



Establishing Mission Communities

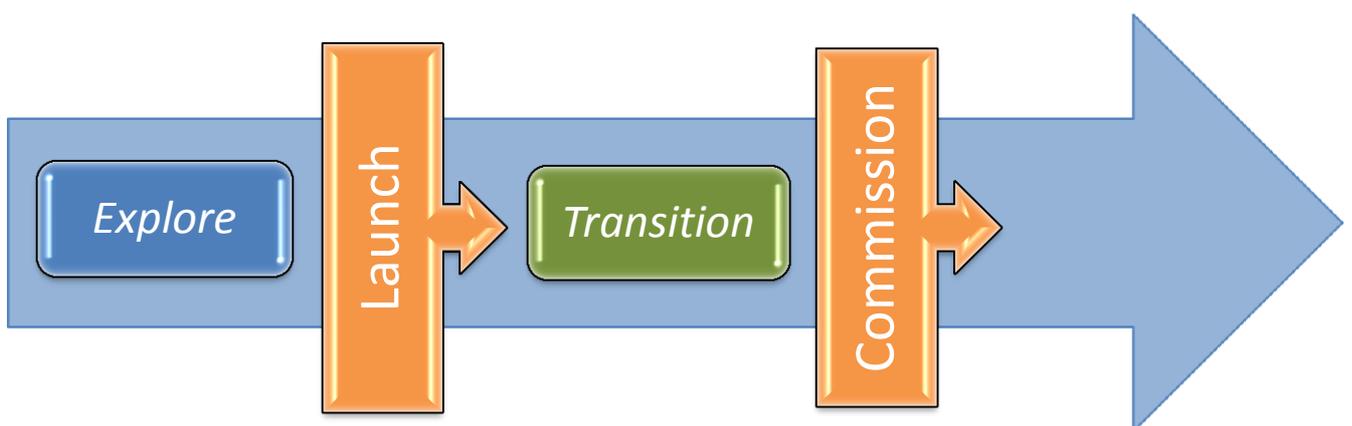
Archways

Introduction

Across Cumbria we seek to provide an opportunity for every person to discover more of God and God’s purpose for their lives, and for churches and Christians to be encouraged and enabled to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ and live the gospel.

As part of this commitment mission communities will be established across the county. These will be intentional in mission and outreach, collaborative and supportive, enabling of people’s gifts and ministries, ecumenical and include a variety of churches and styles, will establish new expressions of church alongside the traditional, and ensure a Christian presence, witness and care in every place.

This document sets out what needs to be in place in order to create a mission community. The process has phases leading to ‘archways’ that mark movement to next phase until everything is in place. There is no fixed timescale but it is expected that each phase will take a little while to complete. This is because mission communities will introduce significant change in the way in which churches are organised, and will shift the emphasis of where churches place their priorities. It takes time for these changes to be understood, prayed-over, owned and then put into practice. We want these things to happen soon but they cannot be rushed.



But of course, this is just the beginning.

Explore

The first phase ensures that, as best as possible, people understand and support what mission communities are about and intend to achieve. The completion of this phase, once consent has been given, will be marked by the Launch of the mission community – an ‘archway’ representing the agreement and understanding of local Christian communities and of the wider church in Cumbria that it is time to move ahead and work out how this will happen in practice.

Consent to Launch the mission community will normally be given when:

- The various churches in the proposed mission community area have been fully involved in the discussions and preparations. These discussions and preparations will always involve all Church of England, United Reformed Church and Methodist Churches in the proposed area – these three denominations in Cumbria have formally committed to work closely together and to the mission community process. Other denominations are welcome to participate in different ways in the mission community, and will be invited to be part of these initial (and subsequent) conversations and planning.
- Each local church understands the emphasis on making and growing disciples – a renewed emphasis on mission and outreach and the church connecting in witness, worship and care with those not usually involved with church.
 - Each local church understands what mission communities mean and how they will work, and what (in general terms) it will involve for that local church.
 - Each local church had been consulted about the shape and size of their mission community, and the mission community has an agreed geographical boundary.
- People have prayed and talked and have come to a point where they are warm to what is being proposed, even though they may also be apprehensive. Churches recognise that, in God’s grace, mission communities will strengthen what churches are doing, will strengthen the involvement and ministry of different Christians, and will strengthen our witness and work beyond the church.
- Each denomination has been consulted and gives its support to what is being proposed through its relevant structures. Denominations have different bodies with responsibility for church and parish arrangements, namely the diocesan Deanery Synod and Mission and Pastoral Committee, the URC Area Pastoral Committee and the Methodist District Policy Committee. However the main work of shaping mission communities, supporting and critiquing them, and working with them as they move through the different phases will be done by Area Steering Groups, groups that have an ecumenical make-up.
- Area Steering Groups, in consultation with their Strategy Development Officer and hence with the relevant denominations bodies and denominational leaders, will determine when mission communities move to the next phase in their development.
- Sufficient plans and arrangements are in place to allow the proposed grouping to begin operating effectively as a mission community during its transitional phase, including arrangements for interim leadership at the mission community and local church level and initial plans for enhanced mission and outreach.

The above list is designed to ensure that people and churches have a proper chance to think about mission communities and what it will mean *before* they begin. This first phase is intended to ensure that people are prayerfully aware of what a mission community might mean and gain a commitment to that change before it happens. Different churches and different Christians will have different levels of commitment, enthusiasm and uncertainty. This exploratory phase enables that range of views to be aired in an open and prayerful way so no one feels bamboozled or ignored.

At the end of the 'Explore' phase the fledgling mission community will have the consent of both local Christian communities and the wider church in Cumbria. It is then Launched and moves to 'Transition': determining how it will operate and function in more detail and starting work in earnest as a mission community.

Transition

Please note.

A significant period of time may pass between the completion of the Explore phase and the completion of the Transition phase. This second phase introduces all sorts of vital (and challenging) decisions and arrangements, each designed in different ways to make sure that the mission community truly is able to make a difference to the way in which it helps people in Cumbria discover more of God and God's purpose for their lives.

While all these things are being prayed through and talked about lots can should to happen, and the work of the church can flourish. Once the mission community has been formally Launched it can begin to operate to all intents and purposes as if it had already been Commissioned but without necessarily having satisfied all the criteria that mark a mission community as ready for that final stage in the journey. It is a period when new ideas and methods or working can be tried, when intensive thought can be given to how transformational change will be brought about and during which people may be called out into positions of ministry, mission and leadership.

This section mentions 'plans' and 'planning' in many places. 'Plans' are not blueprints, with everything determined. Good plans need to be adaptable and responsive to what God is doing and the surprises God brings. But there needs to be a clear indication of the sort of things that will happen in the new mission community, and the sort of timescales involved, and the resources that will be needed to make this happen. Plans will be written down, not in great wordy report, but in an easy to understand and accessible way, so that anyone who wishes can see what is being proposed and where they fit in.

During the Transition phase there will generally be a period of continued planning to underpin the formation of the mission community, but the Launch event will mark the point at which the fledgling mission community comes together and begins operating as a mission community.

It will be appropriate for a mission community to be Commissioned, marking the end of the Transition phase, when:

- It has an appointed mission community Leader (and that person is part of various networks for training and support).

- It has a leadership team of laity and clergy established, praying and working together and in which clergy and authorised lay ministers (in particular) are clear about their roles and opportunities.
- It has identified its priorities and made its plans for mission and outreach, drawing on ideas from the mission planning that already taken place across the denominations and churches and utilising the expertise of the Reach Team.
 - It has identified within its mission planning specific ideas designed to strengthen the welcome and accessibility of existing church life and worship, and has explored new ideas to draw people in (described in **God for All** as 'InReach').
 - It has identified new ideas to connect with people beyond the existing patterns of church life and worship (fresh expressions) – described in **God for All** as 'OutReach'.
 - It has considered how it will sustain and develop missional engagement with various significant organisations within the mission community area, including church and community schools.
 - It has demonstrated its ability to bring about transformational change in its mission and outreach.
- It has explored together how the gifts, skills and ministry of Christian people in the Mission Community will be discerned, strengthened and encouraged, and will be used across different churches in the mission community.
- The fledgling mission community has established a way for all churches to work together (a Group or Council or similar) that involves clergy and laity from each local church community, so that all churches are represented and able to participate.
- It has agreed plans for the discernment and appointment of Local Church Leaders.
- It has a realistic and sustainable plan for financing ministry and mission across the mission community.
- It has a 'timeline', showing how all this fits together, and is achievable and manageable, and holding everyone to account for making sure it happens.
- It has found a consultant or 'critical friend' who will be someone outside the fledgling mission community and who will help enable all that is needed to become a mission community and then be involved as the mission community develops. This person will be described as the Mission Community Consultant.
- It has worked out how administration in the mission community will be handled (for example with a dedicated, paid or voluntary administrator or some other arrangement).
- It has demonstrated that it can run successfully as a mission community

Archdeacons will be closely involved, as Strategy Development Officers, with mission communities while they develop their plans. They will serve across the denominations in this capacity although they obviously have no jurisdiction beyond the Church of England. They will

help ensure that the variety of ideas across Cumbria have a measure of consistency and depth and that the plans being developed are likely to lead to transformational change in the life and witness of churches – that ‘mission communities’ are wholeheartedly about *mission*. The Strategy Development Officer appointed by the denominations will both critique and encourage what mission communities are planning, and will then sign-off those plans so that the mission community can be formally Commissioned and then in God’s grace will work to make **God for All** a reality in its area. Commissioning will usually involve a service of celebration, thanksgiving and commitment, along with a massive party!

Commissioned

Mission communities that have reached the point of being Commissioned will have already achieved a great deal, and will deserve enormous congratulations. But, of course, reaching this point is not an end in itself – it is the beginning of a revitalised approach to helping all people discover more of God and how God wants them to live their lives and use their gifts and talents in his service and for the good of all.

- Mission communities will continue to carefully and prayerfully review and upgrade their plans and ideas, to ensure that they are achieving what they set out to achieve, and they are responding to new opportunities and possibilities.
- Mission community Leaders (and the Leadership team) will be particularly responsible for monitoring, energising and enabling what is happening. However everyone in the mission community will share a responsibility for making it work and for making sure that churches are increasingly focussed on connecting with those who are not regularly part of church.
- Each mission community will continue to have a ‘Mission Community Consultant’ who will help by prayerfully challenging and encouraging what is happening.
- Archdeacons (or in some cases someone delegated by an Archdeacon to have this responsibility) will have a particular involvement with each mission community and with each mission community Leader in monitoring progress and helping people make their mission commitment a reality.
- Each mission community will be expected to share their insights, experiences (and mistakes) with other mission communities across Cumbria, so that we learn from each other and are energised by each other.

While all this is happening...

As the church and its work in Cumbria is re-imagined, and we explore and transition towards mission communities, there are many things that churches can be doing together while these processes are worked out. For example:

- Regular prayer together.
- Specific mission or outreach events and projects.
- Social events and shared projects.
- Shared learning groups.
- Conversations about, for example, stewardship or administration or shared resources.
- Shared conversations between people with a similar role or interest. For example, church treasurers, children's leaders, church wardens and stewards, music and worship leaders.

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