

# NEW COMMUNITIES PIONEER PILOT PROJECTS: AN EVALUATION FOR THE DIOCESE OF OXFORD

## Summary Report

Church Army's Research Unit, February 2021



Church Army is an Anglican Mission Society and Mission Community working across England, Scotland, Wales and the island of Ireland.

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## Introduction

This report summarises the findings of an evaluation of some of the Diocese of Oxford's New Communities Pioneer Ministry Pilot Projects, conducted by Church Army's Research Unit between July and December 2020. The main output of this evaluation is a set of eight individual project write-ups produced for the diocese. In this short summary report, we draw together common themes from the case studies and wider learning from this project.

## Background

The Diocese of Oxford's New Communities Initiative was developed as a response to the unprecedented level of new housing development and population expansion in the diocese. This, according to one estimate, was expected to result in 210,960 new dwellings and 470,000 new residents by 2026.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the scale and pace of development planned, the diocese was determined to do more than 'simply provide ministry cover'. It set up the New Communities Initiative with the following objectives:

- to help build new, sustainable Christian communities in new housing areas in the diocese by developing, enhancing and co-ordinating strategic capacity in mission and ministry
- to build social capital by increasing participation with others in the work of social cohesion and community development in the new housing areas
- to plan, initiate and sustain a variety of ministries in these areas by resourcing and supporting the Church at the local level whilst working with ecumenical partners wherever possible
- to learn from the experience of a small number of pilot schemes by sharing the knowledge gained and applying these lessons to future initiatives

The New Communities Initiative was supported by a grant of approximately £500,000 from the Church Commissioners. This enabled the appointment of a New Communities Development Officer and the creation of an Opportunities Fund co-ordinated by the Diocesan New Communities Group.

With money from the Opportunities Fund and other local sources, various 'pioneer pilot projects' were created in parts of the diocese experiencing major new housing developments. In June 2020, the diocese appointed Church Army's Research Unit to conduct an independent evaluation of some of these pilot projects. The overarching aim of the evaluation was:

To critically evaluate the New Communities Pioneer Ministry Pilot projects and to see what lessons the diocese can learn from them.

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<sup>1</sup> Diocese of Oxford (2015) *Diocesan Response to New Housing Areas (New Communities)*.  
<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ODS-15.10-New-Communities.pdf>

## Methodology

At the start of this evaluation, diocesan staff identified nine pioneer pilot projects that they wanted to assess. As agreed with the client, the research team's evaluation methodology was primarily qualitative in scope (though, where possible, we have also reported on numbers mentioned by pioneer ministers). This involved attempting to undertake the following for each pioneer project being studied:

- A desk-based review of any background documents supplied by the diocese or Pioneer Minister
- An interview with the Pioneer Minister
- An interview or focus group with members of the Pioneer Team
- An interview with one other local stakeholder suggested by the Pioneer Minister
- An interview with the relevant Area Bishop and/or Archdeacon
- An interview with the relevant Area Dean and (if available) Lay Chair

Of the nine pioneer pilot projects that we initially approached, eight were willing and able to participate in the research. The one remaining project (Bicester Ecotown) indicated they did not have the capacity to participate and we agreed with the client not to pursue this.

For the eight projects we studied, the methodology outlined above was followed generally consistently. However, in some cases, local circumstances and participant availability required some flexibility. This was particularly true for the Bracknell project where a Pioneer Minister had not been appointed. In this case, the original methodology was adapted to include interviews with other people who had been involved in the work there.

Alongside the project-specific interviews, we also interviewed two wider stakeholders identified by the diocese: Bishop Martin Gorick (currently Bishop of Dudley but previously Archdeacon of Oxford and Chair of the diocese's New Communities Committee) and Revd Canon Verena Breed (Team Rector, Bicester Team and previously a member of the New Communities Committee).

Thirty research interviews or focus groups took place in total, with some (such as those with Bishops and Archdeacons) considering several pioneer projects. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all of these were conducted online.

The main output of this evaluation is a set of eight individual project write-ups, one for each of the pioneer projects investigated. But over the pages that follow, we briefly summarise common themes from across the projects and some wider learning arising from this evaluation.

## Findings

### Pioneer appointments

The table below provides an introductory overview of the eight pioneer projects investigated and the pioneer ministers appointed.

Context	Archdeaconry	Pioneer Minister	Pioneer background	Year appointed
Bicester Kingsmere	Dorchester	John Bentley	Church Army Evangelist	2012
Didcot: Great Western Park	Dorchester	Mark Bodeker	Ordained Anglican	2014
Newton Leys	Bucks	Ben Thorpe	Ordained Anglican	2016
Aylesbury Kingsbrook	Bucks	James Talbot	Ordained Anglican	2017
Aylesbury Berryfields	Bucks	Gareth Lane	Ordained Anglican	2014
Milton Keynes Broughton	Bucks	Ruth Maxey	United Reformed Church Minister	2013
Bracknell	Berks	No external appointment (Jim Barlow, Interim Minister)	(Ordained Anglican)	(2015)
Arborfield Green	Berks	Tonya Elliott	Ordained Anglican	2018

Other than in Bracknell, where no external appointment was made and the local Interim Minister took on elements of the pioneer role, each project involved the appointment of a full-time stipendiary Pioneer Minister. In most cases, the person appointed was an ordained Anglican Minister. However, a United Reformed Church Minister was appointed at Milton Keynes Broughton and a Church Army Evangelist at Bicester Kingsmere.

### Project set up

All the projects were based in areas facing significant population expansion due to substantial redevelopment. Some of the projects appear to have been initiated primarily by local churches keen to respond to new housing developments in their areas, while in others the diocese played a more active role. Though all the projects involved Anglican parishes, some, such as Milton Keynes Broughton, grew out of the work of wider ecumenical partnerships.

The stated aims varied from project to project but, in most cases at least, they seemed to involve some combination of the following:

- Building community in new housing areas and serving the common good
- Creating new worshipping communities aimed at people unlikely to be reached by existing churches

In some projects, the original aims were clearly understood and 'owned' by all relevant parties (including the pioneer, local churches, wider stakeholders, senior diocesan staff), but in others there appears to have been some tension and confusion – for example, concerning the relative priority and relationship between 'building community' and 'creating new worshipping communities'.

Alongside support from the diocese’s New Communities Opportunities Fund, many of the projects also received funding from other local sources. The amount of funding provided by the diocese varied from project to project but, in many cases, pioneer stipends were fully funded by the diocese for the first five years, followed by tapered contributions over subsequent years. Despite local variations, all the projects supported employed a relatively high cost financial model. In addition to the costs associated with paying a full-time minister for at least five years, many of the projects also involved the purchase of new housing for the Pioneer Minister.

The tapered grant funding arrangements described above appear to have been set up with the hope or expectation on the part of the project funder that, over time, the costs associated with employing a Pioneer Minister could increasingly be borne by local churches and/or the new worshipping communities created. However, some of our case studies suggest that these expectations were not always clearly understood by pioneers and local churches.

In contrast with some other funding programmes, expectations and requirements around target setting and project reporting appear to have been relatively ‘light touch’. As one pioneer minister commented, there was a sense of “We trust you. Make of it what you will. Go and see what emerges”. Though pioneers generally seemed to appreciate this ‘permission-giving environment’, it may be that in some cases a lack of specific targets or clear expectations contributed to tensions, confusions, and disappointments further down the line.

### Progress to date

As the projects being assessed have been running for different lengths of time, it is not possible to make ‘like-for-like’ comparisons. However, progress with relation to the two overarching aims introduced above (building community and creating new worshipping communities) is briefly summarised below.

### Building community

The pioneer projects all reported positive developments with relation to bringing people together and building community in areas of new housing. Selected highlights are summarised below.

Context	Examples of building community
Bicester Kingsmere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a residents’ association</li> <li>• Welcoming new residents with cake and a card</li> </ul>
Didcot: Great Western Park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An annual summer family activities week</li> <li>• A regular community café</li> </ul>
Newton Leys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Congregation ‘open up’ their homes to others</li> <li>• Pioneer creates networks within wider community</li> </ul>
Aylesbury Kingsbrook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pioneer volunteers and hosts quiz at pub</li> <li>• Pioneer worked to establish a civic parish council</li> </ul>
Aylesbury Berryfields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visiting the local school</li> <li>• ‘One-off’ events for the whole community</li> </ul>
Milton Keynes Broughton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family fun days organised with (not just for) local people</li> </ul>
Bracknell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging pop-up events in Bracknell town centre</li> <li>• A ‘babies and bumps’ group in a local coffee shop</li> </ul>
Arborfield Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A running club</li> <li>• Community events in partnership with the council</li> </ul>

Some of the senior diocesan staff and wider stakeholders we interviewed also reported on the positive wider impacts generated by these projects. Though some housing developers were initially reluctant to work closely with churches, the success of these pilot projects in building community helped ‘open the

door' for more positive relationships and collaboration between developers and churches in other new areas of housing in the diocese.

### New worshipping communities

As summarised in the table below, new worshipping communities have been established in most projects, though the level of progress and the numbers of people engaged varies from context to context.

Context	Pioneer start date	New worshipping communities established
Bicester Kingsmere	2012	Various services and events established under the banner 'Kingsmere Community Ministry'.
Didcot: Great Western Park	2014	Great Western Park Church – approximately 50-60 attenders attending an 'open church' service (pre-lockdown). Additional congregation at retirement complex.
Newton Leys	2016	St Joe's – a worshipping community of approximately 70 people.
Aylesbury Kingsbrook	2017	A 'steady group' of approximately 20 people has been meeting in Kingsbrook since September 2018.
Aylesbury Berryfields	2014	Church on Berryfields – a community of 85 people (including monthly attenders and online viewers). 40-60 attenders at a typical gathering pre-lockdown. Monthly gatherings taking place before 2016 and weekly gatherings since January 2020.
Milton Keynes Broughton	2013	Church Without Walls (launched December 2013) - total worshipping community (pre-lockdown) of around 100 people, with 48 people worshipping at least twice a month.
Bracknell	(2015)	No new worshipping community established – the project has focused instead on working with and through existing congregations of various denominations.
Arborfield Green	2018	United@5 – monthly all age worship service with 25 attenders, many of whom are new Christians. Desire to go weekly. Started in 2019.

The worshipping communities established were all at different stages of development and maturity. Some appear to meet Church Army's Research Unit's ten criteria for an Anglican fresh expression of Church better than others,<sup>2</sup> but exploring this and other ecclesial factors (such as church tradition) fully was beyond the scope of this research. It is also important to note that:

- Some pioneers arrived in their context as part of a small group or plant, whereas others built a community around themselves 'from scratch'.
- The size of worshipping communities varied, and pioneers used a variety of measures to estimate their size. Some pioneers appeared not to think of attendance numbers as an important descriptor of their ministry.
- Most pioneers have had considerable success in building communities of non-churched and de-churched Christians and seekers, but some have had difficulty in growing beyond their starting congregation or in integrating inherited and new congregations.

<sup>2</sup> These criteria are listed on page 18 of Lings, G. (2016) *The Day of Small Things: An analysis of fresh expressions of Church in 21 dioceses of the Church of England*. <https://churcharmy.org/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=204265>

## Sustainability

Most projects have made some progress with relation to the various dimensions of sustainability highlighted by our previous research on sustainable fresh expressions of Church.<sup>3</sup> Such progress includes evidence of:

- Establishing local leadership teams (informal governance)
- Moving towards a relationship of inter-dependence with the sending church and/or wider ecumenical structures (formal governance)
- Becoming increasingly responsible for finance, including the promoting of member giving and external fundraising
- Investing in the development of local leaders to continue the work when the pioneer leaves

If, however, sustainability is defined primarily in terms of being able to cover all the costs associated with a full-time minister, all the projects still have a long way to go. As one team member from the Aylesbury Kingsbrook project put it, the new worshipping established was “certainly sustainable” in terms of the commitment of the team, but “when you add in financial implications, that’s a different matter”. Or in the words of another church leader commenting on the Newton Leys project:

*“In terms of sustainability, my goodness there’s a work of God happening on that estate without a shadow of a doubt, but the financial side is a tricky one.”*

Within some of the projects, it appears that all parties involved had clear expectations at the outset about when and how external funding would come to an end and the need to make adequate preparations for this. For projects such as Milton Keynes Broughton (Church Without Walls) where this was the case, such clarity had enabled there to be “positive, creative discussions within the wider ecumenical partnership about potential ways of continuing the work”. Consequently, many of the people we spoke to were cautiously hopeful that Church Without Walls would be “sustainable in some shape or form” when the Pioneer Minister eventually moves on.

Unfortunately, however, not all projects benefited from such clarity. In some there seems to have been a significant mismatch of expectations between Pioneer Ministers and other stakeholders about roles and responsibilities with relation to moving towards financial sustainability.

In many contexts, the expectation was that funding the pioneer’s stipend would eventually become the responsibility of the newly established community. Whilst many pioneers and stakeholders agreed with this in principle, they struggled in practise to secure adequate income from their congregations. One cause of this difficulty was that pioneers’ congregations tended to be comprised largely of new Christians who had not grown up in church and had no pre-existing expectations of regular giving. One pioneer, for example, found that:

*“It seems that you need about two years for someone who’s come in [from being] long term de-churched or un-churched before they start giving, and when they do it’s fairly small and then starts to increase.”*

Aside from being generally unused to giving, these new Christians were, in the experience of one stakeholder, less familiar overall with the concept of a parish share and a wider ecclesial body:

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<sup>3</sup> See Wier, A. (2016) *Sustaining young Churches: A qualitative pilot study of fresh expressions of Church in the Church of England*. [www.churcharmy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=204264](http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=204264). Appendix 2 of this report contains a list of further resources and research on financial sustainability.

*“in a parish church people understand there’s a parish share ... In a plant, they have far less understanding about money paid out to a wider body ... It’s hard to explain without feeling like you’re always drumming on about it.”*

## Learning arising

We invited the people involved in each project to reflect on things that gone well and things that had been challenging. Though some of the learning points identified were specific to individual projects (as documented in separate project write-ups), there were also several recurring themes. These are summarised in the table below.

*Note that some of the challenges identified are ‘flipsides’ of the positive!*

What has worked well?	What has been challenging?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Getting in there early</b> – building relationships with developers, new businesses, schools etc at an early stage</li> <li>• The Pioneer Minister’s <b>visible presence</b> in the community – in some cases through the intentional use of ‘the dog collar’, and in others the intentional avoidance of it!</li> <li>• <b>Living in the community</b> has led to recognition of belonging from residents and enabled important participation in civic councils and residents’ associations</li> <li>• <b>Building community first</b> – goodwill and relationships providing a platform for the subsequent establishment of new <b>worshipping communities</b></li> <li>• Developing a <b>collaborative culture</b> – being willing to delegate</li> <li>• <b>Adaptability</b> – being open to what emerges and willing and able to adjust and tailor one’s plans</li> <li>• <b>Ecumenical partnerships</b> (both formal and informal) have often proved mutually beneficial</li> <li>• <b>Not having a building</b> has been ‘invigorating’ in some contexts (e.g. Milton Keynes Broughton, Aylesbury Kingsbrook)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As indicated in the previous section, the projects studied have faced various challenges with relation to <b>sustainability</b></li> <li>• In some projects, there has been a <b>mismatch of expectations</b> between key parties involved (e.g. pioneer, local churches, diocesan office)</li> <li>• <b>Growing a team</b> and delegating has been difficult for many pioneers. Though there are pros and cons of different resourcing models, things take longer with a smaller team.</li> <li>• Though ecumenical working has brought many benefits, it may have in some cases <b>diluted the pioneering focus</b> on developing something targeted at the non-churched</li> <li>• Involvement with <b>building projects</b> has sometimes been frustrating, absorbing lots of time and energy with limited results</li> <li>• Although <b>not having a building</b> has been positive for some, it has also brought difficulties, especially since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In some contexts, fulfilling promises to provide a building has not appeared to be a priority for housing developers.</li> </ul>

Some of the pioneers we interviewed also offered wider theological insights about things they had learned about God, mission and the Church. These have been incorporated into the individual project write-ups and summarised in Appendix 1.



## Conclusion

The New Communities Initiative was developed because of the unprecedented level of new housing development taking place within the Diocese of Oxford, and the diocese's determination to do more than 'simply provide ministry cover'. Our study of eight pioneer pilot projects established through this ambitious, forward-thinking initiative has uncovered many encouraging signs of progress and fruitfulness with relation to the following core aims:

- Building community in new housing areas and serving the common good
- Creating new worshipping communities aimed at people unlikely to be reached by existing churches

However, it is also clear from our case studies that, in most contexts, there is still a long way to go, particularly with relation to establishing financially sustainable ministries. Here there are interesting parallels with the findings of a previous review of 'Cutting Edge' ministries in the diocese, which questioned the feasibility of projects becoming self-sustaining within 5-7 years.<sup>4</sup> The report by Rev'd Angie Paterson also went on to suggest:

*What is also clear is that if communities are to become self-sustaining there needs to be a degree of financial independence right from the start. The financial footing for each of the projects was quite different but our experience has shown that front-loading grants, whilst easing early pain, created difficulties in the long run. An element of self-sufficiency from the outset is helpful for the longer-term establishment of a community.<sup>5</sup>*

All the projects studied employed a relatively high-cost financial model which involves paying for a dedicated full-time Pioneer Minister in each new area for up to ten years. As our previous *Sustaining Young Churches* report noted, high-cost models are much harder to sustain financially than other less resource intensive models, though the question of which model offers the best return on investment or most sustainable fruit is a far more complex one.<sup>6</sup> As the report noted:

- On the one hand, a full-time paid leader model may sometimes inhibit sustainability. This is not only because it is difficult to sustain financially, it can also very easily lead to an over-reliance on paid staff that inhibits member involvement.
- On the other hand, 'shoestring' models do not always work, particularly in new or under-resourced mission contexts where there is very little existing church presence. Paid full-time ministers also generate various spin-off benefits.

What is clear though, in view of the level of new housing development occurring within the diocese, is that appointing a stipendiary Pioneer Minister is not going to be feasible within every new community. In view of this, we suggest the diocese may wish to consider ways in which paid pioneering roles in these and other contexts may need to be imagined. This might include:

- A greater emphasis on resourcing and enabling others within some pioneer roles
- Moving beyond the traditional default assumption of 'one leader, one church'
- Looking for the right mix of 'pioneer starters' and 'pioneer sustainers'
- Exploring ways to enable pioneers to work together, support and learn from each other
- Increased openness to bivocational ministry in some contexts

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<sup>4</sup> See page 56 of Paterson, A. (2008) *Cutting Edge Ministries - The Journey: 2002-2008*.

<https://www.oxford.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Cutting-Edge.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Paterson, A. (2008), p. 56.

<sup>6</sup> Wier, A. (2016) *Sustaining young Churches*, p. 47.

## Appendix 1: Further reflections from pioneers

As part of this research, pioneers in areas of new housing were asked to share reflections on what they had learnt about mission and God through their pioneering experience. The insights generated are documented more fully in the individual project write-ups but summarised below.

### Mission belongs to God

Several pioneers we spoke to had been encouraged by their rediscovery of the truth that God's mission belongs to him, rather than them. In contexts where there is, in the words of one pioneer, 'more opportunity than you can eat', some pioneers have found that it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the perceived weight of responsibility for the area in which they are working. Pioneers have been liberated from this self-imposed expectation through the realisation that God is actively working in their contexts, and that their mission belongs to God.

### The significance of buildings and not having them

Even prior to the coronavirus lockdown of 2020, many pioneers found themselves without a building from which to host services and events. This was sometimes unexpected and often inconvenient but has prompted a lot of reflection on the part of pioneers and their teams.

For team members, not having access to a conventional church building has led to a deeper engagement with their own practical ecclesiology. One team member described being motivated to 'go back to Acts and completely re-evaluate what church is'.

For another pioneer, the experience of 'building-less-ness' prompted thinking about how his personal home could become a place where the community could gather.

Pragmatic reflections on the usefulness of buildings also emerged. One pioneer found that weekly gatherings in the same building attracted more consistent engagement from those who were 'on the fringe' of ministry. Several others highlighted the practical benefits of not having to set up and pack down for every meeting.

### Letting go of neat lines and linear expectations

Some pioneers explained that they had to 'unlearn' some of their assumptions about the pioneering experience, particularly with regards to structure and linearity. Examples included the expectation of a linear 'conversion experience' for somebody coming to faith, or the expectation that church structures could be defined as clearly as they might be in the inherited church.

### Responsibility for a geographical area

Some pioneers had further developed their thinking around being responsible for a geographical area. For one, this was framed through the vocabulary of the 'cure of souls' and the insight that this included responsibility for local Christians (who might be looking for a local church), as well as de-churched or non-churched residents. For another, the sense of geographical responsibility was expressed through excitement about the prospect of 'discipling the community at large' by taking part in the decisions and conversations which shape the culture of the area in which they were situated.

## Appendix 2 – Financial sustainability - further reading and resources

We have provided below a list of resources in response to the question:

*On financial sustainability, can you offer any observations compared with research or reviews elsewhere about what has the greatest chance of being sustainable long term financially and otherwise?*

### The Day of Small Things

Lings, G. (2016) *The Day of Small Things: An analysis of fresh expressions of Church in 21 dioceses of the Church of England*.

<https://churcharmy.org/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=204265>

See particularly the following sections:

- 6.14 Progress in three-self responsibility
- 12.6 Progress in fxC towards sustainability and viability
- 12.11 Elements indicating vulnerability in fxC
- 12.12 Mortality within fxC

### Sustaining young Churches

Wier, A. (2016) *Sustaining young Churches: A qualitative pilot study of fresh expressions of Church in the Church of England*. [www.churcharmy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=204264](http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=204264)

See particularly:

- 3.4 Financial sustainability
- 4 What encourages and inhibits sustainability within fresh expressions of Church
- 4.3.2 Financial sustainability

### Fresh expressions of Church in the Diocese of Leicester

Church Army's Research Unit (2019) *Fresh expressions of Church in the Diocese Leicester*.

[www.churcharmy.org/Articles/556696/What\\_we\\_do/Research\\_Unit/Recently\\_completed\\_research.aspx#Leicester](http://www.churcharmy.org/Articles/556696/What_we_do/Research_Unit/Recently_completed_research.aspx#Leicester)

- 2.3 Who leads fxC?
- 2.5 Stewardship
- 3 Assessing progress and prospects
  - Value for money?
  - How durable are fresh expressions of Church?

This report may be of interest by way of contrast to the relatively 'high cost' financial model employed by the Diocese of Oxford's Pioneer Ministry Pilot Projects. Within the Diocese of Leicester, we found that the majority of fresh expressions of Church operate a relatively 'low cost' financial model that may make them easier to sustain. We would caution, however, against making simplistic comparisons or value judgements about the two models. As noted in our *Sustaining young Churches* report, 'shoestring' models do not work

in all contexts; furthermore, paid pioneer ministers often generate considerable ‘value added’ or spin-off benefits to a diocese (Wier, 2016:47).

### Other resources

Though the following resources do not address financial sustainability so explicitly, they may be helpful for those interested in exploring wider sustainability issues.

#### On transient mission contexts

See Lings, G. (2018) *Things that were tried and died: Why do so some young adult mission initiatives die?* [www.churcharmy.org/Groups/297572/Church\\_Army/web/What\\_we\\_do/Research\\_Unit/Young\\_Adults\\_research/Things\\_that\\_were.aspx](http://www.churcharmy.org/Groups/297572/Church_Army/web/What_we_do/Research_Unit/Young_Adults_research/Things_that_were.aspx)

Though the focus of this research was mission with young adults, some of the challenges noted with relation to transient mission contexts may also be relevant to pioneer work in new communities.

#### On intending to be Church

See Church Army’s Research Unit (2019) *Playfully Serious: How Messy Churches create new spaces for faith.*

[www.churcharmy.org.uk/Groups/319979/Church\\_Army/web/What\\_we\\_do/Research\\_Unit/Playfully\\_Serious/Playfully\\_Serious.aspx](http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/Groups/319979/Church_Army/web/What_we_do/Research_Unit/Playfully_Serious/Playfully_Serious.aspx)

This research notes several marked differences between Messy Churches that saw themselves as ‘outreach initiatives’ and those that saw themselves as ‘new church congregations within their parishes’. It found a clearly observable tendency for those with intention of being fresh expressions of Church to ‘outperform’ outreach initiatives on almost all elements of working towards self-sustainability (Church Army’s Research Unit, 2019:15).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See also the companion statistical report, *Painting with Numbers*, which can be downloaded from: [www.churcharmy.org.uk/Groups/319979/Church\\_Army/web/What\\_we\\_do/Research\\_Unit/Playfully\\_Serious/Playfully\\_Serious.aspx](http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/Groups/319979/Church_Army/web/What_we_do/Research_Unit/Playfully_Serious/Playfully_Serious.aspx)

## Appendix 3 – Potential further evaluation criteria and questions

The table below outlines a flexible evaluation framework for pioneering projects which seek to establish sustainable Christian worshipping communities whilst serving the common good and building relationships in the wider community. The questions it offers are primarily qualitative and far from comprehensive. They are designed to aid critical reflection on the part of the pioneer and other stakeholders.

	What?	Who?	Why?
<b>Building a faith community</b>	<p>How is this faith community suited to its context?</p> <p>How is this faith community understood by its members?</p> <p>What opportunities are there for people to come to know Jesus better through this faith community?</p>	<p>Who comprises the faith community?</p> <p>How many are existing Christians?</p> <p>Are members/attenders broadly representative of the local population?</p> <p>Are they mostly of one age or social group or ethnicity?</p> <p>Are there any ecumenical partnerships?</p>	<p>If this faith community was not here, how would things be different for the people who are a part of it?</p>
<b>Taking part in the wider community</b>	<p>How does the faith community interact with its wider context?</p> <p>Is this interaction formal, informal, or a bit of both?</p> <p>What do these relationships mean to those who take part?</p>	<p>Who do you interact with in the wider community?</p> <p>Are there some groups with whom it is easier to interact?</p> <p>Are there some places in which it is easier to interact?</p>	<p>If you did not interact with the wider community, what would be different?</p>
<b>Serving the common good</b>	<p>How is the common good being served?</p> <p>How are opportunities to serve being recognised?</p>	<p>Who is deciding how best to serve the local community?</p> <p>Who is being served?</p> <p>Who is involved in serving?</p>	<p>If you did not serve the common good in your area, what difference would it make?</p>
<b>Progressing towards sustainability</b>	<p>What future is envisioned for this project? Do the congregation and the diocese share this vision?</p> <p>How is this project becoming sustainable?</p> <p>Is there progress towards financial sustainability?</p> <p>How does it relate the diocese? Do the congregation and the diocese share this understanding?</p>	<p>Who is being equipped to take responsibility for aspects of this project – now and in the future?</p>	<p>If this project cannot be sustained, what will the impact be on those who have invested themselves in it?</p>