



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 basics

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 surveys that should be handed out to every member of the church.

Three types of survey are available; you can use any of them, 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 general survey**
This is a simple, single sheet survey, suitable for anyone to complete. It's suited primarily for small churches. Whilst it's very short (just eight tick-box responses), it is also '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 general survey**
This survey is longer, having six tick-box responses for each of the characteristics (for a total of forty-eight). It is still designed for anyone to complete, without having any background to the process. Each response focuses on a different area of a single characteristic. Although the survey is more involved, it gives a much clearer idea of the areas of each characteristic in which the church is yet to develop.
- **A leaders' survey**
This survey is the most comprehensive and has separate sheets for each characteristic. Each contains a series of six statements, each on a different area of the characteristic. However, the language and concepts are more involved and so (as the name suggests) this would be more suitable for leaders in the church to give a fuller response alongside the general surveys. Respondents will need to be more confident in their views of the church. However, the quality of the feedback will be another step up because of its comprehensive nature.

Whichever survey you use, they are designed to work together. Each statement in the short survey addresses an equivalent section in the full and leader surveys (in the same order), and the six statements for each section in the full survey address the same areas of the same characteristics in the leaders' survey (again, in the same order). Therefore, you can use a combination of all three surveys, if you wish, and collate the results easily.

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

stage three: discern

During this stage, the church will need to spend some time prayerfully considering the responses from the surveys. 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 leaders' survey for the MAP CHC also has two text box responses on each sheet, where respondents can indicate specific things to celebrate and ideas for moving forward. If they 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 and leader's surveys (and particularly the text box responses), if used, 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 responses on each form. If the short surveys have been used, further work may be needed to listen to the whole church about how God is leading them.

running a church health check survey

Completing a MAP Church Health Check is not a complex process and should be manageable in any size church. The following steps should help you to get the most out of the tool.

introducing the process and characteristics

The Church Health Check is best done by involving the whole church (see above). So, for everyone to have the best chance to contribute, you will need to introduce it carefully.

Hopefully, as a part of stage one of the MAP for Derby Diocese process, you will have spent some time with the church explaining and exploring the characteristics together. Without this, the MAP Church Health Check (and indeed the whole MAP process) is unlikely to be effective. This may take some time, but it is time well spent. You can use the 'MAP Characteristics' resource to help you plan a sermon series or to discuss and reflect on the characteristics in small groups.

You will then need to introduce the Church Health Check process itself. The MAP for Derby Diocese resources includes an introductory leaflet to help you do this – 'Introducing the MAP Church Health Check'. However, it will be best if this leaflet is supported by careful explanations at other times, such as on Sunday mornings or in PCC meetings.

In introducing the MAP Church Health Check, you will need to explain:

- **Why the tool is being used**
Explain that the tool will help the church to see how well they are already exhibiting the characteristics of the church God is calling them to be and will help them to hear in which areas God may be challenging the church to grow and change. The tool will also help them, further on in the process, to see how far they have come in responding to that call and challenge.
- **How the tool works**
The introductory leaflet will help you here, but you will also need to say how you are planning to use the tool. Talk about the surveys and how they will be used. Ensure people know that all responses are anonymous, and no personal data will be requested. Talk about what will happen to the responses and how they will be used.
- **What you would like them to do**
Explain when the surveys will be available, how they should be completed and when and to where they should be returned. Make sure they understand that you would like them to complete the whole survey, that there are no right or wrong answers and that it is each person's view that you would like.

completing the surveys

The next step will be to complete the survey. Here, you can use the short, the full or the leader's survey (or any combination). Choose the right survey for each group. For example, you might like to give the leader surveys to the PCC, the full survey to regular church members and the short survey to those who come to a more 'fringe' group, (e.g. a parent and toddler group).

Typical attendance patterns are such that you will need to make the surveys available on more than one week to ensure you get the best response – three weeks will be a minimum. If you would like people to fill them in at church, make sure you provide pens. Make it easy for people to return them, with people at the door receiving them or a clearly marked box in a prominent place in the church.

collating the results

Once you've received all the surveys back, you will need to collate the information so that it can be easily presented and understood. To do this, you will need to produce a 'score' for each characteristic and, if you have used the full or leader's survey, for each of the six aspects of each characteristic.

Each survey uses the same scoring system, so that they can be directly compared. Therefore, whichever survey has been used, each response can be given a score out of five:

- strongly disagree = 1 point
- disagree = 2 points
- neither agree nor disagree = 3 points
- agree = 4 points
- strongly agree = 5 points

Here's how the surveys work together:

- The **short survey** has just eight questions, each relating to one characteristic. The questions are in the same order as the characteristics in the MAP Characteristics resource. If used in combination with the other surveys, assume that the respondent gave the same score for *each aspect* of a characteristic that they did for that characteristic.
- The **full survey** is divided into eight sections, each section containing six questions. Each section equates to one characteristic, and each question in each section equates to one aspect of that characteristic. The sections and questions are in the same order as those in the MAP Characteristics resource.
- The **leader's survey** contains the same characteristics and aspects as the MAP Characteristics resource, and each is scored.

You will need to ascertain, for *each aspect of each characteristic*:

- The total *score* for each aspect (i.e. the scores for that aspect added together)
- The total *number of responses* for each aspect (i.e. how many people completed that response on their survey; note that this is *not* the same thing as the number of surveys returned; some people will return a survey but leave some responses blank)

Then, for each aspect, you can find a percentage score by using the following simple formula:

total score for that aspect ÷ (total number of responses for that aspect x 5) x 100

Of course, if you're only using the short survey, you will only need to do this for each characteristic, rather than each aspect, giving you eight scores.

This may seem like a lot of effort... why not just add up the scores instead of all this counting responses and doing maths?

It's very rare that everyone will fill in every question on every survey. That means you will have a different number of responses for each question – so if you just compare the totals, you're not comparing like with like, because the maximum score you could get for each aspect will be different. Doing it this way, what you're doing is finding the maximum score given the number of responses, then finding the percentage of that maximum that was actually scored – thus you get a score you can compare, even if the number of responses varied across each aspect.

communicating the results

Having asked for responses from the whole congregation, it's important that you take the time to communicate the results of the survey promptly and fully in the church. Otherwise, the church will lose interest and ownership with the process, thinking that all their effort has just gone into a 'black hole', and it will be much more difficult to engage them later in the MAP process.

using the results

The results of the Church Health Check will give you a very good indication of where the church might not be showing the characteristics of the church God is calling you to be, and therefore where God might be calling the church to grow and change. This information can be vital as you move forward with stage three of MAP for Derby Diocese.

However, there are limitations to the data you've collected. You will need to continue to listen in other ways in order to build up a reliable picture.

- **Continue to listen to the church**

The Church Health Check is asking about subjective opinions; in other words, what the church *thinks* is the situation, rather than what the situation *actually* is. Most of the time, those two are very close (especially if you had a good number of responses from a wide cross-section of the church). However, it doesn't necessarily have to be the case. So, you will need to continue to listen to the church through story and experience, and also to what other measures are telling you (see the MAP resource 'Measuring Church Growth and Health'). If these are all saying the same thing, then the chances are it's an accurate picture.

- **Listen to the community**

Very often the church can have a skewed view of themselves. This isn't because they're being intentionally deceitful, it's just that as we inhabit a particular world view, we tend only to look from that point of view. So, you will also need to listen to the wider community (see the MAP resources 'Community Audit Ideas' and 'Community Listening Exercise').

- **Listen to God**

Of course, above all, we're wanting to hear from God about how he is calling the church to grow and change – so it's important that we continue to listen to him in prayer.

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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