

God for All

Mission Communities

The Garden Planner – How To Grow A Mixed Ecology of Church

Welcome

Hello and thank you for reading this Mission Community Garden Planner.

The booklet aims to help support, energise, and encourage all of our mission communities in Cumbria as they consider how best to flourish locally: as churches, as faith communities, and as individual Christians and disciples of Jesus.

It all sits within our county's ecumenical God for All vision and strategy and its four central themes - Follow Daily, Speak Boldly, Care Deeply and Tread Gently. Those themes are at the heart of our work to grow God's Kingdom and underpin everything in this booklet.

When thinking about how mission communities can flourish, people have found the imagery of a garden helpful. The Garden Planner draws on that as mission communities are invited to consider what their next steps will be.

We hope you find it helpful in sparking conversations in your local context and as you consider what 'flourishing' looks like.

Follow Daily

Speak Boldly

Care Deeply

Tread Gently

Introduction

In this document, we are helping people to develop their Mission Community by comparing it to planning and growing a garden.

Take a moment to think about what a flourishing garden looks like. It might be your own garden, an allotment, a communal garden or the imagined garden of your dreams.

Everyone's ideal picture will be slightly different; some will have a bigger veg patch, others may tend towards formal flower beds and manicured lawns, whilst some may prefer to allow nature to run its course a little, wildflowers and grasses the order of the day.







That's the beauty of the garden. Each may look and feel slightly different, but all are focussed on a specific aim: to flourish within its setting.

And that's the same for our Mission Communities: each mutually collaborative community is working slightly differently within its local context. But all have the central aim of growing mission - the whole work of God upon the earth.

So as together we further explore what it takes for our mission communities to continue to flourish, the image of the garden is a useful one to have in our mind's eye. There are many parallels which can be drawn between a healthy garden and a healthy mission community.

As we continue to step out on our God for All journey and give ourselves prayerfully and practically to God's work, let's use this imagery to think more about how we can continue to grow His Kingdom in Cumbria.

Who are your gardeners?

It doesn't matter how big or small a garden is; the spirit of teamwork is core when it comes to growth.

Let's take a country house estate, for example, where there may well be a head gardener (the mission community leader) who brings oversight to the project: the big picture thinking. But it's too large an area for them to tend themselves. So, in collaboration with others, they need to develop a vision for what that estate garden will look like, what areas need to be the immediate focus and which team of gardeners will be set to which task.

Conversely, in terms of scale a window box garden may be much smaller but it still needs to be carefully thought through too. What plants will flourish in that setting? Where is the predominant light and shade? Even though it's a smaller undertaking, there still needs to be discussion to establish how to maximise space and to ensure people are there to tend the soil, water the plants, weed and prune accordingly.

It's that same sense of collaboration which is fundamental to the success of a mission community. The head gardener can't take the responsibility for tending all areas. Teams of gardeners (lay and ordained colleagues, pioneers, children and family workers, worship leaders, congregation members) need to have oversight of their own specific areas of mission (their 'flowerbeds'), whilst appreciating where they sit within the mission community (the garden) as a whole.

And in a garden, when two or more people are simply turning over soil together to prepare beds for growth there's a wonderful sense of teamwork, collaboration and achievement. There's a united goal and aim. It's that same spirit which we can bring to flourishing mission communities.

Garden Features

Regardless of what kind of garden you may tend, each will have certain key features which are integral to its make-up and which draw the eye: a pond or stream, a greenhouse, trees, plants, shrubs, outbuildings, paved areas and patios.

There could be any such mix and a different weighting could be placed on the various key features. But all combine to create that sense of growth and revitalisation.

The Six Things

By the same token there are six features of mission communities which are central to growth, regardless of size, shape or locality. To flourish our mission communities we are being asked to focus on:

1) establishing patterns of **prayer.**
2) encouraging the **discipleship** and spiritual growth of all Christians.
3) exciting **vocations** to make the most of the ministry gifts with which God has endowed all his people.
4) **stewardship** of our gifts to resource the Church's mission.
5) **operating effectively** together without creating additional layers of governance.
6) enabling collaborative **mission** at local level.

It's that mix – placing such importance on prayerfully and practically working together – which will see growth in disciples, in energy and common purpose with our mission communities in a way that will enrich the local church and extend its mission.

Garden Planning

When it comes to garden design, planning is key. And that's just the same for your mission community.

Let's imagine for a moment that we're looking at a piece of rough earth. This is the 'patch' from which we want to see our garden grow. But before we put a spade in the ground there are important points to ponder...



How do you want to use your space?

That's the crucial question for any gardener and likewise it's the same for any mission community. Come together to discuss what should be the primary aims of your mission community – is there a particular focus on youth work, drawing alongside other community groups, using arts and nature as missional tools? There are so many opportunities but it's up to you as a mission community to direct your energies.

What are your priorities?

The amount of space and resources you have to hand can impact a garden's design. Both can be limiting factors so think carefully about what it is you've got to have in your garden. Sometimes, over-ambitious planting – trying to do everything at once - creates unsustainable maintenance, whereas a few well-placed plants can have a much greater impact, even if other areas have to remain uncultivated (for now). Again, the same goes for your mission community. Think carefully about the overall resources you have to hand and how you can use those to the greatest effect. For example, Jesus began with just twelve disciples but used them and others to grow the early church. What are the things you could do in your setting that are missional? Are there people or projects you could concentrate on who will change the landscape?

What will grow best here?

Plants in a garden grow best where they are happiest – where the soil, light, rainfall and surrounding plants suit them best. All of this needs to be carefully checked out and tested to ensure the right plants are introduced to flourish within that environment. And a mission community is just the same. You need to consider what it is that will grow well in your setting and what will be a blessing. **Engage with as many people as possible** to talk through what is the bedrock of your community, what will grow well and what may struggle to take hold. This is not about curbing ambition but more about considering what will grow well in a mission community setting, whilst also allowing time to 'tend the soil' gradually for new growth in new ways.

Know when to plant

Again, it takes careful planning when deciding when to plant seeds, to nurture them (perhaps in a greenhouse), to help seedlings 'harden off' and then choose the moment to transplant them outdoors. So many factors need to be thought through – heat, sunlight and capacity to tend are just a few. The same goes for mission communities too. Try to prioritise your mission, according to what will make the biggest impact with the resources you have. Consider when is the right time to introduce new phases of mission and to where. Make sure the shoots are strong enough to develop and grow when introduced into your mission community context.

- **Garden planning**
  - How do you want to use your space?
  - What are your must-haves?
  - What are your garden's fundamentals?
  - Know when to plant
  - What else should we consider?
- **What are our available resources?**
  - The well-established plants
  - Grafts or cuttings
  - Sowing seeds
  - Tending the soil
  - Landscape and environment
  - What other resources are available?
- **Who are your gardeners?**
  - Mission community leader
  - Ordained Clergy
  - Volunteers
  - Formal lay roles
  - Children, families and youth
  - Administrator
  - Who else might help?
- **How are the gardeners nourished?**
  - Communal prayer
  - Study/ theological reflection
  - Diversity and inclusion
- **What tools are there for the garden?**
  - Boost growth in your mission community
  - Tool shed resources and support
  - Financial models & targeted funding
- **What weeds are affecting our garden?**
  - Challenges are faced at a local level
  - Duplication of effort
  - What else could affect our garden?

What are our available resources?

As gardeners we've looked at the lie of the land and carefully thought through what it is we want from a particular 'space' and the external factors which could influence the rate of growth. Now we can look at what shrubs and plants are available and think through what may work well together in terms of companion planting and how we'll do it.

The tool shed

In a garden, the **tool shed** is the 'go to' place to pick the right implement for the task at hand. In the same way we are building our own tool shed which mission communities can benefit from. Through the God for All website we will be providing a range of resources, support and guidance on ways that together we can grow a mixed ecology.

The well-established plants

The **traditional patterns of ministry** that remain deeply embedded in our communities will continue to be. Over time, these will change, but the transition is gradual from one planting to another. These include Parishes and Benefices, Circuits, chapels, other places of worship, Baptisms, weddings, funerals, confirmations and membership. Other well-established plants include the ancient patterns of prayer and spiritual traditions that can still be profoundly life-giving today and, above all, the eternal Gospel itself, proclaimed afresh in each generation.

Grafts or cuttings

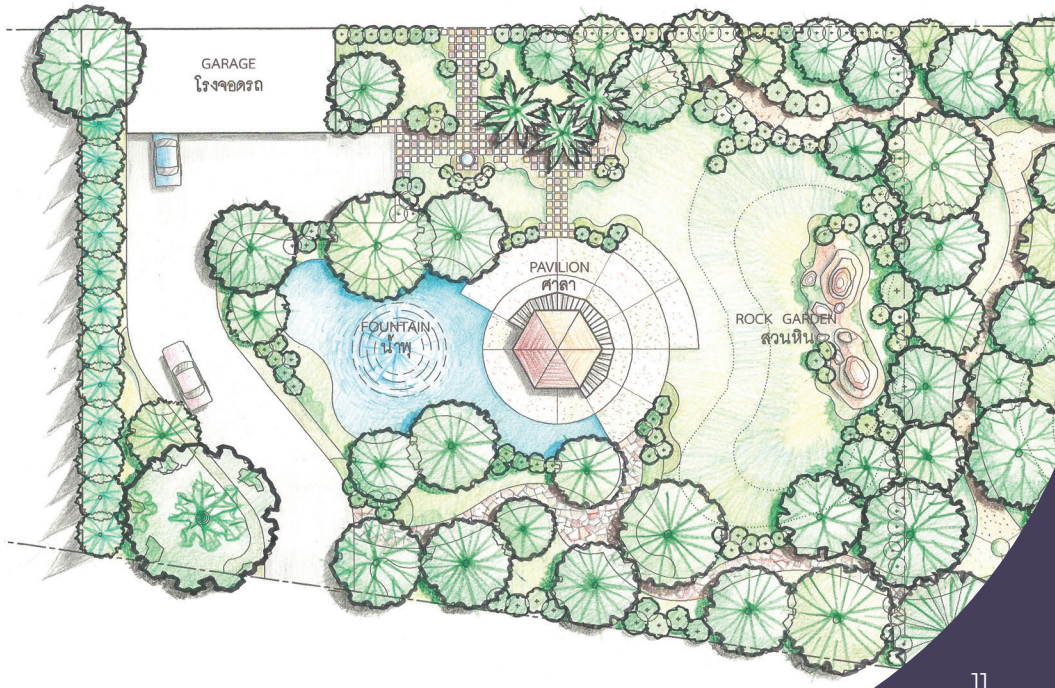
A **graft** is where you take well-established root stock and grow something out from it that works in a new way or place. A Fresh Expression is an equivalent in the Church – where the roots are based on the traditional elements of Christian worship and mission, but the visible expression of it looks very different. **Cuttings** are taken from parts of a well-established plant and placed in new soil that grows a new plant, as vigorous as the old. Church planting would be a good example of this.

Sowing seeds

Sometimes, in a garden, you take seeds, sow them and see what grows best in a particular place. **Pioneering** is an example of this in Church life, where we take the seeds of the Gospel out into the world and see what grows from them. This could include work and mission around chaplaincies, schools and youth work, community partnerships, Foodbanks and Warm Spaces.

Tending the soil

In a garden, a lot of work is done to improve the soil to make it more receptive to the seed. An effective digital presence will be an important part of the Church of the future. So, think about the digital impact your mission community could make through use of websites, streaming, social media, digital elements in services, internet connectivity in areas where there wasn't any. Likewise think about your overall accessibility as churches within a mission community setting: Are you accessible in your approach? Are you welcoming? What are your buildings and assets?



Landscape and environment

Think about what other features there are in your mission community and what opportunities they represent. Hospitals, schools, community centres, big employers, places of gathering in the community and any geographical places of interest all offer chances to connect and grow in new ways.



Who are the gardeners?

Remember collaboration and teamwork are key. There may be a mission community leader but one person can't do it all on their own. So, think about what your team has to offer in terms of ministry roles (ordained, lay, different denominations), other paid roles (administrator, youth work, children and families worker), formal lay roles (warden, safeguarding officer, stewards, PCC etc.), volunteers, (welcome teams, Dementia-Friendly Church, Eco Church, Sunday school/Sunday kids, parent/carer groups, community café, Foodbank, pastoral provision, night shelter/homeless provision, money matters/ debt support, breakfast/after school clubs, mental health support, activity groups for older people and other community activity groups).

How are the gardeners nourished?

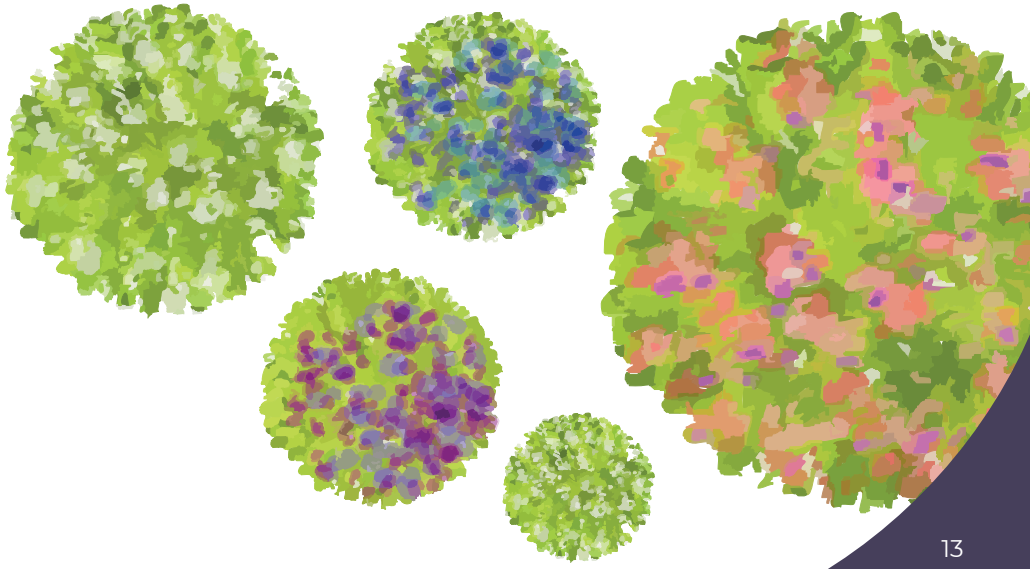
Consider how discipleship is supported through worship patterns, services, communal prayer, personal spirituality, study/theological reflection, the nurture of new disciples, spiritual direction/mentoring/ vocations, stewardship, diversity and inclusion, relating to the wider church, confidence in evangelism.

What fertiliser is there for the garden?

Consider what is available to boost growth in your mission community: the practical resources and support on offer in terms of people's giftings, skills and time. And think through what best financial models can benefit growth through careful, targeted funding.

What weeds are affecting our garden?

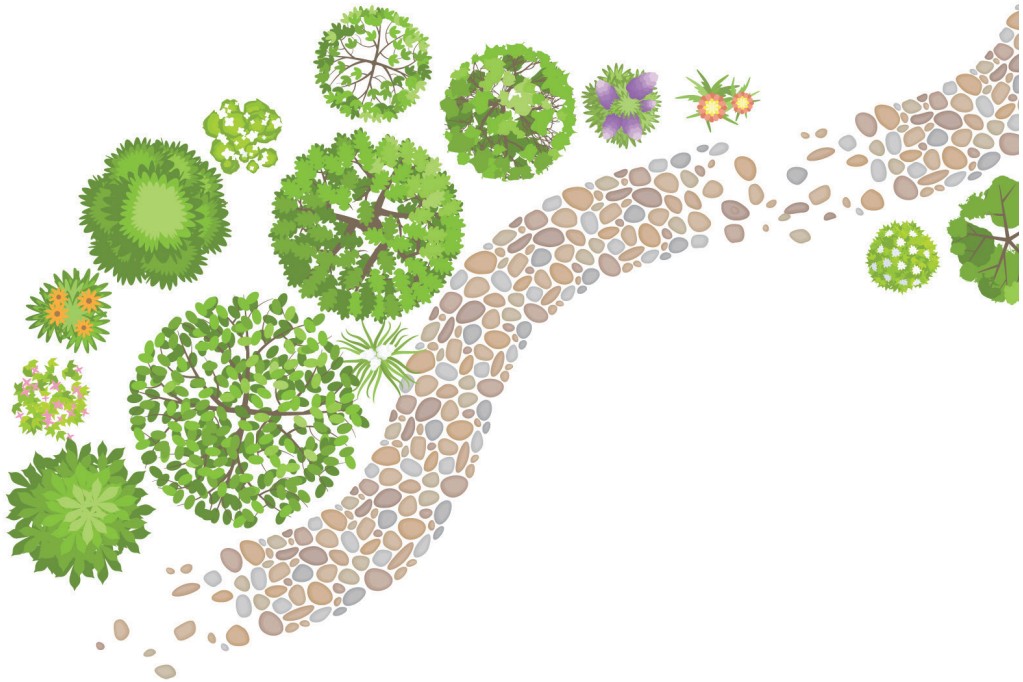
Take time to think through what challenges are faced at a local level and consider the things that may be draining energy from the mission community. Always think about how local churches can learn from one another and reflect upon those things which may not need to be done any more.



What a picture!

The result should be a growing and evolving garden which is perfect for your setting. It's an area where plants thrive both alone and with each other, where there's a sense of rich abundance and longevity, a space which can contend with all seasons. And it should be a place where you want to be, where you feel renewed and inspired.

The same is true for mission communities. Take time to think through what it is you want to see flourishing in particular, what appetite there is locally for new or renewed mission and the resources you have to hand.



What's Next?

We hope that you will use the 'Garden Planner - Next Steps' resource to further help spark conversations about your future focus as a mission community.

No-one is telling a mission community what to do in their 'patch'. Like a garden, it requires local knowledge to discern what will work best where. We ask each Mission Community to make sure that each of the 'Six Things' is covered, as these are the essential tasks which will enable Mission Communities to flourish for mission, but what you do under each 'thing' and how you do them should be shaped by you, your passions and hopes.

Experience suggests that a good way to navigate your next steps is:

1. Get as many people as possible across your mission community together. Play with the garden image together and try to work out what the key components of your mission community are, building up a picture of what your garden looks like. Identify what's working well, what's struggling and what new things you might like to try.

2. Once you have a picture of your garden and its potential, look again at the four themes- Follow Daily, Speak Boldly, Care Deeply and Tread Gently - and help people to think through which areas matter most to them and will energise them the most.

3. From that, you can develop a plan of what your mission community will do with its 'garden'. You can identify your teams who will work on different areas and begin a process of faithful improvisation - building on what has gone before towards the hopes you have discerned together. Don't be afraid to put some things on the Compost Heap or leave some areas fallow to allow you to concentrate on those areas where your hearts lie.

4. Lastly, have fun, work on your priorities, but keep adapting what you do as you try things.

We ask each Mission Community to make sure that each of the 'Six Things' is covered (see page 5).



Mission Communities

How does your garden grow?

For more information and contacts please visit

www.godforall.org.uk