

CHURCH PLANTING AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

A STATEMENT BY THE HOUSE OF BISHOPS

This paper from the House of Bishops sets out some principles for the implementation of church planting, and the development of new congregations, as part of the mission of the Church. It is commended by the House as a guide for dioceses, deaneries and parishes on good practice in this area. It is deliberately kept short, in terms of key principles. More material on both the theology and ecclesiology of church planting, and practical advice on the details of how to do church planting well, has been developed, and is available from the [Centre for Church Planting and Growth](#), as well as from other sources.

Context

1. The Church of England is part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. These four inseparable 'marks' of the Church according to the Nicene creed follow from its reality as the body of Christ, from the union of its members with him and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. While they convey first and foremost what the Church receives by God's grace, they also indicate how it should live and act in the world because of that grace. Having been blessed with 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace', the Church is called to 'make every effort' to maintain it (Eph. 4.3). Sanctified by the Spirit, it seeks for lives to be marked ever more deeply by 'the holiness without which no one will see the Lord' (Heb. 12.14). Catholic because it is 'the fullness of him who fills all in all' (Eph.1.23), it longs to embrace the full diversity of humanity created by God. Having heard and heeded the gospel proclaimed by the apostles, the Church is sent out as the apostles were to declare the one gospel in every generation and make disciples of all nations. It is shown to be 'apostolic' as it participates in the apostolic mission.
2. Church planting is one among a variety of ways by which the Church of England seeks to share in the apostolic mission by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ and drawing people into the adventure of discipleship. It is complementary to, and not a replacement for, other vehicles for mission, understood according to the breadth of meaning set out in the [Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission](#)¹. While church planting is generally characterized by a focus on the first two marks, that does not entail a neglect of the other three. All are integral to the Church's witness.

¹ The Five Marks of Mission are: To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; To teach, baptise and nurture new believers; To respond to human need by loving service; To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation; To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth. (*Bonds of Affection-1984 ACC-6 p49, Mission in a Broken World-1990 ACC-8 p101*)

3. As bishops, we are committed to adopting an approach to mission and church growth within our dioceses that embraces both the contribution of traditional forms of ministry (e.g. through our parishes, chaplaincies and schools), and the contribution of newer forms (e.g. through our church plants, fresh expressions etc). We see no binary divide between traditional and new, as forms of church evolve. Church planting itself includes a rich variety of activity that could be viewed on a spectrum between, at one end, attempts to establish completely new Christian communities under Bishops' Mission Orders and, at the other end, the revitalisation of some among our existing parish churches. We value initiatives across the whole range of this spectrum, while imaginative thinking about new possibilities for church planting should continue.
4. The responsibility of bishops for leadership in mission was recognized in the early centuries. Bishops were seen to bear the mantle of the apostles by embodying the Church's being sent out in the power of the Spirit to share the good news of Christ, and by leading their dioceses in the apostolic mission. Many more recent examples of bishops as missionaries could be given, while this aspect of our calling is also relevant to our roles in teaching the faith and formation for discipleship and ministry. In the Church of England today, bishops undertake to pursue and support the full range of contributions to mission and church growth noted in the previous paragraph, creating and normalising a pattern of diversity, of parish and other traditional forms alongside newer forms. This pattern of diversity is the 'new normal'. It requires leadership from bishops in leading our dioceses into understanding and embracing this diversity.
5. The nature and composition of the new diversity will vary according to local context. But there is a role for both traditional forms and new forms in all our dioceses and in most areas.

Practice

6. Planting new churches is a long-established and effective means of establishing the presence of a Christian community to witness to the gospel in new places, and of enabling that witness to be shared with more people in all places. It is integral to how the Church of England has shown its commitment to apostolicity and sought to express its catholicity (see paragraph 1 above). All our churches were once planted. There have been previous periods in Church history of intensive planting of churches: notably for the Church of England in mediaeval times, Queen Anne's 50 New Churches, the Victorian era, and the interwar period.
7. In the past, church planting in the Church of England generally led to the formation of new parishes. The parish system has long been the Church of England's way of establishing churches, proclaiming the gospel and providing pastoral care in every community. That system has however never been fixed, and it has always evolved to adapt to new cultural and social conditions, for example through medieval chantry chapels, chapels of ease, or Victorian parish creation. In our day, Bishops' Mission Orders, church revitalisation and church planting are some of the ways in which this very adaptable system continues to evolve.

8. In this context, church plants can include entirely new church communities, or fresh expressions of church, or new congregations within existing church communities. The concept of church 'planting' can also include initiatives to revitalise existing churches through 'grafting' leadership, people and/or resources into them. We encourage and commend all such initiatives.
9. We welcome planting new churches as a way of sharing in the apostolic mission by bringing more people in England to faith in Christ and participation in the life of the Church. We will encourage it, and not seek to limit it, wherever the good practice in this statement is being followed.
10. Planting churches is an activity for all traditions and expressions of the Church of England. It is not limited to any one tradition. Those traditions with recent experience of effective planting must share that experience with others. Nor is it only relevant to some social and geographical contexts, it helps the Church of England to reflect more fully the diversity of the society we serve, and thereby to demonstrate its catholicity.
11. Church plants aim to attract more people to faith within the life of the one body of Christ. They will therefore also aim for those people to be drawn into the Church's unity and holiness, as both gift and calling. They must never become isolated congregations separate from other parts of the Church of England but should be fully involved in wider church structures, contributing to and gaining from the wider mixed economy of the diocese. There are responsibilities that follow from this for established parishes and diocesan staff, as well as for new church plants.
12. Bishops, archdeacons and dioceses – including structures such as diocesan boards of finance, and bishops' councils – will look for opportunities to contribute to mission and evangelism through encouraging, fostering and supporting new church plants, alongside and of equal value to other forms of mission.
13. As church planting becomes a normal part of a diocese's approach to mission, so sending, planting or leading a new church plant or other fresh expression of church, or oversight of such an initiative, should be considered a normal form of priestly ministry. Thriving parishes are required to be open to sending people and resources to support church plants, and also to receiving church plants within their parish boundaries, wherever this can benefit the Church's mission. Ministerial development must provide the training and support clergy need for this work.
14. New church plants need to work within a church ecology of long-established parish and other churches, and also with other new churches. It is essential that churches of all kinds, new and old, work supportively together in every place.
15. Experience shows that supported church plants generally do better than unsupported plants. As in past periods of church growth (Queen Anne's 50 New Churches, or the Victorian era, or the interwar years), establishing new churches will often require considerable set-up costs – even if today this is more often about adapting buildings and creating teams than about constructing new church buildings. The diocese concerned provides, or ensures that the plant has access

to, advice, coaching, training, and funding as necessary. Diocesan and national resources (through Strategic Development Funding) can often be provided for new church plants as part of resourcing a diocese's strategy for mission. The bishop provides intentional and visible episcopal blessing.

16. We will work with parishes that are capable of supporting planting initiatives to identify communities (geographical or otherwise) which might benefit from planting. We recognise and affirm the sacrificial commitment that sometimes has to be made by the sending church in supporting a new church plant. We also recognise that, despite the principles of consultation and support set out below, sometimes successful planting requires the disruption of existing patterns of church, and requires disruptive leadership to bring it about.
17. The existing buildings infrastructure of the Church is often deeply symbolic and part of local identity, as well as offering a vital resource for church planting initiatives. Where a plant is going into an existing building, it is important to be aware of perceptions within the local community, beyond those who are or have been regular worshippers there. Reopening a church building can be a positive symbol of renewed presence, while commitment on the part of the Church community now present in it to all Five Marks of Mission gives confidence that it is continuing the Church of England's historic ministry in that locality (see paragraph 2 above).
18. The establishment of a new church plant should be preceded by sensitive and full consultation and joint work with other neighbouring church communities. This does not mean that existing churches have a veto over plans to plant new churches. In cases of dispute, the decision on authorising planting lies with the diocesan or area bishop, who will take into account the principles agreed by the House of Bishops. In many cases, this will be done through the established arrangements for Bishop's Mission Orders (BMOs). But church plants can also be authorised in other ways.
19. We as bishops aim to give practical support and encouragement to schemes for new church plants, provided they are working within the structures of the Church of England and are abiding by the spirit of the principles set out below. We encourage all traditions of the Church to embrace this approach. This will involve working with PEVs in the case of parishes that have requested their pastoral and sacramental ministry, and also understanding the role that other networks and agencies may have in supporting those involved in church planting initiatives.

Principles

20. Guidance on church planting from the House of Bishops, based on careful reflection on practice and aligned with existing provision for BMOs, may be summarised in the following ten principles:
 - i. The Church of England will look for opportunities to contribute to mission and evangelism through encouraging, fostering and supporting new church plants alongside and of equal value to other forms of mission. We will inform and

educate local churches about the benefits and lessons of planting, to promote understanding of its place in the overall church ecology.

- ii. We expect those responsible for church plants to commit themselves to work to the best of their ability in cooperation with the other churches in the local area, including the church in whose parish the new church plant is located, as an integrated part of deanery and diocesan structures. They should aim to use some of their resources to support the mission of their neighbours and expect to make regular financial contributions to the diocese, as an expression of the mutual responsibilities that are a normal part of church life.
- iii. We expect those responsible for churches neighbouring a new church plant, including the church in whose parish the new church plant is located, similarly to commit themselves to work to the best of their ability in cooperation with the new church plant or churches, to welcome them into local structures, and wherever possible to use some of their resources to help support the new church plant.
- iv. Church plants should have a clear mission ambition and purpose.
- v. Church plants that aspire to be resource churches (church-planting churches supporting a wider area) will have a clear strategy for developing as resource churches for the surrounding area, and/or for further planting into other places. This will be built into the planning and consultation with other neighbouring church communities from the start, with the resourcing (including clergy and lay leaders) planned accordingly. The bishop's leadership role is key in supporting this planning.
- vi. Where church plants are 'grafted' into existing church communities, they will be respectful of existing traditions and practices, and seek to value and preserve those as far as possible, consistent with the overall aim of developing alongside them new forms of church which will add materially to the church's effectiveness in mission.
- vii. Proposals for church plants will seek to learn from the experience of church plants in other comparable places, learning lessons from successes and failures.
- viii. Churches that are neighbours to church plants within the same parish or deanery will also seek to learn from the gifts and experience of the church plants, as a contribution to reflecting on and re-energising their own mission.
- ix. Successful church plants have often operated in networks of similar churches in similar contexts. Future church plants can also benefit from such networks of support. These networks must aim to work across church traditions, to spread the support and learning as widely as possible across the Church.

- x. Churches should look for opportunities for creative partnerships for mission, especially between well-resourced churches and poorer parishes to support mission in the latter areas, respecting the contributions and needs of each.

The movement of the Spirit

21. The apostolic church, sent by Christ as the apostles were sent to proclaim afresh the faith entrusted to them, is always being led by the Spirit to new contexts for sharing the gospel. In the course of that journey, as the Archbishop of Canterbury said in his Presidential Address to the General Synod in February 2018, 'Through Popes and Reformers, through men and women monastics, through movements of lay people and through bishops, the Spirit of God has disrupted stasis and caused the Church to reimagine its shape and ministry.' Church planting will continue to change and evolve in the coming years, in ways that have yet to be imagined, as the Church responds to the movement of the Spirit in mission. If this document quickly becomes dated and in need of rewriting, that is not necessarily to be regretted.

House of Bishops
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