1-2) and the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32); the natural state of these things is to grow when they are healthy; growth is built in. The same can be said of the church. God's intention is that His church should grow numerically.

However, using the number of people who go to a church as the main, or even the only, measure for the health of that church presents some difficulties.

1. *We don't have any direct control over the growth of the church*

The growth of the church is concerned with people coming to faith in Jesus Christ, which has to do with the work of God's Holy Spirit in them. Therefore, we cannot directly control the number of people who are a part of the Christian church. We see this in the early church. Although the Christian church was vibrant, it was God who added daily to their number (Acts 2:42-47).

2. *Healthy churches don't always grow*

Although as a rule, healthy organisms grow, there will be times when they don't. Trees don't grow in winter, and that's a healthy part of their lifecycle. Organisms naturally die. When animals reach adulthood, they stop growing and growth comes instead through multiplication. Therefore, when we're looking to find out whether an organism is healthy, we may well look to see if it's growing. However, it won't be the only thing we look at.

In the same way, whilst we would generally expect healthy churches to grow, there may be seasons when they don't. If we simply focus on the number of people coming to the church, during seasons when the church isn't growing, that may lead us to believe the church isn't healthy. This is often the case, but it isn't always.

Therefore, whilst the increase or decrease in the size of a church (i.e. the number of people who are a part of its worshipping community) may give a good indicator of its health, using it as the only, even the most important, measure isn't always helpful.

healthy organisms

When assessing whether an organism is healthy, we will look for other signs – *characteristics* – of health. We look for evidence of these characteristics of health, and if all those characteristics are present, then we know the organism is healthy. That way we can be sure that, at the right time, it will grow naturally. For example, a doctor carrying out an examination will look at blood pressure and heart rate, ask some questions about lifestyle and medical history, perhaps take blood samples. These things will give the doctor evidence to assess the health of the patient, because he or she knows the *characteristics* of a healthy person and what *evidence* of these characteristics to look for. A change in the evidence of these characteristics can indicate where the problem lies.

Similarly, for a health check of a church, we need to understand what the *characteristics* of a healthy church are, and what *evidence* to look for of the presence of these characteristics.

the church God calls us to be

Very often, when we're trying to discover how to be a healthy church by focusing on numbers, we will try all sorts of programmes and initiatives from other churches that have led to growth in those churches. We can end up doing quite a lot, becoming exhausted, and yet still not seeing growth.

If instead we focus on developing the characteristics of a healthy church – in other words, becoming the church God is calling us to *be* – it can free us from this frenetic activity and allow God to work in us. Our job is simply to become the healthy church that is ready and able to flourish in the way and according to the timing that God wills for us.

Of course, becoming the church God calls us to be can be hard. The changes we need to make may well be costly. However, instead of concentrating on lots of activity (which can lead us away from God), we are concentrating on and following God's call (leading us toward him).

introducing the church health check

The MAP Church Health Check (sometimes referred to as the MAP CHC for short) is a core element of the MAP process for Derby Diocese. It is a tool that works with another of the core elements, the MAP Characteristics of a Healthy Church, to help the church celebrate the areas in which they are already exhibiting those characteristics, and to discern the areas in which God may be calling them to exhibit them more fully.

Because this tool isn't about what we *do* as a church, but rather what God is calling us to *be*, it can be used in many different places. What we *do* as God's church will vary from place to place. What we are called to *be* as God's church rarely does. So, it can be used:

- across different church types, traditions and styles
- in different sized churches
- at church, parish, benefice, or deanery level
- in different situations (urban, suburban, market town, rural etc.)

When we use the word 'church' in this document, it can refer to any of these varying contexts.

how to use the church health check

the practicalities

when should the tool be used?

You may wish to use the MAP Church Health Check tool in a series of evenings, as an away day or as a part of Sunday worship with a sermon series and discussion groups during the service. You can do the work all at once, or divide it into more manageable sessions. The MAP CHC is also suitable for use in small groups, either formed specially (e.g. Lent groups) or as a part of your home group or other small group programme.

who should be involved?

Some churches will want to use this tool just within their leadership team (e.g. the PCC). However, using the tool with the whole church will help everybody to feel involved. This makes it more likely

that the whole church will be committed to the process and to the changes that may come as a result. You will also hear from a wider range of people as you reflect on where the church is in its journey toward becoming the church God is calling it to be. You may wish to explore the tool first as a leadership team, and then use it in the wider church.

should we use a facilitator?

The MAP CHC is designed so that it can be used without outside help. However, having someone come in and facilitate the use of the tool can help to release everyone to take part and help the church to reflect honestly with the facilitator guiding and asking helpful questions.

fitting the MAP Church Health Check into the MAP process

The MAP Church Health Check tool works in conjunction with the third core element of the MAP process, the MAP Stages:

- 1) **Explore** the purpose and character of the church God is calling you to be
- 2) **Reflect** on your journey toward God's calling so far
- 3) **Discern** the areas in which God is now calling you to grow and change to meet His call
- 4) **Prepare** how you will make the changes God requires of you
- 5) **Journey** toward making the changes God requires of you

Stage five is the only stage in which the MAP CHC does not usually have a role, as by this stage, the way forward has been set. The tool is used throughout each of the other four stages.

stage one: explore

The important task in this foundational stage is to help the church to fully explore the MAP Characteristics that will be used as the basis for the MAP Church Health Check. These characteristics are developed fully in a separate resource, which contains a Scripture based reflection for each one, alongside some 'starter' questions. It is important that the church is given the time and the space to understand and adopt the characteristics, as the MAP process is based upon seeing these characteristics as the ones that God is calling them to exhibit.

Every effort has been made to ensure the Characteristics are written in a way that is appropriate for any context and tradition. However, in exploring them, the church is free to amend or adapt the language used in order that they fit more easily into the culture and tradition of the church. The resources are available as Word documents in order that this can be done.

There is, though, a word of caution. It may be tempting to make substantive changes to, or even remove, the parts of these characteristics that the church finds difficult. However, these characteristics have been found to be common across a wide range of churches of every type, in every context, tradition and spirituality, and are based firmly in Scripture. There would therefore need to be extremely good reason to make such changes. It is more likely that doing so will prevent the church from tackling an area that, though challenging, is vital to their response to God's call.

stage two: reflect

During the second stage of the MAP process, the church is asked to review honestly the extent to which they believe the church is already exhibiting each of the characteristics. To do that, there are questionnaires that should be handed out to every member of the church.

Two types of questionnaires are available; you can use either, depending on which is more appropriate for your church (or you can adapt the language or style of them for your own context):

- **A short questionnaire**

This is a simple, single sheet questionnaire, suitable for small churches. Whilst it's a lot less involved and takes a lot less time, it is very 'broad brush' and will give little indication of which aspects of the characteristics the church is demonstrating and which it is not. This may make discerning the way forward later more difficult.

- **A full questionnaire**

This questionnaire has separate sheets for each characteristic. Each contains a series of six questions, each on a different area of the characteristic. Although the questionnaire is longer, it gives a much clearer idea of the areas of each characteristic in which the church is yet to develop. The results are also likely to be more objective (and therefore closer to the real situation) as they are based on more specific, evidence-based questions.

The questionnaires should be completed in the context of prayer and listening to God, and ensuring that as many as possible from the church are able to have their say.

In addition to the two main questionnaires, we are hoping to have a version that can be completed by children and young people with the help of their parents, carers or group leaders, so that they are able to have their say about the church.

stage three: discern

During this stage, the church will need to spend some time prayerfully considering the responses from the questionnaires. The aim is to discern which two or three characteristics it is most important for you to focus on developing as a church in the coming season. These are most likely to be the ones with the lowest scores from the reflect stage, but they may not be. It is important to do this work in the context of prayer, listening for the guidance of God's Holy Spirit.

The full questionnaires for the MAP CHC also have two text box responses on each sheet, where respondents can indicate specific things to celebrate and ideas for moving forward. If the long questionnaires have been used any responses may be helpful.

Some sort of 'multi-voting' process (see the MAP resource), used in the context of prayer and worship, may well be helpful here to discern the areas that the church is being called to.

stage four: prepare

This stage involves preparing how God is calling the church to grow and change. As with the previous stage, the full questionnaires (and particularly the text box responses) will be helpful – perhaps even more so than in the previous stage. They will help the team to see which specific areas it may be right to work in by looking at the individual questions on each form. If the short questionnaires have been used, further work may be needed to listen to the whole church about how God is leading them.

[getting help](#)

web pages

Our web pages on the Diocesan website have more information about the MAP process, including a range of downloadable guides, tools and resources. These resources will grow over time.

Go to www.derby.anglican.org and select [Mission Action Planning](#) under the [Mission](#) section.

the parish support office

It is always good to have someone alongside you when you're doing something new, for advice, to act as a sounding board and to point you towards other help and support.

That's where the parish support office comes in. As well as developing and offering the materials and tools contained in the MAP for Derby Diocese process, we're also here to help you at every stage of the process in your church as you carry out the work, from introducing it to the church leadership and launching it in the church, right through to making the detailed plans. Typically, we might get involved in one or more of the following ways, although this list isn't exhaustive and we will always look to work with a church in the way that best suits that church:

- Speaking to leadership teams
- Facilitating away days
- Providing training, preaching and teaching
- Offering advice on tools, techniques and approaches
- Walking alongside as a 'critical friend' during every stage of the MAP process

You can contact us at Church House, and we'll then put you in touch with the person most likely to be able to help.

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