

Encountering *The Day of Small Things*

George Lings

Director of Church Army's Research Unit



You've heard that Church Army has reported on fresh expressions of Church. You want more than bullet points in an executive summary. But you doubt you'd cope with the full 233 pages of charts, statistics and comment. On the other hand you might be tempted to dig deeper.

£4

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The backdrop to *The Day of Small Things*

In November 2016, Church Army's Research Unit completed a four year research process and published *The Day of Small Things*. It was about the impact of fresh expressions of Church in the Church of England. The research was funded in partnership by the Church Commissioners and Church Army. It occurred against a backdrop of two factors. Firstly, a steady slow decline in church attendance and secondly, the whispers of an upturn in starting young churches in the decade following the *Mission-shaped Church* report of 2004. This report had sold widely and drawn the attention of the Church of England to the growing phenomenon of fresh expressions of Church and church planting.

They are one sign of reform as well as renewal within the Church of England.

But no one knew how extensive the fresh expressions of Church (fxC) were; we didn't really know either what their mission effect was, or how these young churches were maturing. Nearly ten years after *Mission-shaped Church* it was time to find out and to provide a statistical foundation beneath the wealth of individual stories that flowed from the booklets from Church Army's Research Unit¹ and from the national

Fresh Expressions team, via DVDs and written cameos on their website.

Why this title?

'The day of small things' is part of a quote from Zechariah 4:10. It comes from the period called the Exile and speaks to a context like ours. The Church of England exists in a period we could call post-Christendom. We are at the edge, not the centre, of society; regarded with disdain rather than deference.

This exilic text keeps two emphases connected. It urges resisting the temptation to despise small things because their existence hints at the beginning of a renewal. But it admits that what can be seen is only small.

This research shows that the Church of England's fxC are many small things which act as signs of renewed hope. We know that no one of these small young churches is going to make a big dent in a century of ecclesial numerical decline. It would be easy to despise this feature. However, the phrase 'the day' suggests **the arrival of a significant moment**; it suggests that their time has come. These small things, taken together, are making a difference that matters.

¹ 56 of these were published from 1999 to 2012 under the title Encounters on the Edge. These are still available as free PDF files from www.churcharmy.org/encountersontheedge

That difference is not limited to numerical addition in the face of decline. The fxC embody a re-imagination of how Church can look and be. They seek being faithful to the past as well as seriously engaging with the present. They are a sign of creativity, not just of growth, in partnership with the disturbing but renewing Spirit of God. This research reveals previously unknown factors and it provides data to underline previous good guesses.

The report invites the Church of England not to despise what is growing within its family, but is too often still a curiosity at its edge. The invitation is to notice a phenomenon which has mushroomed in the last ten years. Now may be 'the day of small things': a diverse set of small, sometimes frail, mainly young churches that lay a claim to being among our best hopes for the future. They are not the whole answer, but they are one sign of reform as well as renewal within the Church of England.

The size and scope of the task

To arrive at a plausible national picture, between 2012 and 2016 Church Army's Research Unit made contact by phone and email with the leaders of all the known fxC from 21 dioceses (half of the Church of England), working with one diocese at a time. At the halfway point we wrote a report on the first 11 dioceses; it formed part of a wider process about church growth known as *From Anecdote to Evidence*, and was presented in January 2014. It was agreed that these findings were so valuable to the dioceses



and individual fxCs that a second quarter of the dioceses of the Church of England should be surveyed. Overall, our team of four people followed up some 2800 leads provided by the dioceses. In conversation, we worked out with the leaders whether a particular case, supposedly an fxC, fitted with the 10 indicators, agreed in advance, of what would count.

The indicators boiled down to three factors:

- Did the example meet at least monthly?
- Was the intention to reach those not currently attending a church?
- Was it to form a further church and not be a stepping stone back into existing church?

This revealed that 60% of the alleged cases were something else. Some were mission projects to bring people back to an existing church. Others were events to further the

life of existing Christians. Sadly, some were just rebadging an existing thing, because the fxC label was now popular.

The first two 'other things' are valid and to be valued, but outside our research brief. The third is a curse, because it devalues the currency of the term 'fresh expression of Church'. In addition, some examples had the instincts we looked for, but they only had the resources in people to meet 6 or 4 times a year. We honour their intentions but could not include them in the results.

With the leaders of those examples that qualified, we completed a densely packed two page questionnaire. These records were entered in a database and analysed one diocese at a time, with a report sent to its leaders.²

However, in 2016, as the process began to near its end, we needed to create an overall report. In doing so we came to realise that it spoke to **four overlapping issues**:

1. What is the national picture about fxC?
2. How representative was the picture from the 1st 11 dioceses?
3. Do different types of fxC have defining characteristics?
4. What is typical across the dioceses and what varies?³

This booklet brings the reader the headlines of the discoveries in relation to those four questions. It may stimulate the curiosity of some, so that they swim down to the deep end of the pool of this research and consult *The Day of Small Things* itself, for more detail and discovery.

2 Each of these diocesan reports is on the website of Church Army's Research Unit and is free to download. We also later went back to the first 11 dioceses and asked what had happened in response to research. The results are in a short report called *What happens after research?* which is a free PDF on our website www.churcharmy.org/fxCresearch

3 For a fuller picture of those four questions see *The Day of Small Things* section 2.1.

1. What is the Anglican national picture re. fxC?

Numbers of fxC and attendance

There had been guesses beforehand, but no one knew for sure how many fxC existed. We found out that 1109 had started across 21 dioceses in the period 1992-2014. At the time we wrote we knew that many further fxC from 2015 and 2016 had been starting.

The contribution the fxC make to the national picture is that, on average, they make up 15% or between 1 in 6 and 1 in 7 - of a diocese's church communities. Clearly that is an important contribution. We also know that the remaining 20 dioceses of the Church of England are a bit smaller, at about 93% of the church attenders in the first 21 dioceses, so the national figures are not a simple double. Yet we know no reason why averages for these further 20 dioceses should be different, as we didn't cherry pick dioceses in the first half. So using that 93% figure, **we could expect there are some 2100 fxC across the entire Church of England.**

Adding up the fxC figures from 21 dioceses, **some 50,600 are attending.** That number would be 9.8% of overall diocesan figures for average weekly attenders. But if you call a monthly attender $\frac{1}{4}$ of a person for stats purposes, then this percentage reduces to 6%, because of the proportion of fxC that meet monthly not weekly.⁴ It's also true that, in traditional church and fxC, some people belong to more than one church and our figures don't include that complication. Across the whole of the Church of England it is reasonable to think there are 94,000 attenders at fxC.

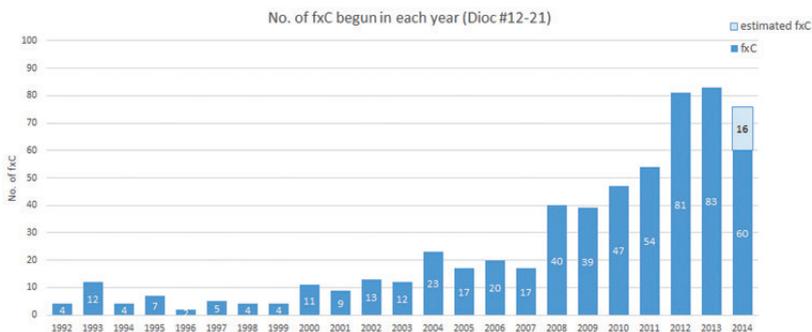
A startling but encouraging factor is that, as a whole, **the fxC do twice as well as parish churches in attracting those under 16.** Their congregations have 38% under 16s compared with 19% in parishes. This is very promising for the future in a greying Church, but care and wisdom will be needed that plentiful contacts with under 11s is followed up with what works for teenagers and then for young adults. But don't form an impression that fxC is all 'kids stuff'; the 62% majority of fxC attenders are adults. The majority of fxC are all age communities, though some focus on adults with particular needs - say like learning difficulties, or shut-in older people - and some types, like youth church and child-focused church, have a major emphasis on the young.

⁴ See *The Day of Small Things* sections 5.1 and 5.2 for the precise way this was worked out

Features about their growth

A rising tide

Four times as many are being started now compared to 2004, the year of the *Mission-shaped Church* report. The rate of starts per year is a rising tide and, like a tide, as the chart for dioceses 12-21 shows, it comes in by uneven waves. No one knows how long this tide will continue to rise. In 2012 we wondered if we were seeing the high water mark. When we worked out how many were starting in 2013 and 2014 it became clear that the peak had not been reached and may continue to rise considerably.⁵



A good investment

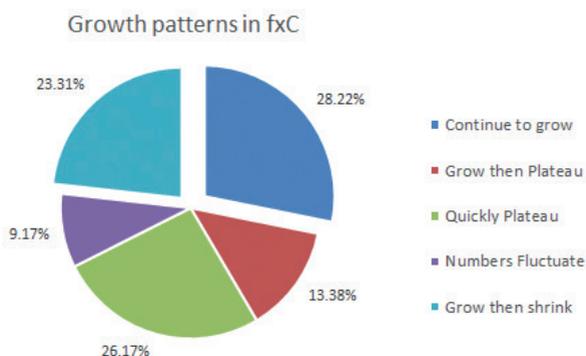
Another growth feature is that for every one person who set out to be part of beginning an fxC, now there are a further 2.6 more people. This 'net growth ratio' of 2.6 also means 260% growth since the start of the fxC. It is right that we note the cost to the sending church of giving away valued friends and resources. But if this is the result, how worthwhile such sacrifice is. Paul quoted Jesus' words: 'it is more blessed to give than to receive'. We now need to learn to apply that value to starting young churches, not just to money and time.

Different growth rates

An important piece of learning is that not all the fxC continue to grow in size. 28% of them do continue to grow numerically. However, nearly half (48%) are on some sort of numerical plateau. A further 24% did grow but now have shrunk. 11% of fxC have died, of which half had already begun to decline. The 48% that seem to have reached a plateau raises an important question. **Is there such a thing as 'natural unit size' in**

⁵ See *The Day of Small Things* sections 4.4 and especially 5.4 for this growing phenomenon.

churches? Later in the booklet I'll return to that and present evidence that suggests this, and what may be best to do at that point.



Sizes and locations

Their average size is 50 people and usually smaller than the average for parish church congregations. We also know that **over ¾ of the fxC remain within the parish that started them**. They are an extension of its mission and life, not a radical departure from it. But it's right and needed that some types of fxC go beyond the parish. Some of these send large teams known as transplants and grafts, but together these only make up a minority 4.6% of the overall picture. Tiny teams of 1-2 people, that we called seeds, make up another 7.7%.

Leaders

We live in a time when answers to the question 'who can lead in God's church?' are changing. The fxC picture contributes to this. We found that women are as likely to lead as men, and lay people as much as ordained ones. But that near equality is only about averages. Dig deeper and the most common combinations of leader factors are ordained men, working full time and paid, and lay women, in their spare time, doing so voluntarily. There is also considerable variety about which kinds of leaders are found at which types of fxC, as part 3 of this booklet shows.⁶

A recent Anglican development has been identifying who has the gift of pioneering. We found so-called pioneer ministers only account for 2.7% of the fxC. This is much lower than the overall known number of them would suggest. It looks like many pioneers are starting mission initiatives that are not intended to be fxC.

⁶ See *The Day of Small Things* chapter 10 for many more details about who leads the fxC.

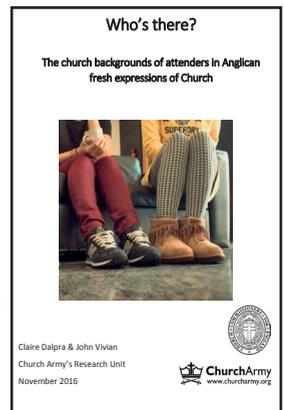
Among the lay leaders are a group for which we invented the term 'lay-lay'. This means those without diocesan authorisation or formal training. To our surprise this group made up over 36% of all leaders of fxC and they were three times the number of 'qualified' lay leaders. We investigated how well the fxC they lead perform, compared with all the other fxC. On most counts, **these lay-lay leaders do as well as the rest**, except these fxC have communion less often.⁷

Modesty and accuracy

Part of the aim of fxC is not to enable existing Christians to change which church they go to, but to see new people join the community of Christ's people – the Church. They might be those who earlier in life gave up on church (the de-churched) or those who have never been part of the worshipping Christian community (the non-churched). We wanted to know what was happening, but knew that finding the answers was not straightforward and there would be limits on what the local leaders would themselves know about this.

Initial figures in our first report of 2013 said only 25% were existing Christians, 35% were de-churched and 40% non-churched. But we want those figures set aside as a crude first attempt. It was not clear whether those figures included the Christians who began the fxC. More accurate figures from the second set of dioceses give the leaders' views that the fxC are made up of 40% Christians, 27% de-churched and 33% non-churched. These figures for new people were lower than the 2013 'results', partly by including all the team and also because the 2nd set of dioceses contained more church plants. We consistently found that the church plants attract fewer non-churched people and have a higher percentage of existing Christians.⁸

Church Army's Research Unit has also written a further report called *Who's There?* Two team members, Claire Dalpra and John Vivian, went to the attenders themselves. They unearthed the complex reality of the attenders' backgrounds. For example, over time a person could have grown up non-churched, become a Christian and then later given up on church. So this person would fit all three categories. Or a person growing up non-churched might have started attending church and only years later joined an fxC. Also some younger people had grown up all their life in an fxC. It's a complex picture indeed.



7 *The Day of Small Things* chapter 11 unpacks which fxC types the lay-lay lead, and some aspects of their mission effectiveness and progress towards maturity, as young churches.

8 See *The Day of Small Things* section 4.6.3 p. 44.

Their study yielded far more modest figures: one calculation was of only 20% de-churched and 21% for the non-churched. Another more generous calculation came out at 39% de-churched and 24% non-churched. They also did a comparable task with the attenders in a set of parishes in three dioceses. That showed the fxC were drawing three times as many non-churched as were the parish churches. It also confirmed the results about fxC having younger congregations.

We need to hold two factors together. It is clear that there has been some degree of optimism within the leaders' opinions of who comes, but also that significant numbers of de-churched and non-churched people have started attending an fxC.

By this whole range of measures the research claims that nothing else, as a whole, in the Church of England has this level of mission impact and at the same time is embodying the re-imagination of Church. Nor is it an accident that those two features are related.

Questions to ponder

- Which national factors came as a surprise to you?
- Which ones confirmed what you guessed?
- What should the Church of England learn about the place of fxC?
- How should this affect how the Church invests its resources of people and money?

2. How representative were the first 11 dioceses?

Why does that matter and how does it help?

Researchers carry the concern that their findings may be unintentionally flawed. They fear the sample size may be too small to draw secure conclusions. They worry that the examples chosen may have a bias and convey a distorted picture. In 2013, we did not know whether what we were finding in dioceses 1-11 was typical and whether this slice fairly represented the national picture. We had tried to choose a geographical spread of dioceses, one that accounted for rural and urban dioceses, and were aware we needed a range of dioceses which viewed fxC in different ways – from enthusiasm to coolness.

To have the chance to test all this with another ¼ of the dioceses was a welcome gift. It might reassure us and mean we could have confidence to tell the Church of England to trust what we found. It also gives some measures by which a diocese can assess how far it has got in seeing the fxC play their part within the diocese's overall life and mission.

Part 2 cites averages across the two sets of dioceses. Within these figures variety occurs, as part 4 reveals. Contexts also vary greatly such as from rich to poor, or rural to urban. Types of fxC behave differently, as part 3 shows. Even within a type of fxC, an individual one is just that; there are similarities but also differences, just as with different children in one family.

Representative factors across a diocesan fxC portfolio

Growth

- Four times as many fxC per year are starting compared with 2004. The rate has continued to rise across each of three 7 year periods studied.⁹
- Their attenders add about 6% to the diocesan figures, when adjusted for frequency of attendance
- Together they do make up some 15% of the diocesan churches.
- Across the two sets of diocese the proportion of fxC that numerically plateau is 47-48% and those that continue to grow in size is 27-29%.
- The 'net growth ratio' of 2.6 remains steady across the two sets of dioceses.
- 80% of the fxC adopted at least one route to grow disciples, not just attract attenders.

⁹ See *The Day of Small Things* section 5.4 for details of this by diocese.

Spread

- **The fxC occur in all kinds of social context within a diocese.** That fits with the Anglican call to be a Church of the nation. Chapter 7 of *The Day of Small Things* delves into the differences that the social context can make.
- The new people mainly came from the surrounding neighbourhood (71%), fitting well with the historic parish instinct. Yet about 38% came via the looser social reality of networks, showing both features are part of Anglican mission today.¹⁰
- 80% of attenders were deemed totally or mainly typical of the context, meshing with the Anglican instinct for reaching people of a given locality.
- Frequency of meeting varies across the fxC types. Overall 45.5% meet weekly, 8.5% fortnightly and 45.8% monthly. Fortnightly has always been the least common choice and these ones exhibit greater signs of fragility. It remains a debated key question how those meeting monthly can build commitment and depth. **Lesser frequency does not seem to hinder mission but it does slow down the path to church maturity.** This is spelt out in chapter 8 of the report.

The creativity in fxC is not a prelude to independency or schism.

Resources

- The overall proportions of ordained and lay leaders, and of male and female leaders, are about equal to one another.
- 3-12 people is the most commonly chosen (68%) team size taken to begin an fxC. Many churches could consider such a calling and level of sacrifice.
- The fxC are begun by all traditions, although not equally so. It is not just the evangelicals or charismatics who do it. However, the different traditions have a tendency to gravitate to certain types of fxC.¹¹

Other factors

- About 60% of cases presented to us turned out to be something other than an fxC.¹²
- A tiny proportion of the fxC left the Church of England. It was 4 cases out of

¹⁰ These figures do not sum to 100% because leaders could choose to say both factors were equally true in their case

¹¹ See *The Day of Small Things* section 5.3 for how the predominance of a tradition varies across the 21 dioceses, section 6.19 by fxC type, and overall in section 12.8.

¹² The proportions of exclusion per diocese and our classification of these examples are covered in section 5.9. This is taken further, including what should be learnt from this in section 12.10.

1109. This is no flood and barely a leak. The creativity in fxC is not a prelude to independency or schism.

Where variety occurs and why

The Day of Small Things section 5.11 lists 30 factors with **dissimilar results**. The differences group around two areas shown below. The good question is why they occur and part 3 of the booklet unpacks it.

Mission factors: Percentages of Christians, de-churched and non-churched attending, who led the fxC, team sizes taken, congregation size and what support they had.

Church factors: Use of the sacraments, taking responsibility for money, decisions and spiritual fruitfulness, routes to aid discipleship, day of meeting and choice of venue.

Two take home messages

1. There are many known factors that balance out across a diocese as a whole. These should inform a diocese and act as some measure of what they could expect and even an indicator of how much they have engaged with the contribution the fxC undoubtedly make.
2. There are also factors that vary widely across the dioceses, which are not fundamentally to do with which diocese this is. It is the predominance of certain types of fxC within a diocese which accounts for most of the variations seen between our 2013 and 2016 reports. That, however, is not the whole story and individual dioceses do have their own part to play, as part 4 of the booklet discloses.

Questions to mull over

- What do you think your diocese expects from its fxC?
- How similar or different is your diocese to the overall picture shown by the research?
- What can therefore be celebrated in your diocese or deanery?
- What further action might be called for?

3. Do different types of fxC have defining characteristics?

With half of the Church of England covered, Church Army's Research Unit had larger sample sizes of the more common types of fxC. So, for the first time, we could compare them and see what was common, what varied and also ponder why that was so. We chose 60 cases as the minimum number to work with. That gave us 14 types of fxC to analyse, accounting for 87% of the 11019 cases. The result was the longest chapter in *The Day of Small Things* – number 6. So this section is longest too.

The short answer to the question of whether the fxC have defining characteristics is 'yes they do'. Now we can be clearer about that. **This should deliver us from the illusion that the fxC all look or behave the same.** It should also enable people to make wiser choices between them in considering which approaches to use and what to start.

David Attenborough time?

To explore what is common and what is different, some people have found the following analogy fun and useful. Ask yourself what these animals have in common: tiger, lion, anteater, camel, squirrel, meerkat, cat, deer and dog. Clearly it is not their size, diet or habitat. What they do share is that they are four-legged, furry, have live births and feed their young on milk. We are one of them; we are all mammals.



The world of the fxC is like that. We have to look beneath obvious factors like size, habitat and diet which do characterise particular animals. Speaking of diet, tigers might choose to eat some of the others, including us. We need to attend to features that may be deeper, or at least less obvious, in order to find what they share, as well as see how they differ.

The variety and the overlaps

There are at least 20 different named types of fxC. Some are pretty recognisable by features like their style of public worship, such as Messy Church, café church or alt. worship. With others it is about their mission purpose – like network church which is not for an area, but for people linked through relationships. Sometimes their size is diagnostic, like with cell church. But the 20 are not all totally different types. We found that any local story could combine features from several types.

The most common types are: Messy Church (360), café church (151), child-focused church (148), church plant (132) and multiple congregation (101). We recorded 90-80 examples of: community development plant, all age worship¹³ or network church. Those for which we had 70-60 cases include: alt. worship, under-fives church, youth church, clusters and older people's church.¹⁴

With the mammals it would be daft to ask 'which is the best type?' Camels are great in the desert, but I wouldn't want one in the house. Other questions like purpose and context are vital; so too here. **It would be a mistake to think there is one best fxC type.** They are designed to do different things and mature at different rates. It may be the best we can say is that we need all of them: the big and the small, the expensive and the cheap, the complex and the simple, the focused and the generalist. I think we should celebrate a church bio-diversity. And that includes the honourable place of what the good parish church can do.

What do they all share?

It goes back to the definition and the very wording 'fresh expression of Church'. They are *fresh* - that is, they used not to exist and now do; they are not a rebranding of a prior work. They are fresh, like a fresh cup of tea or fresh fruit, which tastes good, refreshes, and is still within sell by date.

They are fresh *expressions*, meaning that they have deliberately (perhaps sacrificially) changed from past practice in order to enter and engage with the context. Theological language for this includes the incarnational principle and the inculturation process. The word 'expression' hints at this function and focus in mission.

They are also expressions of *Church*. That is part of their identity. So they are Christ-centred, relating to God, one another, the world around and the wider Church. These relationships unpack the four historic church words: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. And they are intended over time, when right, to give birth to yet further expressions.¹⁵ For mammal, here read: fresh, expression, Church.

Because they are Church freshly expressed, **they will be both like and unlike prior churches. Hence the crucial word is fresh, but not novel.** In some contexts some

13 There would have been more of the all age worship type but we only began specifically naming them starting with diocese no. 12.

14 It would take too long to define all these here. With some the very name at least shows their focus. *The Day of Small Things* chapter 6 has a two paragraph summary of each type at section 6.22 pp. 121-126. Appendix Two, pp. 219-222, also adds a historical sketch to each type.

15 This last feature is argued in a book by George Lings, *Reproducing Church* (BRF, March 2017).

of these new births will look like things we have seen before – like that cup of tea. They don't have to be something never seen before to qualify.

How the fxC types differ

Chapter 6 of *The Day of Small Things*, with its 20 subsections, is nearly 50 pages long. I can only whet your appetite by giving some headlines, illustrating the range within a variable examined, and pointing up lessons to note.

Size of gathering

Church plants tend to be the largest, with on average 103 people. That is followed by two further congregational types: multiple congregations (80) and all age worship (68). Then come 9 types where the average is in the range 30-57. Two are notably small: older people's church at 25 and special interest group at 29. With some, size impresses and with others smallness models intimacy.

We need all of them: the big and the small, the expensive and the cheap, the complex and the simple.

Growth, plateau and shrinkage

These three features all vary with fxC type. The range over which 'continue to grow' varies is from nearly half to under a fifth. Clusters (aka missional . communities) and multiple congregations score the highest for this growth and youth church and alt. worship the lowest.

The latter two also have the highest shrinkage rate. Our guess of reasons that lie behind the low growth score and high shrinkage rate are that alt.worship is resource hungry and can be inward focused. In the case of youth churches, they sometimes find it difficult to continue to recruit at the lowest age range they cater for. Thus a wave of young people passes through and is not replaced, as the top end moves away or grows out of the youth stage.¹⁶

Sometimes a high figure for the percentage for reaching a plateau is because of limits to the size of the venue, so some churches based on under-fives have a waiting list. Similarly a lounge, serving an older peoples' home which hosts their church, can be the limiting factor.

Who comes?

Percentages of Christians, de-churched and non-churched vary with fxC type. This is part of the argument that a diocese, deanery, or even benefice, needs a portfolio of

¹⁶ See *The Day of Small Things* section 6.3 for more data and comment.

different fxC types to fulfil better the wide mission of God. The types at each end of the ranges are as follows:

Christians	Church plants	51.7%	Child-focused church	23.1%
De-churched	Older people's church	40.7%	Youth church	16.4%
Non-churched	Church based on <5s	47.5%	Church plants	19.5%

The report in section 6.4 teases out the details across the 14 types of fxC and gives the five highest and lowest scoring types for the three groups of people to contact. Even the snapshot above shows what variety there is. The de-churched figure illustrates what we know: that the older the generation to reach, the more de-churched there are, and much fewer of them are in the younger generation.

It is striking that church plants score highest for drawing **Christians** and lowest for non-churched. Having larger teams will contribute to the Christian figure. It may be for all their missional intent (for which evidence is strong), they are also sometimes so like existing church in venue, style and size, that this can hinder their effect among those for whom the church is a foreign land.

These types do best among the **de-churched**: older people's church, child-focused church, multiple Sunday congregations, network church and alt.worship. Their achievement can be celebrated, though most of these types are relatively poor at reaching the non-churched.

In general, those types which do best in attracting higher proportions of the **non-churched** are those with a focus on the younger generations: teens, school-age children including Messy Church, then those for pre-school age, and the community development plants serving poorer areas.

This division, of what works best for which group in the overall mission, is worth noting.

There is also **variety by age served**. There are obvious links to some types like older people's church and church based on under-fives. But there are surprises too. Messy Church is 49% adults, not unduly focused on children. That contrasts with café church, church plant, special interest group, network and cluster, which are all over 70% adults. What about with the under-16s? They are 51% of attenders at Messy

Church, 29% at café church and alt.worship, 27% at network churches and clusters and 24% at church plants.¹⁷ Clearly, the fxC type chosen makes a difference to what age groups may be expected to start coming.

Why they started

This is a complex question, dealt with by section 6.5 of the report, as people responded to seven different motives we offered, from which they could choose up to three. Here are some headlines:

Across the 14 types of fxC, the averages for the desire for growth is far more often sensed locally (52%) than the impetus coming from the diocese (10%). This is evidence that **the fxC world is mainly grass roots initiative, rather than central planning**. The deviations upwards from this average for diocesan involvement are most marked among church plants (27%), network churches (23%) and youth congregations (19%). Some of these were intended to cross a parish boundary and so rightly the diocese was involved. The diocese seems least involved when something is started involving many children or is for older people.

Motives over time

Over the 20 year period covered, an important change has slowly unrolled. The geographical reasons, though valid, have become less of a consideration. They include motives like spotting part of the parish from which few came, or responding to either a full church or the building of significant areas of new housing. **What have grown are the cultural perceptions**. We offered two: firstly, the need to diversify ways of being church, and secondly, the identifying of a cultural group who were missing from the existing church. The latter might be by social status, generation or some cultural identity.

It is clear that the fxC types linked to provision for younger elements of the population are more influenced by these two cultural motives. Other types, like the church plants, multiple congregations and all age worship, work more with the geographical considerations and existing buildings being full. It is not that one is fundamentally right and the other wrong, but they are certainly different and the differing motives link to the resultant figures for proportions of Christians, de-churched and non-churched.

The shift to cultural thinking is vital for a reformed Anglican self-understanding.

Too often our claim has been that we are accessible to all. This admirable theory is patently untrue in much practice, shown by elderly, female, middle class congregations. We need to match admirable theory to humility, and the embracing of

¹⁷ See *The Day of Small Things* section 6.11.

diversity without undue fear and the desire for control. As such, the fxC - as a whole - are showing us the way.

Team sizes and support

Taking 3-12 people is the predominant choice in 68% of cases. But starting with only 1-2 people is double the 12% average, among youth church and nearly as high in older people's church. Messy Church can need quite a few team members, reflected in theirs being the highest score for taking 13-19 people. The most different is the church plants. They have 4 times the average for taking 20-49 people and 10 times the average for taking 50 or more.¹⁸

All of these choices have virtues and weaknesses.

Small teams can experience a lack of resources for the task, inducing future burnout. Large ones can be prey to the need to please the group of existing Christians, rather than discern what would work among the people they are sent to. Thinking through such issues and matching team size to both task and resources is important.¹⁹



These team size factors are linked to two support types called grafts and transplants. Broadly speaking, the biggest teams are rare and usually seen in the grafts and transplants, which only some churches are able to provide. The majority come from, and stay in, the same parish and are modest in team size. I leave the evidence of whether bigger is more effective to the end of the booklet.

Who leads what

Some patterns emerged. Women are more likely to lead fxC that cater either for the young or the old. Male leaders predominate in church plants (85%) and over 70% of network churches, alt.worship and youth churches. In all of these mainly male-led fxC, the leader is ordained, and in the female-led ones for younger people, mainly the leader is lay. The picture is complicated because the longer lived fxC have had more than one leader over time, more often with an ordained founder being followed by a lay person.²⁰

18 See *The Day of Small Things* section 6.8 for more data and comment.

19 *The Day of Small Things* sections 6.8 and 6.9 delve deeper into these factors and which types of fxC are most likely to cross parish boundaries.

20 See *The Day of Small Things* section 6.13, and chapter 10, for more statistics about leadership variables and their interpretation.

Traditions and fxC choices

This area is contentious. Some hold traditions loosely, a few repudiate all of them, and yet others hold one very firmly. **We were surprised to find two features almost at odds.** On the one hand our data showed that all but one type of fxC (clusters) could be started by any of the five traditions that we asked leaders to declare a link with: Catholic, Central, Charismatic, Evangelical and Liberal.

On the other hand it became clear, through looking at the more frequently chosen links, that the five top choices favoured by charismatics and evangelicals were identical, and in much the same order: cluster, church plant, community development plant, network church and youth church. Moreover, in the other three traditions there was notable overlap with their top five choices: alt.worship, child-focused church, Messy Church, multiple congregations, special interest group and youth church.²¹ So traditions are linked to fxC choices.

We also found evidence, backing up impressions elsewhere, that both the evangelical and charismatic traditions are more strongly present in urban contexts than rural ones, and conversely that the central tradition flourishes more in the rural context.²²

Where do they occur?

Chapter 7 of *The Day of Small Things* examines this and what effects the area served has upon the life and dynamics of the fxC. Firstly, there are connections between type and distribution. Once more there are two dynamics to notice. They exist in tension with each other.

The first impression is that nearly all the types have been started in all locations, ranging from city centre, through estates, towns, suburbs and commuter villages, to deep rural. Closer examination revealed that of the 17 more common types, 12 occurred in 10 out of the 11 geographical/social options. 5 others: Café churches, church plants, community development plants, all age worship and midweek churches occurred everywhere.

But as we looked yet more closely, we noticed the fxC types that were absent or rare (less than 2% of examples) fell into two groups. Firstly, in the city centre locations it was very unusual to find Messy Church, child-focused church, church based on under-fives, older people's church, school based church or cell church. We imagined this was because there were fewer of that section of the population in the city centres. Secondly, a totally different set of fxC types were rare or absent on the private estates:

²¹ *The Day of Small Things* section 6.19 digs deeper into this.

²² See *The Day of Small Things* section 7.13.

special interest group, multiple congregation, alt.worship, youth church and cluster. It may be that these types tend to express the deliberate widening of a diversity of church styles beyond one existing congregation. And it may be that on such new estates the first church is still being established and that is all that there is.²³

Secondly, **it is not true that the vast majority of fxC provide for comfortable England.** It is the case that, proportionally, the fxC are engaging more often with tougher and poorer contexts than is true in the distribution of parishes.²⁴ Our findings were that 47% of the fxC occur in the less affluent urban and estate locations, as well as in the deeper rural areas that have their own social challenges. Conversely 53% were in city centres, suburbs, private estates, towns and expanded villages.

The effect of frequency of meeting

There is clear variety of practice here. Only one type, Messy Church, is dominantly monthly (87%). **Four other types are fairly evenly spread between monthly and weekly:** café church, child-focused church, all age worship and older people's church. The others are mainly weekly, with church plants at 96%. Fortnightly is usually the least common Chapter 8 of *The Day of Small Things* explores how the frequency chosen affects what happens. Boiling this down, there appear to be two somewhat conflicting dynamics.

Frequency and mission factors

Firstly, in relation to mission factors, a lesser frequency of meeting almost seems to be favourable. Consider the following features: the monthly and fortnightly fxC have a similar but higher percentage (40%-38%) of non-churched attenders compared to the weekly ones (28%). In net growth ratio terms, the monthly fxC draw 3.6 more attenders for each person who started, whereas the weekly ones see only 2.3. The average congregation size of the weekly fxC is 48, similar to the monthly at 46. Only the fortnightly ones at 36 are notably smaller. The 'continues to grow' percentages are also close, with the weekly fxC at 30% and monthly at 27%. It is true that many more monthly fxC reach a plateau, but we noted the weekly ones are more likely to later shrink. **Certainly meeting monthly is not a missional disadvantage.**²⁵

23 Consult *The Day of Small Things* section 7.3 for further interpretation and charts of which patterns exist.

24 The details are found in *The Day of Small Things* section 7.2 and pp 131-132

25 See *The Day of Small Things* sections 8.2 and 8.3 to dig deeper into some of these figures. Others were calculated but not included to stop it getting too long.

Frequency and church maturity factors

But secondly, a **lesser frequency of meeting does affect the rate at which young churches mature**, by nearly every yardstick. For example, while on average 42% of the 14 most common types of fxC have held a **communion** service, in some fxC this is very occasional. Undoubtedly the likelihood of communion goes down with less frequent meetings; 66% of weekly ones have held one, but only 19% of the monthly ones have done so. The figures for holding baptisms are similar.²⁶



Engagement with **Scripture** is more complex, because it is done in such varied ways. A fair summary is to say that the frequency of meeting merely underlines the prior variety of choices, made by different types of fxC, over how to engage with Scripture. Those which are more like traditional church, such as church plants or multiple congregations, favour sermons, public reading of Scripture and study in small groups. Those that cater seriously for all age gatherings favour a loose form of talk, storytelling and creative activities. It so happens that the former tend to be weekly and the latter monthly. It is not the frequency itself that is the crucial factor.²⁷

The variance between fxC types over **taking responsibility** for money, decision making and fruitfulness is not so marked by differences of frequency of meeting, although there is some decrease the less often they meet. Across the 14 types, 58% are taking some steps towards responsibility for their finances, with the weekly types at 64% and the monthly at 54%. In regard to responsibility for how they are led, 73% is the average. The weekly ones come in at 79% and 66% among the monthly. Over having some element of self-reproducing, the average is 41%, with the weekly fxC at 54% and the monthly at 28%.²⁸

Frequency also affects the scores for following **routes to discipleship**. Because we offered several routes that leaders could select, the picture is complex. Perhaps the simplest contrast is to say that among the 14 most common types, only 8% of the weekly fxC had not chosen a route at all, compared with 33% of the monthly ones.²⁹

26 See *The Day of Small Things* section 6.16 for variance by fxC type and 8.6 by frequency of meeting.

27 See section 6.15 for variance by fxC type and section 8.5 by frequency of meeting.

28 See section 6.14 for variance by fxC type and section 8.4 by frequency of meeting.

29 See section 6.17 for variance by fxC type and section 8.9 by frequency of meeting.

We also know, but it is not in *The Day of Small Things*, that there is some truth that the larger the team size who begin the fxC, the more likely it is that they will meet weekly. So among those begun with 50+ people, 92% of them meet weekly. With those begun by 20-49 people, 60% meet weekly. It is also broadly true that the closer to a city centre an fxC is, the more likely it will meet weekly. By contrast, the highest proportion of monthly examples are in the villages with new housing and the yet more deeply rural contexts.

Frequency and fxC mortality

You might expect that the slower progress towards maturity among the monthly fxC makes them vulnerable to closure. The overall death rate is 11.1% for the 14 most common types. Among those, 14.9% of those meeting fortnightly died and 14.5% of the weekly ones. But, among the monthly examples it is only 7.1%.³⁰ The death of different types of fxC is covered in *The Day of Small Things* section 6.20. The wider questions around death in young churches are covered in section 12.12.

Ending this whole discussion about the effect of frequency, it is important that the reader understands the data reveals all these patterns vary according to a wide combination of factors. They include: the type of fxC, the social area served and the frequency of meeting. The closing part of this booklet discloses which of these is the most significant.

A right to exist?

Not every fxC that is young and vulnerable dies, but some 11% do. Among human beings there is normally particular attention given to the nurture and protection of the young, both by the care of the parent(s) and wider family, and to some extent by law. It is then worth pointing out that **very few fxC have any legal status within the Church of England**. Put the other way, 88% of them have none. Moreover, not all sending churches care well for them. At the level of individual stories, heard over 30 years, I note a repeating, but mercifully not very frequent, pattern. An fxC begun under one incumbent is closed down some years later by their successor, quite separate from any objective assessment of its viability. In family therapy terms it sounds like the classic arrival of the wicked step-father. Or to draw upon another contemporary and contentious parallel, **it is as though the fxC are treated like ecclesial immigrants**. There is even quite frequent equivalent criticism of them, like the issues of 'pinching our jobs', 'using up our resources' and 'eroding our culture'. In such a parallel it is as though the vast majority of them have no more than a temporary 'right to remain'. Even the welcome Bishop's Mission Order is only like a five year provisional licence

³⁰ See *The Day of Small Things* section 8.10.

and, just as important, it only applies to network type churches that need, with agreement, to cross parish boundaries.

Readers will correctly pick up that I think there is a justice issue here, by which the fair and helpful expectation that a young church should aim to move towards maturity and sustainability is not being matched by the gifts of security and assured identity from the wider Church. Can that be the right way to treat 88% of the 1100 young churches found in half the Church of England?

Some lessons follow

Part 3 of this booklet has opened up the area of how the types of fxC are in some ways similar, using the analogy of the varied animals that are mammals. It has then explored the differences which sometimes are wide and sometimes are less marked.

One way to highlight this diversity is to show several characteristics of Messy Churches and church plants and to underline that they are often found at opposite ends of the fxC rainbow. This is not so say that one type is valuable and the other is not. They achieve different things.

Table 1: Contrasting Messy Church and church plants

Factor	Messy Churches	Factor	Church plants
Average size	52	Average size	103
Monthly	87%	Weekly	96%
Non-churched	45%	Non-churched	19.5%
Christians	32.5%	Christians	51.7%
Lay leader	58%	Lay leader	9%
Female leader	74%	Female leader	15%
Communions	13%	Communions	99%
Top team size	3-12 people	Top team size	20-49 people
Transplants	0.6%	Transplants	32.6%
Cross boundary?	10.8%	Cross boundary?	53.8%
Mortality rate	4.4%	Mortality rate	15.2%
Net growth ratio	3.4	Net growth ratio	1.5

Realise that the fxC types are likely to serve differing parts of the mission field and have differing maturity rates. Avoid the use of an iron cage of rigid expectations about how quickly each type will progress.

Think that all types of fxC may have their own natural unit size or range. This helps discern ways forward when a plateau is reached, including discerning whether to start a further one.

Make known that this research demonstrates it is better to celebrate them all, aware of their possibilities and pitfalls. **Thus every diocese could:**

- Expect to be home to all types of them.
- Understand how they contribute to the overall diocesan landscape.
- Build learning networks across different types, recognising their complementary contributions.
- Encourage those considering starting one to do so with their eyes open to the evidence of how they differ and overlap.

Questions to consider

- What struck you as significant about the differences between fxC types?
- How can fresh expressions of Church and church plants learn to value each other?
- How should a parish treat those types of fxC which will mature more slowly?
- How could a young church be given the right to exist?
- How should you choose which type of fxC is right for your context?

4. Typicality and variety across the dioceses

Parts 1 and 2 of this booklet laid out features of the fxC world that are representative across groups of dioceses. These would be reasonable expectations in a diocese. Part 3 demonstrated what features vary. Over this variety much more flexibility and understanding of particular fxC types is needed.

So what is down to a diocese? *The Day of Small Things* chapter 5, sections 1-7, explores a range of factors which we thought do reflect upon the life of the diocese, or where the diocese could be thought to play a background or environmental role, although not necessarily a directive one.

Table 2: The fxC penetration of a diocese

Feature	High % diocese		Low % diocese	
% of diocesan churches that are fxC	Guildford	35.6%	Gloucester	6.0%
	Liverpool	31.5%	Chelmsford	8.4%
	Sheffield	26.9%	York	9.6%
	Blackburn	23.2%	Norwich	9.8%
Attenders at fxC as % of diocesan AWA (not adjusted for frequency)	Guildford	16.5%	Gloucester	3.7%
	Norwich	15.7%	Chelmsford	4.6%
	Canterbury	14.9%	Southwark	5.8%
	Exeter	14.6%	York	6.6%

We list these percentages not to praise or censure the dioceses cited. We simply observe that they are at different stages in engaging with developing fxC.

Leaders and dioceses

Dioceses have some effect on leadership patterns as they make appointments, fix curacies and decide whether to have pioneers. They choose what forms of non-stipendiary ministry and authorised lay ministry may exist, as well determine a culture of what unauthorised ministry can flourish.

Table 3: Different leadership patterns in a diocese

Feature	High % diocese		Low % diocese	
% of leaders that are ordained	Manchester	68.1%	Leicester	30.8%
	London	63.4%	Manchester	31.9%
	Ely	62.8%	Canterbury	44.0%
% of leaders that are 'lay-lay'	Leicester	52.3%	Manchester	19.4%
	Portsmouth	51.6%	Gloucester	24.2%
	Exeter	48.2%	Norwich	32.1%

The range of differences shows there is a diversity of practice about who may be expected or, in the case of lay-lay, allowed to lead an fxC.

The London diocese factor

As soon as we made a list of the following features by diocese: types of fxC - the team sizes taken, the distribution of transplants and grafts - it was clear that London stood out as having some different patterns to elsewhere. That makes them neither right nor wrong, but they are certainly distinctive.

The Day of Small Things section 5.8 explores in what ways London diocese, and its fxC, are like elsewhere, and in what ways they are atypical. Readers should note here that we have never treated church plants and fresh expressions of Church as separate categories, believing they both do the same job theologically speaking. We took a lead from *Mission-shaped Church* which treated church plants as a subset of the then new overall term 'fresh expression of Church'.

Features typical elsewhere and in London diocese

- Attenders at all types of fxC (not adjusted for frequency) make up 9.8% of the diocesan AWA and its fxC are 17.6% of the churches (15.5% average).
- 70% of people drawn to the fxC come from neighbourhoods.
- Its fxC fit the pattern that, in the motives for starting up, church plants work more with geographical factors and other fxC begin more for cultural considerations.
- All traditions of the Church of England have played a part and in similar proportions to the averages, except in London there are many less central and more charismatic examples.

Atypical features of London diocese

Context

- The **population density** of 14,900 per square mile is highly unusual. Birmingham is one-third of that and Liverpool less than a quarter, let alone 8 dioceses with fewer than 1000 people per square mile. In such a tightly packed urban context with a mobile and growing population, parish boundaries have lower significance than elsewhere.
- Their fxC are more often found using **church buildings**, at 61%, compared with dioceses 1-11 at 43.9%, and the second set of dioceses, including London, at 50.7%. This connects to land prices and the prohibitive cost of new church buildings. This is then reflected in more fxC meetings held on Sunday and on a weekly basis.



Boundaries

- In London 62% of the fxC **crossed a parish boundary** to start an fxC. In dioceses 1-11, the fxC locating beyond a parish boundary were 16.8%.
- 28% of all London's fxC cases are **transplants**, compared with 2.2% in dioceses 1-11 and 6.8% in dioceses 12-21, including London.
- 41% had **larger teams** (20 or more people) to start the fxC. Elsewhere, in dioceses 1-11 that size is 8.5%, and in dioceses 12-21, including London, it is 13.6%.
- There is a commendable high proportion of **diocesan initiative** in the motives measured to account for the starting story. In London it applied to 23% of cases, as compared with 6% in dioceses 1-11 and 9% in dioceses 12-21, including London.

Church plant focus

- 41% of London's fxC are **church plants**. This is nearly three-and-a-half times the average across dioceses 1-21.³¹ London's set is 26.5% of the total across 21 dioceses of 132.
- A high percentage of leaders at the London fxC are **ordained**. Most often they are full time and male. All these features are strongly present at the 35 church plants.
- The **larger average size** of the London fxC is 91, as compared with 44 in the 1st 11 dioceses and 57 in the 2nd set, including London.
- 77% of fxC attenders are adults, and only 23% **under-16s**, compared with 59% adults and 41% under-16s in dioceses 1-11. The London figures may positively reflect the higher percentage of young adults in the capital, some of whom who now attend an fxC.
- Only 16% of the fxC in London are Messy Churches, whereas 32% is the average in dioceses 1-11 and 33% in dioceses 12-21, including London.

Learning from the London diocese story

The atypical list is longer and more diagnostic. Section 5.8 goes on to praise several encouraging features in the London story: the evident partnership with the diocese, the swift moves to church maturity among the church plants and the high proportion of cases which have started yet another one. Yet it goes on to note some modest features, such as falling behind the population growth in the capital, their fxCs' low net growth ratio and having the highest scores for Christians. It is the only diocese where they make up the majority of the fxC attendance.

In the current climate of interest in starting 'resource churches' in other city centres from London it seems churlish to strike any cautionary notes. **Yet it may be wise that care is taken not to uncritically import what works for London.** It has long been a principle in mission not to impose church models from elsewhere. This research, which we were glad to do with London and fed back to them, and what has been learnt from outside London, gives us all a better chance to discern what is helpful across the country. We need to balance being keen to learn from elsewhere with being keen to apply everything in context.

31 For the numbers of church plants in all the 21 dioceses, see table 10 of section 4.3.

Questions to reflect on

- In what ways is your diocese similar or different to the story in London – and what could you learn from them?
- How can a local church support and encourage the ministry of the lay-leader?
- Think about the attendance at a church you know well (traditional or fresh). If it has reached a numerical plateau, how might you know if this is its 'natural unit size'?

Tying things together

Three key words

There are helpful key words about the fxC. These churches, as a whole, are varied, small, and young.

- Their **variety** was covered in part 3 on how they differ.
- Their **smallness** was noted from the start of the booklet and *The Day of Small Things* section 4.2 develops this.
- That they are **young** is testified to by the fact that $\frac{3}{4}$ of them have begun in the last ten years.³²

Some new learning

1. We have noticed the **lay-lay leader**, as part 1 explained. Gratitude to God and encouragement to them are in order. **The challenge will be to support but not domesticate them.** I note that some conversations since our report came out have fastened on the story of young David being given Saul's armour in order to fight Goliath. This gift was kind but mistaken. We need to honour what they can already do and learn from them, as well as offer further support and skills.

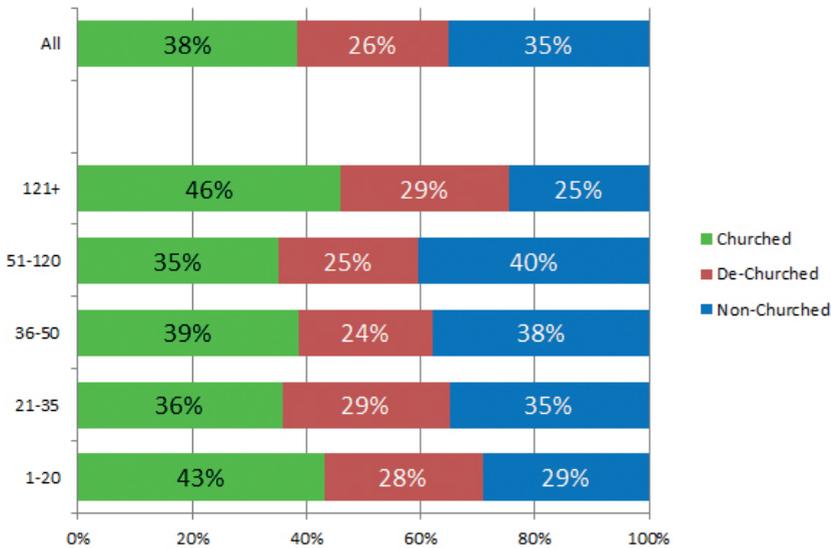
2. We now know that on average 48% of fxC reach a plateau. It occurs across all types of fxC. We have evidence of what we can call **natural unit size**.³³ Conversations with leaders in inner urban churches champion similar instincts. So, **thinking that church growth must mean getting bigger may be a mistake.** Reproduction, or having baby churches, also ought to be thought normal and even more helpful.

3. **Do larger fxC churches do better in mission?** Our data (see chart on the next page) suggests that the smallest fxC (under 20 people) do struggle to attract the non-churched. It may be that there is no place to hide for anonymous investigation. The proportion of the non-churched then rises slowly among the increased sizes of groups of fxC churches, up to 120 attenders. Above that size it falls again, even below the percentage of non-churched at the small churches. We don't know exactly why. Our guesses include that these larger churches become too programmatic, front-led and non-participative.³⁴

³² See *The Day of Small Things* section 4.4.

³³ *The Day of Small Things* section 6.2 explores this and shows the spread of sizes for Messy Church and café church. 64% of the Messy Churches are between 30-69 attenders; with café church, 73% are between 20-69 attenders.

³⁴ See *The Day of Small Things* section 4.10.



4. **What accounts for the variety of results?** *The Day of Small Things* looked hard at the effect of five factors: diocese, leadership provision, area served, frequency of meeting and fxC type. They all make some difference, but which was the lead influence? It became clear to us that many differences across dioceses were caused by features for which they were not directly responsible. We then looked at the leadership factor³⁵ and discarded that as the most significant.

To write this booklet we put together several results which were scattered across the report's chapters, and also included ones that never made the report. We plotted the range of differences across a single variable - say like routes to aid discipleship - to see whether the greatest variance was by fxC type, by area served or by frequency of meeting. Pretty much at random we took four church maturity factors and four mission effectiveness factors.

In all eight cases **the single greatest range was shown by the variety of fxC type**. In seven out of eight cases the area served produced the next widest range. Frequency nearly always came third. FxC type shows the greatest differences, underlining why chapter 6 of *The Day of Small Things* may be the most important to understand. Going back to mammals, tigers are more different to camels than Siberian tigers are to Indian ones.

³⁵ See *The Day of Small Things* chapters 10 and 11.

5. Will this data make **any difference**? We don't know, but we hope so. We sense that our report was written at a time of change towards realism about the profound challenge that faces the Church of England. It is a change towards hard-headed examination of what is working and determination to focus resources on what can be shown to be deeply Christian and to work.

Hopes for the future

We are encouraged to know that, as of January 2017, ten dioceses (here in alphabetical order) have articulated an intention to start many more fxC or church plants: Blackburn, Ely, Guildford, Leicester, London, Portsmouth, St Albans, Southwark, Southwell and Nottingham, Winchester. Our research covered the fxC in eight of these. That may not be a coincidence.

We hope that this overall report, and the suite of three others accompanying it, may prove to be the best guide the Church of England, and its dioceses, has of the characteristics and performance of its younger churches, known generically as fxC, for the next decade.

We realise that there is still more data about patterns and some lessons to draw from them which never made it into *The Day of Small Things*. Our intention is to chip away at this source and from time to time post the results to our website www.churcharmy.org/fxCresearch

If you want to be kept in touch with when we do this, send us your email and we'll let you know: ask@churcharmy.org

George W. Lings
March 2017

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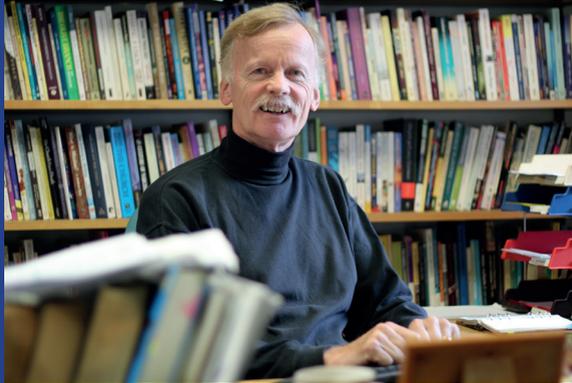
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