

GENERAL SYNOD

A Mission-Shaped Church and Fresh Expressions 15 years on

Introduction

The Mission Shaped Church Report came before General Synod in 2004. This paper aims to set out what has happened across the Church since then. The growth in fresh expressions of church and pioneering has been phenomenal leading to a hugely influential new missionary movement. Its influence is not only in the thousands of new churches being created to enable us to be the church for all our nation but its wider impact across the whole Church on our mission practices, ecclesiology, theology, leadership, resources and structures. This story is now entering a new phase in two key areas. Firstly money provided by the Strategic Investment Board is financing a new exciting five-year project to work intensively with at least ten dioceses to create more and stronger fresh expressions. Secondly we are committed to hugely increasing the number of lay and ordained pioneers to ensure the necessary leadership capacity for this missionary movement is ready to carry on the growth and development of even more fresh expressions and church plants.

The motion: That this Synod:

- a) celebrate this new missionary movement of the last 20 years and the impact made on the Church and society through the planting of thousands of fresh expressions of church since the Mission Shaped Church report in 2004.
- b) encourage every parish and diocese to be part of this movement forming new disciples and new congregations through a contextual approach to mission with the unreached in their community.
- c) call on the Archbishops' Council to bring to General Synod an update on the progress of the new project being led by the Head of Development for fresh expressions to develop fresh expressions in ten dioceses by July 2021

The most influential recent mission movement?

1. It is only fifteen years since the *Mission Shaped Church Report, church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context* came before General Synod in 2004. The report caught 'the wind of the Spirit' as it reported on fresh forms of church that were organically springing up across the Church. The report provided a theological and methodological framework to help the Church understand what God was doing. Many of its eighteen recommendations have now become normal practice. *The Day of Small Things Report* in 2014 by Church Army stated that fresh expressions of church is 'the arrival of a significant movement'. It's not just the statistics that are important but the impetus to reimagine how the Church can look and be in the twenty first century. This movement is a prophetic sign of hope and renewal for the Church.
2. It is also worth noting that the *Mission Shaped Church Report* and the research work of the Church Army Research Unit included both fresh expressions of church and church planting. There is always a danger of seeing this as an either-or choice for churches and Dioceses. But more and more Dioceses are understanding the need to plant a wide variety of new worshipping communities. For example, Oxford Diocese have ambitious plans to grow 750 new congregations by 2030 which will be a mixture of fresh expressions, church plants and missional communities. There are plans across the Church for 1000 revitalised churches from resource churches and 2000 more from other forms of church plants and revitalisations.

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The huge scale of this movement

3. *The Day of Small Things Report* in 2016 by the Church Army Research Unit (<https://www.churcharmy.org/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=204265>) revealed the huge influence of fresh expressions of churches in the Church of England. Here are some highlights
- a) Up to 2014 there were 1109 fresh expressions in 21 dioceses. The report suggests that an estimate of 2100 across the whole Church is not unreasonable. The numbers have risen substantially in the last five years but are not part of the research findings.
 - b) In 2014 Fresh expressions made up 15% of all diocesan church communities. Remarkable growth in only ten years.
 - c) In the Church Army's research 1679 suggested fresh expressions were not included in the research because they did not meet the stringent ten-point test. This suggests the missional impact is far higher across our parishes with many of these embryonic mission initiatives on their way to becoming fresh expressions of church. This could mean there might be as many as 5000 fresh expressions and possible mission communities and outreach initiatives in the Church of England.
 - d) Proportionately fresh expressions are engaging more often with tougher and poorer contexts than the rest of our churches
 - e) Fresh expressions do twice as well as parish churches in attracting those under 16
 - f) Their missional reach is far greater than any other form of church. The leaders' views is that the fresh expressions consist of 60% of people who do not normally engage with church. (27% de-churched and 33% non-churched.)
 - g) Messy Church has had a huge impact as part of this movement. Church Army estimates suggest over 50,000 people attend 2000 Messy Churches in Anglican churches who do not normally engage with their church.
 - h) Discipleship is happening very widely across fresh expressions. For example Ely Diocese states that 87% of their fresh expressions are actively engaged in discipleship.

Fresh expressions wider influence

4. This movement has had a more extensive influence on the wider church than purely numbers of fresh expressions. It has started to impact the culture of the church.
- a) **Leadership looks different and more varied.** It has had a huge influence on what leadership looks like and released a huge wave of new leaders for the church. Women are as likely to lead as men, and lay people as much as ordained ones. The most common combinations of leader factors are ordained men, working full time and paid, and lay women, unpaid, doing so voluntarily. 50% of leadership across fresh expressions is lay with 36% of all leaders of fresh expressions having no diocesan authorisation or formal training. (Three times the number of 'qualified' lay leaders). Yet their impact is as effective as all other leaders.

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- b) **One size church is no longer fit for purpose.** It has encouraged a greater diversity of being and doing church across the whole tradition. This has helped the church to be accessible to a greater proportion of our population through a greater variety of geographical locations and a readiness to create contextual mission for the cultural, ethnic and social groups we struggle to connect with.
- c) **Structures need to change to enable effective mission.** The Bishop's Mission Orders were a direct initiative of the *Mission Shaped Church Report*. In making an Order, the bishop endorses and authorises the mission initiative it covers as likely to promote or further the mission of the Church through fostering or developing a distinctive Christian community or communities. BMOs can recognise existing mission initiatives or promote fresh expressions of church.
- d) **New resources for mission.** Recommendation 17 of the *Mission Shaped Church Report* stated that, 'strategic decisions about future patterns of financial support should be made in partnership with dioceses so as to actively help resource church planting and fresh expressions of church.' The grants from the Strategic Investment Board have been vital in developing many new forms of church with dioceses often creating both resource churches and fresh expressions of church. Through the 60 projects funded by Strategic Development Funding or its precursors from 2014-2019 it is estimated that 300 pioneer posts will have been created.

The expansion of Pioneer Ministry

- 5. **6,000 pioneers by 2027.** Recommendation 11 of the *Mission Shaped Church Report* suggested the need for lay and ordained pioneers to be identified, trained and deployed. Recently Ministry Division has set an ambitious goal to double and double again the number of pioneers by 2027. If achieved this would see approximately 6000 pioneers where 20% are Ordained Pioneer Ministers (OPM), 20% are Licensed Lay Pioneer Ministers (LPM) and 60% are Authorised or Commissioned Lay Pioneer Ministers (also LPM). Pioneers can be 'Fresh Start' (work from a blank canvas, in unreached places, released from inherited incumbency obligations) or 'Parish Based' (work from a parish base, growing fresh expressions to expand the reach of the parish). The mixed or blended economy is important and calls for different expressions of church to recognise and resource one another through an integrated approach. A significant number of pioneers are growing new contextual worshipping communities in a 'pioneer inherited' space (growing alongside or out of traditional parish church).
- 6. There is a need to continue to change the culture across the Church of England to enable growth in the numbers of pioneers. This is being done through 4 strategic pathways:
 - a) **Discernment:** working across the Vocation, Discernment and Formation teams in Ministry Division, the Pioneer DDO hub and Diocesan Vocations networks to grow a better understanding of pioneer ministry and clarity about its purpose. The creation of a suite of vocational tools is in development to be used to call out the pioneer gift.
 - b) **Designation:** working with Bishop Mike Harrison (lead Bishop for Pioneer Ministry) and National Pioneer Panel Selectors to increase the flow of candidates and, in line with lifelong discernment, exploring the possibility for the pioneer designation of those already in an existing ordained or licensed lay role. Recognising the

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importance of pioneers being identified as gifted enablers of others and with the ability to grow teams as well as being practitioners. Future work is planned in assessing pioneer formation criteria and the relationship between Pioneer Panel and BAP.

- c) **Development:** working with Theological Educators (TEIs) to ensure all ordinands engage with learning relating to contextual forms of church plus ensuring appropriate training is delivered for designated pioneers at IME1. Working with IME2 offices through a consultation process to deliver appropriate pioneer training for inherited and pioneer curates. To increase the ability of non-pioneers to accommodate and sustain those who are pioneers. Greater clarity on authorisation for lay pioneers.
- d) **Deployment:** working with dioceses to ensure pioneer posts will allow the long-term sustainability of fresh expressions. Working with the Strategic Development Unit and individual dioceses to increase the number of appropriate pioneer posts, especially a higher number of stipendiary 'posts of responsibility' for OPMs and a greater recognition of the legitimacy of lay pioneer posts.

7. Four key workstreams currently support this:

- a) A Pioneer Active Diocese: 1. commits to increasing strategic capacity for pioneering, 2. envisions a flourishing climate for change, 3. expands its capacity to connect with every community through a contextual approach 4. utilises the experiences and best practice of pioneers.
- b) National Anglican Community of Pioneers: A physical and digital community, providing networking and support to a growing number of OPMs and LPMs, addressing pioneer issues specific to the Anglican context. A voice to advocate for pioneer ministry across the Church of England.
- c) Ordained and Lay Pioneer consultations: gathering permission givers and pioneers from across the Church of England in Autumn 2019 /Spring 2020 to assess the development and growth of ordained and lay pioneer ministry. Outcome: to publish new and revised national guidelines, to renew commitment from dioceses in this area.
- d) Several Pioneer Hubs support this work: DDO, Theological Educators, Bishops, Archdeacons, Fresh Expression/Pioneer Diocesan Advisers, Pioneer Development (6 Ecumenical Partners), the Church of England Embedding Group, National FX Leadership Community (ecumenical).

The Future

8. The impact of the report and fresh expressions have been huge but there are more necessary developments if this is to be successfully normalised and embedded in the Church.

a) **Increasing resilience:** many leaders of fresh expressions are lay and not paid for their role, or if ordained they are often managing other positions of leadership alongside their commitments to developing the new worshipping community. Growing a community from scratch is demanding and easily disrupted by key people moving on. Levels of support from diocesan structures varies greatly across the country, as do commitments to training. Therefore, fresh expressions may falter or get stuck in the early stages of development, which undermines their ability to follow through on their commitment to discipleship and evangelism. Improving support for strategic planning at

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both diocesan level and on the ground, whilst implementing best practice from other movements, will increase resilience and multiply more fresh expressions and new disciples.

b) **Enabling leaders:** In order for support structures to be strategically effective at diocesan level and for fresh expressions to reproduce, current leaders need to be released to enable training, coaching and facilitating of future leaders. This will create a sustainable community of support and best practice.

c) **Intentional reproduction:** Currently many fresh expressions grow organically up from the place where pioneers are living or working, which has led to a flourishing of new worshipping communities, as detailed above. In order to meet the missionary challenge of the times, we need fresh expressions in many more places and contexts. By enabling resilient, well-supported, reproducing leadership teams, combined with improved diocesan structures, we can see the movement spread into harder-to-reach places, growing new disciples in these areas.

9. The SDF supported 'Greenhouse' Project will offer a customisable support system for fresh expression leadership teams, through Learning Communities, which builds in resilience, trains leaders and allows diocesan leadership to strategically develop new worshipping communities.
10. Despite not formally being launched yet, there are 16 dioceses interested in participating in the Greenhouse Project already, demonstrating the widespread need and desire for the growth of fresh expressions as a key means to meet our present missionary challenge.

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