

Mills and mines have closed but the communities are still there. Bringing hope and joy to the people who live and minister there was the

Province, who met in Manchester to discuss their own experience of



Around 11.5 million of us live in post-industrial towns, the parts of the UK which once powered the world. It was pointed out all this industry isn't quite lost – in Sheffield steel is still produced at the same level as it was in the heights of industry. However industry uses fewer staff as the world moves from people power to machines. The question for our churches is how we continue to support these communities and how does the national church support those who minister in these areas.

The day was an opportunity to hear from those who are 'on the ground' and a chance for those ministering in post-industrial towns to listen and learn from projects across the five regions.

Challenges discussed include the need to support asylum seekers in Rochdale and how the church in the Diocese of Manchester is studying population movement to work out where church resources need to be focussed in future. The message here is clear – dioceses are thinking strategically and taking sustainability seriously.

Representatives from the Diocese of Blackburn explained their programme of sports ministry to engage with men, we heard stories of challenges and preventative steps being taken by churches to reduce the number of male suicides and the need to engage with 'missing' age groups, such as 11-18 year olds and the work of dioceses with Church of England secondary schools.

Time and time again we came back to the point that for churches, life goes on, no matter what it is happening in the community the church is a supportive hub. Often post-industrial towns face similar problems to estates, a place which the church, through the Renewal and Reform programme, recognises as having great potential.

Keen to collaborate, parish twinning is thriving in the north, with parishes finding it useful to spend time with colleagues and experience different strands of the church while meeting people from different backgrounds. All the dioceses we met either had experience of parish twinning or were considering it for the near future.

The day-long workshop allowed dioceses the space to talk about the challenges faced and the steps and projects being taken to counter some of these problems. Each presentation was responded to by thought provoking questions and then in the afternoon, proactive discussions took place to consider how the national church can work with and encourage church growth in areas with real potential. After each presentation, there was an opportunity for the group to pray for each diocese and the people who work and minister to communities in each place. Other similar workshops have taken place elsewhere, such as those working in coastal towns and estates.

Projects shared at the event showed impressive, wide ranging initiatives already taking place to support communities and work being achieved thanks to the [Renewal and Reform](#) programme which aims to revitalise the church for the future.