

The Diocese of Manchester is receiving a Strategic Development Fund (SDF) grant for a project to grow sixteen new churches in six years through a network of small churches called the Antioch Network Manchester.

Manchester. It's a post-industrial city of 2.7 million people, and like many cities, it's very diverse. People from countries around the world have made their homes in the city and its surrounding areas. But, like many areas, it has seen a decline in church attendance in recent years. It's a trend that the Diocese of Manchester's small-to-small church planting team are helping to reverse with the help of an SDF grant.

The Revd John Brett, one of the programme leaders, does a lot of planting in inner cities and mill towns. 'Small churches are great in a particular way,' he says. 'They're easier to lead than bigger churches can be and are more adaptable to their environments. They find it easier to know who's there.' It's an approach that has been multiplied across the city in recent years. With small church plants, churches grow to around 50 people. When they have reached 50, the plan is to find a leader to grow another church, and the process starts again.

'We find the person and train them,' explains John. 'They gather a team. They pray, they read, they find out what they're going to do.' It's less about systems, he says, and more about relationships. 'The leader gathers their team, builds relationships, shares that vision. Those relationships then expand into small communities.'

Dylan Edwards leads a team in Rochdale. 'The Lord answers prayer,' he says. 'In Rochdale we were starting from scratch. We had no team – there was no one there.' But now, he says, 'We have a prayer meeting every Sunday which has been a real blessing – just to partner with people, to pray with people, to encourage people. That's been my highlight.'



Leadership is an important element of the teams. 'You want leaders who take that group to heart and really care about them, really get involved in their lives,' says John.

One way of doing this is using leaders who are already in their midst. Rochdale has an Iranian Bible study on a Monday. For most of the people attending the group, Farsi is their first language. 'One of the people who comes has good English, but their first language is Farsi. We've raised them up into a leadership role there as well, inside the Bible study, rather than sending someone in. It encourages that person as well,' says Dylan.

As well as Bible study groups in other languages, some of the churches offer written translations. 'We tend to use Romanian and Kurdish on our slides,' explains John. 'The speaker writes out a simplified version of their talk using short sentences and then Google translates it. It does a good job. We back translate to check that it hasn't gone horribly wrong, and then we hand out multi-lingual sheets.'

But church planting isn't always smooth. 'It is difficult,' says John. 'When you church plant, some people feel this is a magic bullet. It's not going to solve all of the problems. People have to want to do it. But the Diocese of Manchester was amazing at getting into a vision. The whole process has been really exciting. It has been incredibly encouraging for me to see that vision growing.'

Watch the full interview at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoB4N1uqFVs>

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