

PIONEERING IN PORTSMOUTH

Evaluating the Diocese of Portsmouth's Pioneer Project (2016-2020)

Church Army's Research Unit, May 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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Executive summary	3
1 Introduction	4
1.1 The Portsmouth Pioneer Project	4
1.2 Evaluating the Pioneer Project	5
2 New pioneer posts	6
2.1 Progress summary	6
2.2 Case studies	7
Case Study 1 - PO9 Pioneer Ministry	7
Case Study 2 - Leesland Neighbourhood Church	9
Case Study 3 - St Margaret's Community Church	11
Case Study 4 - Choir Church Portsmouth	13
Case Study 5 - The Host co-working space	15
2.3 Reflection and comment	17
2.4 Learning for the diocese	18
3 Harbour Church	20
3.1 Progress summary	20
3.2 Facts and figures	21
3.3 Case studies	22
3.4 Challenges for Harbour Church	25
3.5 Learning from Harbour Church	27
4 Pioneer training and vocations	29
4.1 Progress summary	29
4.2 Pioneer training - 'How to Pioneer' workshops	29
4.3 Pioneer vocations	31
5 Culture change	33
5.1 Encouraging developments	33
5.2 A more pioneer-focused diocese?	34
6 Conclusion	36
6.1 Celebration	36
6.2 Challenges	37
6.3 Learning points	38

Executive summary

The Portsmouth Pioneer Project was a five-year (2016-2020) programme of pioneering activity supported by a £929,000 grant from the Church of England's Strategic Development Fund. The main activities of the project were:

1. Creating new lay and ordained pioneer ministry posts
2. Planting a city centre resourcing church appealing to younger people (Harbour Church)
3. New appointments and initiatives to promote lay pioneer training and vocations to lay and ordained pioneer ministry

Church Army's Research Unit completed this evaluation of the project during 2020 and early 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that parts of the project have evolved in ways not anticipated at the start, there is only limited data available with relation to some of the project elements. Nevertheless, and as summarised below, there has been significant progress with relation to the various aims and outcomes specified at the start of the project.

Outcomes desired	Progress summary
New pioneer posts <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create at least 12 new fresh expressions of Church (fxC) with between 50-100 worshippers• Raise total attendance at fresh expressions in the diocese from 1,200 to 2,200	<p>At least 39 fxC have begun in the diocese since the Pioneer Project began, though not all of these can be attributed to the Pioneer Project.¹</p> <p>As the case studies in Section 2 of this report show, the work of pioneers has not been limited to the establishment of fresh expressions of Church. Working across 'the pioneer spectrum', some have also been involved in community activism and the establishment of kingdom-oriented social enterprises.</p>
Harbour Church <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A large (at least 200 worshippers) city centre resourcing church appealing particularly to younger people• Harbour Church exploring a further church plant	<p>Launched in 2016, Harbour Church now has around 500 worshippers, with an estimated average adult age of 27. Several new services or plants have also been started.</p> <p>Section 3 of this report describes the story of Harbour Church and the key learning arising.</p>
Pioneer training and vocations <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A cohort of at least 20 lay pioneers	<p>As Section 4 explains, the diocese's approach to pioneer training has changed and evolved and plans for a recognised lay pioneers scheme have been put on hold. But over 50 people have attended 'How to pioneer' workshops.</p> <p>Though there have been few formally designated 'Pioneer Ordinands', the diocese reports a significant uplift in the number of younger candidates entering the discernment process who wish to train on mixed mode pathways with a view to church planting.</p>
Culture change <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A more pioneer-focused diocese	<p>There have been some encouraging developments which suggest ways in which the Diocese of Portsmouth has become more pioneering. However, some of the research participants also had questions and concerns about pioneering in the diocese. These issues are explored and reflected on in Section 5 and the Conclusion of this report.</p>

¹ Unfortunately, there is not sufficient data available to provide a clear picture with relation to the impact on overall fxC attendance in the diocese.

1 Introduction

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Diocese of Portsmouth's Pioneer Project. The evaluation was conducted by Church Army's Research Unit between January 2020 and March 2021. Most of this work took place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which both delayed the completion of the evaluation and limited the availability of some research data. We are extremely grateful to everyone in the diocese who assisted us with our research amidst an incredibly challenging year.

1.1 The Portsmouth Pioneer Project

The Portsmouth Pioneer Project was a five-year (2016-2020) programme of pioneer activity supported by a £929,000 grant from the Church of England's Strategic Development Fund. As explained in the original funding bid, the focus of the Pioneer Project was:

forming new disciples and new missional communities by developing pioneering approaches, pioneering training, and pioneering posts for lay and ordained ministers.

The Pioneer Project consisted of three² main elements:

1. Creating various new lay and ordained pioneer ministry posts (focused particularly on hard-to-reach areas, new areas of housing and work with young people)
2. Planting a city centre resourcing church appealing to younger people (Harbour Church)
3. New appointments and initiatives to promote:
 - a. Vocations to lay and ordained pioneer ministry
 - b. Lay pioneer training

The main outcomes desired at the start of the project (as stated in the original bid) are summarised below:

Area of activity	Desired outcome (to be achieved by end of year 5)
New pioneer posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create at least 12 new fresh expressions of Church with between 50-100 worshippers• Raise total attendance at fresh expressions in the diocese from 1,200 to 2,200
Harbour Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A large (at least 200 worshippers) city centre resourcing church appealing particularly to younger people• Harbour Church exploring a further church plant
Pioneer training and vocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A cohort of at least 20 lay pioneers
Cross-cutting theme: culture change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A more pioneer-focused diocese

² The original bid listed four elements, but two of these were closely related so are recorded here as 3a and 3b.

1.2 Evaluating the Pioneer Project

In January 2020, the Diocese of Portsmouth commissioned Church Army's Research Unit to conduct an independent, end of programme, evaluation of the Pioneer Project. The aims of the evaluation were to:

- Assess whether the project's original aims and objectives had been achieved
- Explore how and why the project had evolved in ways not originally anticipated
- Identify key learning points for the Bishop's staff team, diocesan office, churches across the diocese, and the wider Church

The evaluation took place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other than an initial site visit in January 2020, all data collection took place remotely by telephone / video interview. The table below summarises the methodology employed.

Area of activity	Secondary sources consulted	Telephone and video interviews
New pioneer posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Milestone reports supplied by the diocese• Background documentation supplied by pioneers• Data on fresh expressions of Church from leaders' and attenders' surveys	Interviews with: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current and previous Deans of Pioneer Ministry• 5 pioneers³
Harbour Church	Material supplied by Harbour Church, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sunday attendance data• Alpha attendance figures and testimonies• Giving data• For the city lockdown data• External articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7 interviews with Harbour Church staff / team members
Pioneer training and vocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data supplied by the diocese, including survey feedback from 'How to pioneer' course participants	Interviews with <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dean of Pioneer Ministry• Diocesan Director of Vocation and Ordinands• 3 'How to pioneer' course participants
Cross-cutting theme: Culture change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data on Leading Your Church into Growth (LYCIG) course	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions about this incorporated into the other three research strands• Focus group conversation with diocesan strategy group

The rest of this report explores these four areas in turn.

³ All pioneers still in post were invited to participate in the research, as well as some who have subsequently moved on. For various reasons, only five pioneers were available for interview.

2 New pioneer posts

2.1 Progress summary

2.1.1 Posts created

This strand of the programme involved the creation of the new pioneer posts listed below.

Post created	Start date	End date	Project description
North Havant PO9 (1 FT equivalent job share)	July 2015	August 2019	Urban estates ministry in the PO9 area - see PO9 Pioneer Ministry case study
Gosport – Leesland (1 FT) –	April 2016	December 2020	Urban estates ministry in Leesland – see Leesland Neighbourhood Church case study
Southsea: St Jude	September 2018	Current	Church planting and community engagement in a diverse neighbourhood – see St Margaret's Community Church case study
St James Milton (1 FTE)	January 2019	Current	Engaging with children, families and schools through music – see Portsmouth Choir Church case study
Southsea: St Luke & St. Peter (3 PT)	June 2019	Current	Co-working space in a church building, based on social enterprise principles – see The Host co-working space case study
Wymering and Cosham (0.5)	March 2016	June 2019	A lay pioneer post for the north Portsmouth estates of Cosham and Wymering
Waterlooville MDA (0.4)	January 2016	July 2018	Pioneering in a new housing area
Emsworth youth pioneer (0.5)	October 2018	Current	Pioneering youth work around parish and deanery
Crookhorn (curate)	Unknown	Unknown	Curacy with a pioneering focus
Whiteley Conventional District	August 2018	Current	Ministry to young families with toddlers

2.1.2 Quantifiable outcomes

The original SDF bid stated, 'the primary desired outcome from the project is the growth of fresh expressions in the diocese'. At the start of the programme, it was hoped that the new pioneer posts would help contribute to the achievement of the following outcomes:

- Create at least 12 new fresh expressions of Church (fxC) with between 50-100 worshippers.
- Raise total attendance at fresh expressions in the diocese from 1,200 to 2,200

Having reviewed the most recently available quantitative data on fresh expressions of Church in the diocese,⁴ progress with relation to these outcomes is summarised below:

- With relation to the first outcome, it would seem that **at least 39 fxC have begun in the diocese since the Pioneer Project began**. The median attendance at these was 35 people, and 10 fxC had attendance of over 50 people. Given the lower-than-expected response rate for recent leaders and attenders surveys (due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic), the actual number of fxC established is probably higher than this. However, it is also important to acknowledge that not all the fxC can be linked to paid pioneer posts.
- Unfortunately, the low response for the leaders and attenders surveys means there is insufficient data available to provide a clear picture with relation to the second outcome.

⁴ See the separate *Leaders Survey* and *Attenders Survey* reports on fresh expressions of Church in the Diocese of Portsmouth, produced by Church Army's Research Unit in 2020.

2.2 Case studies

Case Study 1 - PO9 Pioneer Ministry

Setting the scene

Location and context: PO9 – including Leigh Park, a large urban estate with over 30,000 residents, one of the most deprived parts of Hampshire

Name of pioneer ministers: Sara and Barney Barron (Baptist Ministers, job-share)

Dates in post: July 2015 – August 2019

Original aims

According to the pioneer ministers, the original aims were:

being part of the community, and sharing our faith within the community, and getting involved in things in the community that would do that.

As such, the original focus of the project (for the pioneers at least) was not specifically on the establishment of fresh expressions of Church. But after about a year in post, the pioneers were then ‘surprised to find out there was an expectation that a fresh expression of Church would be started within five years’.

Progress to date

The key activities the pioneers were involved in included:

- Chaplaincy and therapeutic listening in schools
- Work around food poverty – including a food bank, community meals and community fridge
- A weekly gardening project supporting people with mental health issues
- Supporting isolated older people – including a Christmas day lunch (organised with a local school) and afternoon tea group
- Working with a local vicar at St Francis’ church to establish an all-age worshipping community in a local school

Reflecting on their time in PO9, the pioneers comment that a big feature of their ministry was ‘just having time for people who wouldn’t necessarily engage with traditional expressions of Church’. This enabled them to exercise pastoral care of many people on the edges of church.

Empowering others was also a significant focus. As the pioneers put it, ‘we always tried to do stuff in ways that weren’t charity but were empowering of others’. Examples include:

- Working with local people on the ‘Big Lunch’ initiative – this involved ‘lots of people who we’d met who were struggling in life’

it gave them a sense of purpose and perhaps highlighted something that they were good at... They took on those things themselves, with our support around the outside of it.

- Supporting a man who had been recipient of food parcels to now run the food bank

Sustainability

The pioneers moved on in August 2019 and were not replaced. Some of the activities they established are now run by local people. One such example is the food bank mentioned above. Other examples include:

- The church in a school that the pioneers helped start is now led by someone who works at the school who has come to faith and is doing some theological training
- The afternoon tea group for older people - reflecting on this, one of the pioneers comments:

I tried to set up things which would continue and weren't just about me being the centre of them, or us being the centre of them, but actually were things that could be sustainable afterwards. And as far as I know those older people, some of them still meet together, that are still here.

Though other activities like the school chaplaincy have not continued, the pioneers report a legacy of transformation and culture change in the school.

I think the sustainability is less about (although projects have continued...) - it's less about a project, or a church, or an institution continuing, it is more about a kingdom seed has been sown and that has flourished through the people there that we met and engaged with.

Key learning points

Before the pioneers took up their paid role on this project, they had already been living in the area for over a decade. They reflect:

we achieved what we achieved in Leigh Park because we were there 16 years.

In view of this, they advise other pioneers on urban estates to:

have a year where you're not leading or starting anything, and at least a year where you're learning to be guest in that community

This, they acknowledge, is 'real discipline' for pioneer activists but it is important to ensure they do not simply 'leap to the answers' before getting to know the questions that people in the community are asking.

Case Study 2 - Leesland Neighbourhood Church

Setting the scene

Location and context: Leesland – a tightly packed urban area (mostly back-to-back terraced housing) with approximately 11,600 residents. Although Leesland is a discrete residential area, it is served by two ecclesial parishes.

Name of pioneer minister: Revd Tim Watson, Leesland Pioneer Minister

Dates in post: April 2016 – December 2020

Original aims

According to the Pioneer Minister's job description, the main aims of the post were:

1. To establish, nurture, and grow a new Christian community or communities for Leesland.
2. To develop fresh expressions of worship, ministry, and mission, in keeping with the unchurched community.
3. To release St Faith's Church, Tribe Road, as a potential resource and hub for mission, as relevant in the development of the pioneering ministry.
4. To nurture and equip others to explore and develop their own pioneering ministries as members of the congregations across Gosport deanery.

Progress to date

New Christian communities / fresh expressions of Church

Leesland Neighbourhood Church (LNC) was launched in February 2018, with a desire to love the Leesland community and share God's love. Regular activities have included:

- Meeting on Sunday afternoons at St Faith's for a meal and short act of worship
- Bumblebees Toddler Group (attended by around 25 children and 25 adults)
- Running Leesland Threads children's clothing swap once a month
- Monthly outreach in the Forresters pub
- Supporting the Friends of Leesland Park's monthly work day in Leesland Park
- Seasonal events – including a Good Friday Crafts 'Crafternoon', summer solstice socials, Festival of Lights (engaging over 180 people at Halloween), Great Leesland Cake Off (around the same time as the Bake Off final), and a Christmas meal

Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the community of LNC consisted of around 51 people (27 adults, 24 children). Of the 27 adults, the leader estimates that 13 are churched, 6 are de-churched, and 7 are non-churched. A case study on the Church of England website tells the stories of some of the non-churched and de-churched people impacted by LNC (including several generations of the same family).⁵

⁵ <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/faith-action/changing-stories/tides-change> [Accessed 2 March 2021]

Releasing St Faith's as a resource and hub for mission

As the above case study explains, the congregation of St Faith's Church had declined to just 10 people by 2017 so the church gave itself four options, including closing. 'It opted to hold its traditional services on a Thursday and open the church up the rest of the time for whatever was needed.'⁶ Since then, numerous community activities have been established and the pioneer minister reports that non-worship footfall has gone up by 'something like 450%'. Various local people who do not attend church have also told him things like:

I never used to be in here, now I'm in here three times a week.

I can't imagine Leesland without Leesland Neighbourhood Church.

Nurturing and equipping others

With relation to nurturing and equipping others in pioneering, the original aim was to focus primarily on Gosport deanery, but the pioneer minister reflects that this 'wasn't really picked up'. Instead, he has focused on helping others elsewhere in the diocese develop their own pioneering ministries, reporting:

I've visited a number of folk and had conversations over coffee about how they might develop mission initiatives or explore fresh expressions in their context.

Future sustainability

In interview, the pioneer minister reflected that before COVID-19, this ministry seemed 'very sustainable' but post-COVID-19, the future seems less certain since the number of people engaging has significantly reduced. LNC has also been impacted by local church developments and a perceived change in diocesan strategy. As part of the diocese's pastoral reorganisation, another church nearby (300-500 metres away) is now partnering with Harbour Church and accessing funding which will enable them to put on events 'way beyond anything we could ever resource or afford to do' and which may be hard to compete with.

When we interviewed the pioneer, the pioneer had also announced he would be leaving shortly. It may be possible for some of this work to be picked up by LNC's self-supporting curate. But the pioneer would be keen for a part-time lay appointment to provide 'some focused leadership of up to two or three days a week'. It would also be highly desirable for any successor to have a house in Leesland because it is much harder to connect with the community if you do not live in the area – in the words of the pioneer: 'you're not putting the bins out and buying your milk from the local shop'.

Key learning points

The pioneer minister's main advice for other pioneers and people seeking to do something similar elsewhere include is to 'be willing to take more risks' and 'let it be contextual':

I would really encourage people to really let whatever ecclesial community arrives to be shaped by the community, let it be contextual and enable it to be contextual.

⁶ <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/faith-action/changing-stories/tides-change> [Accessed 2 March 2021]

Case Study 3 - St Margaret's Community Church

Setting the scene

Location and context: Based in Southsea, which the pioneer minister describes as 'quite a diverse community; it's not in the most deprived of parishes or communities but there are pockets of deprivation'. The original planting team (of 11 people) came from St Jude's Church, Southsea.

Name of pioneer minister: Fran Carabott, Lay Pioneer Minister (now also an ordinand)

Dates in post: Volunteer since 2017, employed since September 2018

Original aims

This post was shaped around work that the pioneer was already involved in on a voluntary basis, alongside others from the original planting church (St Jude's, Southsea). In his words, the intention all along has been:

To plant a church and start a new worshipping community... To see the kingdom grow and see more people come to faith.

Progress to date

St Margaret's Community Church⁷ was officially launched in 2017 and reported an average weekly attendance before lockdown of 56 (drawn from around 70 regular attendees).

The pioneer also reports 'the reach was much wider than that' and that St Margaret's engaged with 'a couple of hundred people during the week' through a range of different activities, including:

- A community café and shop
- A thriving toddler group
- Monthly outreach to a pub quiz
- Alpha courses (in person and online)
- Seasonal outreach – including engaging with approximately 200 people at Halloween
- A bicycle recycling social enterprise (run by an outside organisation but based at St Margaret's)

Around 22 people have come to faith so far. In the words of the pioneer, 'there's 22 people in the last three years that have walked in having not a clue about who Jesus is to having a relationship with him now'. In interview, the pioneer told us briefly about one such person:

She came into the community café feeling really anxious... For her just walking into just this café in the church, was a big, massive thing for her. And then she came back week after week. And then... she started coming to church each week and one Sunday she responded to the gospel and let Jesus into her life. She did the Alpha course. And then last year, last Christmas, she got baptised in the church...

During the COVID-19 pandemic, St Margaret's Community Church has continued to meet through a mix of in-person and online worship. The pioneer reports that 'quite a lot of new people' have joined us, the

⁷ <https://www.stmaqsccl.org.uk/>

church has grown, and ‘there are five people waiting to be baptised’. Reflecting on where these people have come from, he went on to say:

[T]hey have [found us] through Facebook I think, because we do a weekly update on Facebook and lots of people said we’ve been following you on Facebook. So I think Facebook’s been really great for us really, especially during lockdown.

The church’s social engagement has also grown during lockdown. Before the pandemic, St Margaret’s operated a community cupboard ‘where people from the community would donate stuff and whoever needed stuff would come and take that’. But during lockdown this has turned into a ‘full-on food bank open three mornings and serving 140-200 people a week’.

Sustainability

The pioneer minister reports ‘we’re really sustainable as a church’, noting that:

- Within the first six months St Margaret’s Community Church had ‘outgiven’ the £6,000 budget provided by the sending church and ‘become financially stable’.
- The community café and shop ‘makes money to fund mission’. Before the start of lockdown, it was making ‘enough money [that] we were just about to employ someone to take it on’.
- The church has recently installed a soft play area, which it hopes to run on a social enterprise basis post lockdown.

Key learning points

The pioneer minister’s top tips for people seeking to do something similar elsewhere include:

1. Pray and get to know your community!

It’s taken us three years just for everyone to get to know us in the community, to build up a trust. So pray, seek God, talk to the community, find out what they need, not what your church can provide for them.

2. Flexibility

The key is being flexible, not waiting until something is perfect... It’s that whole thing of what’s in your hand, whatever you’ve got as your resource then use it.

3. Go for it!

Don’t have endless meetings or committees, just go for it, figure out a vision and a mission and go for it.

Have a clear simple vision and keep the main thing the main thing! Treat it as a big adventure.

Case Study 4 - Choir Church Portsmouth

Setting the scene

Location and context: Project established by St James' Church, Milton – a church with an ageing congregation which was keen to engage with more young people and families through developing relationships with local schools.

Name of pioneer minister: Ally Ross, Musical Director of the Church Choir Project

Date in post: Since January 2019

Original aims

In the words of the post-holder, the aim of the project was to 'refresh our parish' through music and singing activities in local schools:

So basically, we wanted to go in, get music going in these schools and to start making them much more aware of St James' so they can utilise us.

According to the post-holder, the role was advertised as a quite 'fluid position' without set-in-stone targets or prescribed outcomes.

Progress to date

Soon after his appointment in January 2019, the pioneer approached local schools, saying: 'I'm a trained musician, representing St James'; we're here to help, what can I do?'

Off the back of this, various activities and groups were established, including after school choir clubs and music lessons in several local schools. The choirs begun singing pop songs, but after a while, more religious music was tentatively introduced. The musical director reports that choir members 'didn't even bat an eyelid' at this and that attempts to deepen church connections then followed. This included inviting the children's choirs to sing a song during communion at St James'. Over time, the hope is to move some of the choirs over to St James' to further develop the church connection.

So instead of doing 3.15-4.00 at school, we would do an evening, say six o'clock and bring them all together. What we would do is we would do an hour-long or 45 minutes, we would do the singing, and we would end with a prayer or something like that.

There has also been significant engagement with Portsmouth Football Club, which is in St James' parish. This has included bringing together the choirs from different schools to sing at a carol service ('A Pompey Christmas Sing-along') and a football match attended by 18,000 people. The pioneer noted that this experience built up the choir members' self-esteem as well as particularly attracting boys to the choirs (a demographic typically more reluctant to be involved).

Portsmouth Choir Church collaborates with various partner organisations, including Portsmouth Cathedral and the national Choir Church Project. The Choir Church website features a case study of Portsmouth Choir Church, in which the Director of Music at Portsmouth Cathedral comments:

We know that children can be the best evangelists of their own families. Music can bring the children to church, and modelled correctly and honestly, the parents and families may follow.⁸

To date, there seems to be only limited evidence of these wider evangelistic aspirations being achieved. But it is important to acknowledge that the Portsmouth Choir Church is still a relatively young project. The pioneer was only in post for just over a year when lockdown happened. It also seems that the project aims have changed and evolved over time. In this regard, the pioneer comments:

Rather than saying we're going to get 50 new people on a Sunday, I've been going for we want to improve wellbeing and mental health in our parish, because we're the church and that's what we should be doing, so it's caring for our community, rather than trying to force them through the door.

Sustainability

The pioneer was initially appointed on a three-year contract, with the option to extend it to five. After two years in post (one of which was lived against the backdrop of an international pandemic), encouraging foundations have been laid. There are now important questions to be addressed about the direction of the project moving forward.

Key learning points

Choir Church, I truly believe, can work in any city, but there is not one model that fits all. You've got to tailor it to your needs, and it can do that.

The pioneer reflects that Choir Church 'can work in any city, but there is no one model that fits all. You've got to tailor it to your needs, and it can do that'. His advice for people seeking to do something similar elsewhere includes:

1. Serving first in local schools

When I first started in the job here, I went to every nativity play, then it got to the point where if there was an end of year performance, they'd invite me, and so you've got the staff, you've got the kids, and then you walk in at the back and the ones that know you wave at you... That's what you need, to become a presence in the parish.

2. Networking

Networking has been really, really important, and we've made some fantastic partners over time. Once you start to network, you realise that these things are going on.

3. Be unapologetic

Never be apologetic... I was like, 'oh can we do this [song] if it says God in it?' And I was so panicky about that because I was imagining the schools... Not at any point was that a problem. So be unapologetic, would be my absolute advice.

⁸ <https://www.choirchurch.com/projectsandpartnerships> [Accessed 2 February 2021]

Case Study 5 - The Host co-working space

Setting the scene

Location and context: Project aimed at people who work from home - based at St Luke's Southsea, near Portsmouth city centre

Name of pioneer minister: Abi Lane – pioneer minister, curating the Host co-working space. Part-time role (originally as a job-share of a full-time role, but other person has now moved on).

Dates in post: June 2019 - present

Original aims

The Host was launched in 2019 with a vision to offer 'an alternative way of working'. The pioneer reports that her original remit was to 'flesh out the vision for The Host Space and work out what it was going to look like', developing a social enterprise alongside an existing church. Further, more specific, aims included:

- Enabling the Host to become financially sustainable by the end of the initial funding
- Exploring and modelling how to do business based on 'kingdom values'
- To bring a different demographic of people through the doors of St Luke's

Progress to date

After extensive refurbishment of the inside of St Luke's Church, The Host co-working space was launched towards the end of 2019.⁹ The pioneer reports that the project has been 'really good fun to set up' and begun to build up regular customers. But the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impeded the project's progress. The first national lockdown in March 2020, which came at a time when the Host was just beginning to get going, forced it to close completely until August. When we interviewed the pioneer in October 2020, the Host had recently reopened and was beginning to rebuild its customer base. Subsequent lockdowns, however, have hampered these efforts and at the time of writing (March 2021) the Host is still closed for business.

The pioneer estimates that less than half of the Host's regular customers are Christians, but many have told her 'how peaceful it feels coming in' and that they find it a very 'surprising space'. Others have particularly appreciated the 'human interaction' that the Host provides people who are usually working from home. As the pioneer explains, quite a few home-workers have come to the Host saying things like:

I just need the break from the home, I've been going crazy at home, I've got a toddler at home and I don't have to change nappies here, and it's welcoming and it's calm, it's peaceful.

Many such people who have been isolated at home are keen to 'share a bit about what they're doing because they've been isolated at home'. Both the pioneer and vicar of St Luke's have made themselves available to take an interest and to listen. St Luke's also have a Wednesday afternoon communion service that happens at the same time as the Host. This provides an 'opportunity and a bit of a bridge between the Host existing and the church. 'What we want to do', the pioneer explains, is 'bring church just that little bit closer to the people of the Host'. Though 'we haven't quite got to the point where our community of co-workers are exploring church', some of the customers are 'starting to feel a part of St Luke's without being a St Luke's churchgoer.

⁹ <https://www.thehostspace.co.uk/>

Sustainability

It's a strange time to be a co-working space, but also I think it's definitely the right time.

As the Host has been closed for much of the past year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, assessing its sustainability prospects is difficult. When we interviewed the pioneer in October, she told us: 'I can't say whether it will work yet or not' but then went on to say:

It's got more potential now than it did before Covid because having lockdown has meant that there've been so many more people that have been forced to work from home or are trying new things and are not travelling... There's a whole new realm of people that wouldn't have been potentials before and now are potential users.

Key learning points

I think it's really key to have more Christians, more Christian businesses out there in the world doing things right, and having social enterprises and supporting individuals as well.

As well as encouraging more Christians to start social enterprises, the pioneer minister also had the following advice for the establishment of church-based co-working spaces:

1. Assess viability

I'd definitely be encouraging that person to think about how it would work and whether in their local area whether it's the right context for it... It would depend on their physical location... and the resources that they've got behind them.

2. You need advocates

making sure that they've got a good line manager or the vicar who's in charge of them who can be that advocate in the church PCC when it's necessary, because it is necessary...

3. Allow time for permissions

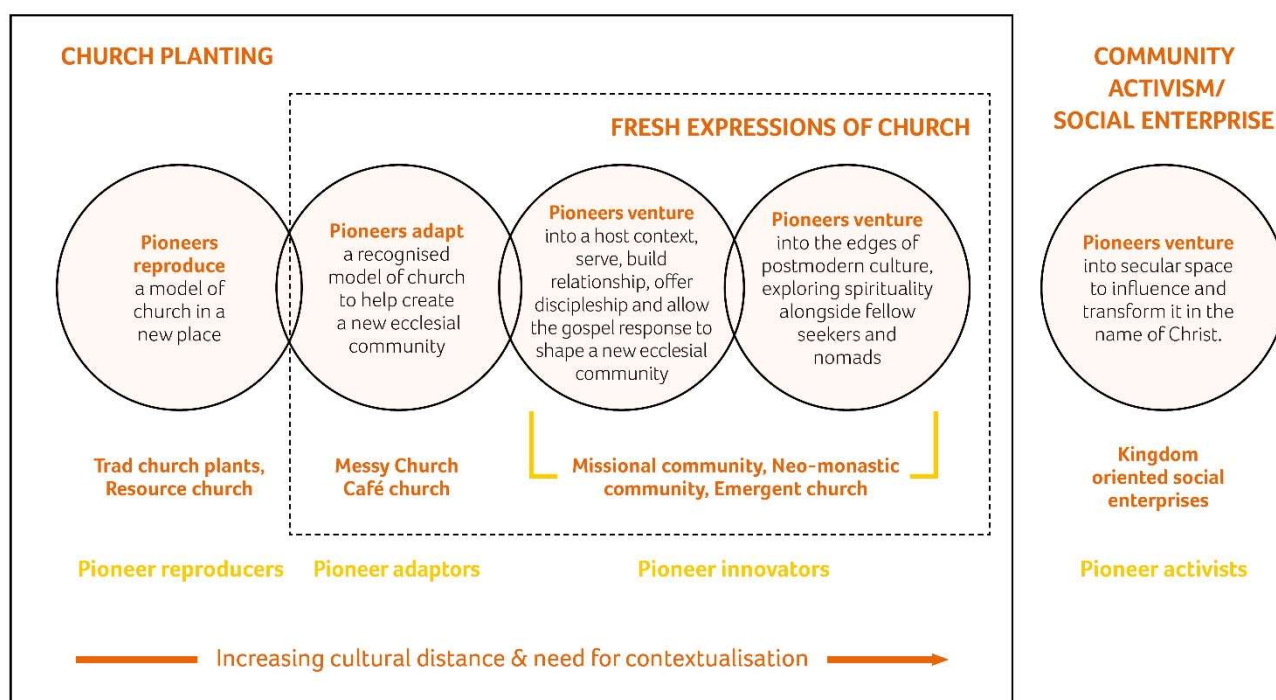
The physical things that come with wanting to do something in an old building... are an absolute hindrance... Everything takes so long to get permission to do anything.

2.3 Reflection and comment

Some key themes and issues arising from the above case studies are summarised below.

2.3.1 Working across the pioneer spectrum (and beyond)

Reflecting on the above case studies, different pioneers seem to have been operating at different places along Bradbury and Hodgett's pioneer spectrum summarised in the diagram below.¹⁰ Some pioneers have established church plants (see Section 3 on Harbour Church), some have established fresh expressions of Church (e.g. Leesland Neighbourhood Church), others have established kingdom-oriented social enterprises (e.g. The Host co-working space). Some pioneering initiatives are harder to categorise precisely. St Margaret's Church, for example, appears to be a hybrid of traditional church planting and a more grassroots fresh expressions of Church approach, while Portsmouth Choir Church may not fall neatly into any of the existing categories.



2.3.2 Expectations and clarity

According to the original SDF funding bid, the primary desired outcome from the project was 'the growth of fresh expressions in the diocese'. This, the bid stated, would be made explicit in the recruitment of pioneer ministers and in the provision of a milestones framework describing expected progress in the growth of a new worshipping community. But as noted already, the work of the appointed pioneers encompassed a diverse range of activities, and expectations around intended outcomes were not always clear. One pioneer, for example, reports being 'surprised to find out [one year into post] there was an expectation that a fresh expression of Church would be started within five years'.

¹⁰ Tina Hodgett and Paul Bradbury (2018) 'Pioneering Mission is a Spectrum', *Anvil* 34.1 www.churchmissionsociety.org/resources/pioneering-mission-spectrum-tina-hodgett-paul-bradbury-anvil-vol-34-issue-1/. More tools and resources on this can be found at www.pioneerspectrum.com.

2.3.3 The challenge of measurement

The case studies suggest that the impact of the new pioneer posts has been wide-ranging, encompassing ‘social impact’ (e.g., people benefiting from food banks), ‘evangelistic impact’ (e.g., people becoming Christians) and the establishment of new worshipping communities. Assessing and comparing impact across projects, however, is difficult because:

- The aims and intentions of the different pioneer posts have been so varied.
- The ‘milestones evaluation framework’ originally proposed for this project was focused specifically on the establishment of worshipping communities. As such, it has been more useful and relevant to some pioneer posts than others.
- For some projects, project aims / intended outcomes have changed or evolved over time.
- Not all pioneers started in post at the same time and all the original cohort have now moved on. It is therefore difficult to compare like for like.
- Some pioneers are critical, suspicious or resistant to particular approaches to measuring ‘results’.

[When I started], the idea of pioneering and being a gift to a community was a thing, and I’d really been released by the diocese and also the local parishes to be that gift and do what’s needed... [But] I think the focus now is on results...

the diocese likes to work on numbers, bums on seats shall we say, which... is very complicated when you’ve got this [pioneering] scenario.

2.3.4 Sustainability challenges

By autumn 2020, only one of the original group of pioneers appointed in 2015/16 was still in post. All the others had either moved on or ‘[been] moved on’, and none had been replaced. Feedback from pioneers who have moved away suggests that the relatively short-term nature of these posts has been a factor here. As one pioneer put it, ‘This feels like a temporary project because the commitment is to five years.’

For other pioneers who have started more recently, a significant proportion of their time in post has been spent working (or in some cases on furlough) against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, much of the work established is understandably quite fragile still. In this context, there are important questions to be addressed about the direction of the project moving forward.

2.4 Learning for the diocese

Later in this report, we share pioneers’ reflections on the question: ‘To what extent has the Diocese of Portsmouth become a more pioneer-focused diocese?’ In this section, we summarise (in anonymised form) the more project-specific feedback pioneers gave us on experiences of relating to the diocese. The pioneers we interviewed told us they particularly appreciated the following from the diocese:

- Encouragement and support from key diocesan staff, including the Dean(s) of Pioneer Ministry (‘both have been brilliant’) and the Strategic Development Programme Manager (‘it’s good to have someone with his business knowledge and also knowledge of the diocese’)
- The provision of peer support through the Pioneer Fellowship
- Specialist support and advice on issues such as safeguarding
- Access to learning opportunities – e.g. Kaospilot design training in Denmark

Some pioneers, however, also expressed concern or frustration regarding:

- Reporting requirements

It was a bit of a culture shock... I guess at points we almost felt overwhelmed with support, and there was a sense of are they just checking up on us.

- Limited access to funding for running activities

I needed £X a year to pay for X [activity]. And I was told that's not how the funding works, that's not how SDF works, so you can't have that money.

- A sense of detachment

You put everything of you into these projects, you live into them with every ounce of your being. And then it feels like decisions [are made by...] people who talk about this at a monthly meeting for an hour.

For dioceses and others in the wider Church seeking to support and nurture pioneering, the pioneers we interviewed offered the following 'top tips':

- Get behind pioneers – give them 'permission to flourish [and] permission to fail'
- Give pioneers a working allowance

If you're going to get funding for six pioneer posts, don't. Get funding for five and then get some working allowance for those pioneers.

- See pioneering as a gift

I'd encourage those in power to understand pioneering as a gift in terms of time and resources to a community. I feel like my role - many people in the community see me as a community vicar I think, rather than a pioneer - my role is to be gifted to [the community].

- Be clear about the differences between 'grassroots pioneering' and church planting (as per the pioneer spectrum)

Pioneering for me is grassroots, it comes up from the ground, and church planting comes down from above. ... And as you want to gift someone to a community, you need that gift to be shaped by that community, not shaped by what you think they need.

- Look at different financial models – 'better to be half-time for twice as long'?

I think what the diocese and other institutions need to hear is that deploying people for five years and then there's this cliff edge, it isn't sustainable... If anything, I'd be saying it'd be far better, if the finance was an issue, to say actually let's employ someone half-time for ten years, because I think it creates a sustainability...

3 Harbour Church

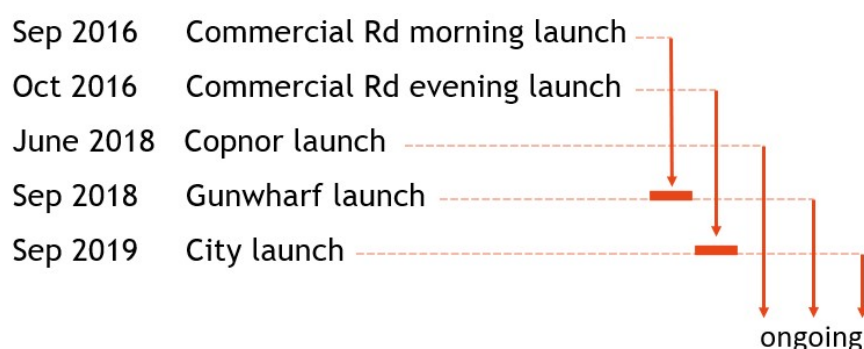
3.1 Progress summary

According to the original funding bid, the stated intention of this strand of the project was to:

Plant a large, city centre, resourcing church appealing to younger people. Within the five year timescales, we expect this to have grown to at least 200 worshippers and to be exploring a further plant.

These aspirations have all been achieved or exceeded:

- Harbour Church was launched September 2016
- Though Harbour Church is a community of all ages, **the average age is 27** [leader's estimate]
- There were around **500 worshippers** on a typical Sunday before COVID-19.
- There have been **several new services or plants**, as summarised below:



Note: Not all these new services can necessarily be classified as (church) plants using traditional definitions. We observe several different models or approaches at work here:

- *Planting a new congregation from scratch in a new venue (traditional church planting at Commercial Road)*
- *Building community relationships through a toddler group first and then launching public worship (something like a fresh expression of Church at Copnor)*
- *Moving an established congregation (Commercial Road morning service) into a church building with an existing inherited congregation (transplant model at Gunwharf / St George Portsea)*
- *Relocating an established congregation (Commercial Road evening service) into a vacant church building (City congregation at All Saints Portsea)*

Within the rest of this section, we unpack further the story of Harbour Church and reflect on the key learning arising from the story so far.¹¹

¹¹ Note that all interviews and data gathering took place in September-November 2020. Since then, a further national lockdown came into force and so circumstances, activities and patterns of services will have changed again.

3.2 Facts and figures

3.2.1 Sunday attendance

Sunday attendance at Harbour Church has continued to grow throughout its life. From around 150 people attending the church when it began (September 2016) and meeting at one service, around 500 people were attending on a typical Sunday by March 2020, across four services. It needs to be acknowledged that some of this growth may be attributable to Harbour Church inheriting two existing congregations when it took on new locations, though anecdotal evidence suggests that most of the people from these existing congregations ultimately left.

Harbour Church's attendance figures show that 79% of Sunday attenders are adults and 21% are children and youth (September-December 2019). These proportions are the same as seen in the general population of Portsmouth.

3.2.2 Alpha

Many Harbour leaders named the Alpha course as being a valuable and successful tool in their ministry. The course has been run multiple times a year with an average of 35 people attending each course (pre-COVID-19).

During the first lockdown (Spring 2020), individual Alpha courses were run online across a number of different settings, including specialist youth and prison groups. During this period, an average of 104 people attended Harbour Church Alpha courses each week.

3.2.3 Finance and giving

Harbour Church has seen a year-on-year increase in planned monthly giving from its congregations and appears on track to continue this trend in spite of COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions. They currently have around 160 regular givers, but are aware that the large majority of their giving comes from the Gunwharf location.

We've kind of acknowledged that our morning service [Gunwharf] is essentially picking up the tab for a lot of our other activities... there's a sense where that isn't really sustainable because as we continue to grow and all of the services get bigger, it's weighted against the giving that we do have

Leaders also acknowledge that the congregational giving alone does not come near to covering the full running costs of Harbour Church and so they rely on other sources such as applying for grants and accessing SDF funding. They describe seeing the 'SDF cliff edge' approaching as they near the end of this funding.

The difficulty of attracting some of the demographics that Harbour Church does, such as students, young adults and single-parent families, means that these members often have little disposable income to contribute towards the church. In view of this, one Harbour Church leader commented: 'I think it's difficult for us to imagine a scenario where we're completely self-supporting.'

3.2.4 Demographics

The original brief for Harbour Church was to reach 15 to 29-year-olds, but Harbour has also recognised the need to engage people of other ages: 'We knew that in order to be a church that reached 15 to 29-year-olds we had to be a church for everyone.' As the church has grown different services, congregations and locations have developed to cater to different demographics, including students (City), young adults

(City), young families (Copnor and Gunwharf), older families (Gunwharf). Alex now estimates the average adult at Harbour Church to be aged 27 and for attenders' church backgrounds to be 50% Christian, 30% de-churched, 20% non-churched.

In early 2018, Church Army's Research Unit carried out a survey of attenders at Harbour Church as part of a wider research project. This survey was conducted at the evening service of Harbour Church, which was primarily focused on students and young adults, while the morning service focused on families. This provides a snapshot of some of the demographics at Harbour as it was nearing its second anniversary.

This survey found that, at the evening service:

- Just over half (51.4%) of the attenders were aged 18 to 24
- 30.5% of attenders were current university students and another 46% had previously attended university
- Of attenders who identified as Christian, 18.4% said that they 'became a Christian' or 'rediscovered a faith they had lost' at Harbour Church
- 70.8% of attenders were already churchgoers prior to arriving at Harbour Church

3.3 Case studies

Some of the key ministries and activities established during the lifetime of the pioneer project are summarised below.

3.3.1 Copnor – early engagement

Harbour Church services in Copnor launched in June 2018, but the story does not begin there.

St Albans Church has been linked to Harbour Church since the plant first began and in the initial years the building was used to run a toddler group for the Copnor community. Through this the team were able to get to know the area and the people within it and they discovered the need to support young families, especially young mums.

This earlier engagement with the community meant that when a new service was launched in June 2018, it was not starting from scratch but able to build on the relationships and connections already made. As one leader put it:

when we started the service people wanted to come as they knew us and trusted us

'The Four' is an action-packed service based around different zones within the church for children to engage with and is aimed at families with children primarily under the age of seven. Invitations to attend The Four are often sent out through connections with the local school and groups such as the scouts.

We have families who wouldn't have come to church but the kids wanted to, and then the parents have heard the gospel.

3.3.2 Harbour Youth – starting afresh

Harbour Youth was reborn during lockdown. There had always been a small number of younger teenagers at Harbour Church (anecdotally, maybe seven or eight), but much of the church's investment had been in students and children.

At the start of 2020, Harbour appointed a youth pastor tasked with building up this ministry. They almost immediately encountered the national lockdown but decided to turn this into an opportunity to build relationships with the existing young people, build up the team, and plan for the relaunch of Harbour Youth.

At the start of the summer holidays, Harbour Youth was relaunched with socials. The team were keen to make this gathering as attractive to the young people as possible and so filled the space with PlayStations, basketball machines, game zones, tuck shops and other things. As attendance started to grow, in September they launched youth services. Building on the format of the summer social, these also included an element of worship.

The summer socials saw 25 young people attending and by October 2021 (the time of our interview), 50 young people were regularly attending. It is estimated that 60% of those who attend do not come from a Christian background.

In the context of a very difficult year for teenagers and young people, the team describe wanting to make Harbour Youth 'a time of joy amidst the pandemic'. They report seeing positive impacts on the confidence and mental health of the youth who attend.

The team have also been keen to provide opportunities for young people to take more ownership of the services, for example by being involved in the worship band, assisting with sound and tech. They are also looking to develop a trainee youth worker scheme.

3.3.3 Gunwharf – community engagement breakthrough in lockdown

Harbour Church launched in St George's Church in September 2018. While there was an existing congregation within the church, the team acknowledge that there was some 'apprehension' from the local community about Harbour's arrival:

I think I'd say we probably did struggle a bit to build trust with the local community.

While some progress on this had been made before the pandemic, the first lockdown at the end of March 2020 accelerated this progress. One catalyst for this has been the church partnering with local community groups to deliver food to people in need and providing building space for these groups to work in.

The team reflect on this period as one of opportunity. As one leader put it: 'we've now got relationships within the community we'd never have dreamed of before lockdown'.

3.3.4 For the City

We have a congregation that loves the city and the most effective way to reach the city is to meet their deepest needs first.

'For the City' is the umbrella term for all the social action projects and ministries within Harbour Church. The team describe social action as an integral part of Harbour Church, but the way it is expressed is down to individual congregations and the suggestions they put forward. Key ministries include:

- Spa 61 - pamper beauty sessions for women, including special sessions for refugees and hostels
- Christians Against Poverty debt advice
- Safe Harbour - meals and community for people on the streets

- Food bank
- Prison ministry – including visiting (when allowed), letter writing and Alpha courses

During the pandemic, For the City has perhaps been the most visible element of Harbour Church within Portsmouth. Between March and October 2021 (figures that data is available for) they provided:

- 259 food packs (feeding approximately 450 people)
- 462 hot meals for the homeless
- 843 hot meals for women's hostels
- 972 phone calls were made to check on people
- 52 care packages for vulnerable people
- 30 care packages for essential workers

For the City ministries have also engaged with local organisations and services working in the same area. Spa 61, for example, has built a relationship with the Red Cross, domestic abuse services, the council, probation services as well as women's refuges and hostels. This appears to have helped to address some people's apprehensions or concerns about Harbour Church. As one leader put it:

I think when we first arrived we had a bit of a reputation of being this young, rowdy, HTB 'thing' and now people can see that we have a heart.

These ministries have also helped to change some people's perceptions of church more generally by enabling them to realise the church cares, and some people have begun exploring faith or attending church services. Through Spa 61, four women and four children have been baptised so far.

3.4 Challenges for Harbour Church

Some key challenges identified by the people we spoke to (from Harbour Church and beyond) are summarised below.

3.4.1 The impact of COVID-19

The first lockdown meant moving to online services – both live-streamed (City) and pre-recorded (Copnor & Gunwharf). As restrictions have eased and then returned, church has looked different at different times. Most of the interviews and data gathering for this strand of the evaluation took place between September and November 2020. Since then, a further national lockdown came into force and so circumstances, activities and patterns of services will have changed again.

The longer-term impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and government restrictions has had on Harbour Church is still largely unknown. Many team members identified this unknown as a challenge in their near future. Trying to rebuild the atmosphere and feel of the Harbour Church community and its ministries while also working within the current restrictions and what they allow will continue for some time. This was identified particularly for the congregations focused on younger children and families as venue capacity and activity limits mean that they will not be able to operate as before.

3.4.2 Financial sustainability

As noted already, Harbour Church cannot yet be financially sustained by congregational giving alone. Given the target demographic and the communities Harbour Church serves, the team members we interviewed considered it unlikely that Harbour Church would ever be in a position where this is the case. A continuing challenge for the team will therefore be seeking alternative sources of funding, whether through grants, diocesan sources, fundraising, or other income streams such as venue hire. In this sense, it is important to acknowledge that city centre ‘resource churches’¹² like Harbour Church may, like many other churches, continue to be financially dependent on the wider Church.

3.4.3 Growing team

A further challenge related to sustainability concerns the ongoing challenge of growing team. There are already a lot of people involved in making Harbour Church happen both on a Sunday and during the week. In fact, congregation members are encouraged to join one of a series of ‘teams’ and this form of service is seen as one of Harbour’s methods of discipling its attenders. But as the church continues to grow and ministries diversify, this means the team too needs to grow. The rapidly growing Harbour Youth ministry is an example of this - a large team was recruited in a relatively short space of time, and as the ministry’s plans are to continue to grow, yet more team will be needed. The challenge for this is providing appropriate training for the team as well as keeping them inspired and motivated and helping new team members to ‘catch the vision’ for the ministry.

3.4.4 Overcoming suspicion

The Harbour Church team report encountering, and needing to overcome, various levels of suspicion from the wider community. This has included:

¹² <http://www.centreforchurchplanting.org/city-centre-resource-churches/>

- Suspicion from local communities when Harbour has moved to a new location – community members sometimes have specific expectations around what a church ‘should’ be doing and Harbour does not always conform to these.
- Suspicion from other churches and Christians – with Harbour Church sometimes seen as ‘incomers’ who have come to Portsmouth with a certain style and model that may negatively impact other churches.

Over the years, Harbour Church have needed to work hard to address and allay such concerns, but this is likely to remain an ongoing challenge moving forward.

3.4.5 Reaching the non-churched

One of the criticisms sometimes levied at resource churches like Harbour Church is that much of their growth comes from transfer growth or, as one pioneer we interviewed put it, taking ‘lots of people from other churches’. In 2018, Harbour Church was featured in an article in *The Economist* with the provocative title, ‘Trendy new churches poach worshippers from stuffy ones’.¹³ This suggested that around a third of Harbour Church attenders had moved from another church.

Definitive figures on the backgrounds of church attenders are hard to come by. But when we interviewed Alex Wood, he estimated that ‘probably half of the people who come to us are people who have either moved to the area who were regular churchgoers before or who have moved from another church who are regular churchgoers’. As a qualification to this, he then went on to comment: ‘The only thing is with the 50%, what’s not clear is if they hadn’t moved to Harbour whether they just would have stopped going to church.’

Regardless of the precise figures, what is clear from this evaluation is that the growth of Harbour Church needs to be attributed to a combination of:

- Attracting existing Christians
- Attracting people with a previous, or more tenuous, connection with church
- Engaging ‘non-churched’ people

Though there is potential for deepening discipleship across each of these categories, the key challenge for pioneering mission is engaging with the non-churched. The above case studies highlight some encouraging developments at Harbour Church in this regard, which it is important to build on moving forward.

¹³ <https://www.economist.com/britain/2018/10/27/trendy-new-churches-poach-worshippers-from-stuffy-ones>

3.5 Learning from Harbour Church

Summary

As indicated above, the targets and aspirations for Harbour Church identified in the original SDF bid have all been achieved or exceeded. Nevertheless, several ongoing challenges for Harbour Church have been identified, including:

- Financial sustainability
- Growing team
- Overcoming suspicion
- Reaching more non-churched people

Advice for others

Reflecting on the progress to date, Alex Wood (Vicar of Harbour Church) comments:

I think we always knew that we would want to work towards exceeding those expectations, but ... it didn't come easily... We found it was quite challenging and difficult to do it.

For others in the wider Church looking to learn from the experience of Harbour Church, Alex and the team offered the following advice:

The importance of good first impressions

The team describe the importance of first impressions and good launch events. This may be the first experience a person has had with a church community and so they want it to be as positive an experience as possible.

people [were] saying things like 'oh we've never seen the church like this ... we've never felt so welcome'

Harbour have held barbecues with free food and family fun days, both when they first arrived at new locations and also more recently when they have reopened after COVID-19 restrictions have changed.

Looking for community gatekeepers

As Harbour has moved into more neighbourhood/community-based locations, the team describe having to change their approach slightly when it comes to establishing relationships and building community. As well as connecting with organisations such as local schools and clubs, the team found that there are often one or two key people within a community who, while they may not hold any formal role, seem to be a **'gatekeeper'** or person everyone looks to for acceptance.

'Clear is kind'

Reflecting on experiences of moving to a new location and inheriting an existing congregation, the Harbour team suggest (with the benefit of hindsight) that it may have been better to introduce some key changes more quickly than they did. Though some people may be upset by the changes, more decisive action is

sometimes necessary to avoid a protracted period of discomfort and uncertainty. The team have subsequently adopted a motto of 'clear is kind' to prevent misunderstandings of their intentions for the church.

4 Pioneer training and vocations¹⁴

4.1 Progress summary

SDF funding was sought for investing in a full-time Diocesan Director of Vocations and Ordinands (DDVO) role and a 0.5 role focused on pioneer training, with a view to achieving the following outcomes:

Outcome	Quantitative measures	Qualitative considerations
Growth of lay pioneer scheme (a cohort of at least 20 lay pioneers)	Attendance on <i>mission shaped intro</i> and related training courses	Tracking the impact of attendees of fresh expressions in the diocese
	Number of recognised lay pioneers in the diocese	Pioneering recognised within diocesan lay ministry framework
Vocations to licensed pioneer ministries (10 new ordained pioneer ministers and 10 trained pioneer supervisors)	Number of pioneers accepted for reader and ordination training	

The delivery of this strand of the project has been significantly impeded by staff illness and recruitment delays. The current DDVO and Pioneer Development Officer did not start until December 2018 and January 2019 respectively. They have therefore only been in post for the final two years of the pioneer project – the last of which took place against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the original bid was written, the diocese's approach to pioneer training has also changed and evolved. This has included running 'How to Pioneer' workshops instead of '*mission shaped intro*' and putting plans for a recognised lay pioneers scheme on hold. As such, some of the original targets outlined above are no longer so relevant to the diocese. But in the sections that follow, we briefly review the limited data available about pioneer training and vocations in the diocese.

4.2 Pioneer training - 'How to Pioneer' workshops

After several unsuccessful rounds of recruitment, a new 0.5 Pioneer Development Officer / Dean of Pioneer Ministry was eventually appointed in January 2019. His remit included supporting stipendiary pioneer ministers and developing a strategy for training and supporting lay pioneers.

In pursuing the latter, a series of workshops was developed based on a book by Dave Male called *How to Pioneer*. This was launched in November 2019, following on from the diocese's successful 'REACH' conference in October 2019.

Workshops were held every two months in different venues around the diocese (including Fareham, Liphook, and the Isle of Wight) and were designed to be standalone sessions that participants could engage with on a 'jump on / jump off' basis. Each workshop explored a different pioneering principle from the *How to Pioneer* book.

¹⁴ Within the original SDF bid, the following were listed as two separate strands of activity:

- Promoting vocations to lay and ordained pioneer ministry
- Lay pioneer training

In practice, however, project activities in these two areas have been closely related so they are considered together in this section.

Two in-person workshops were held in late 2019 and early 2020. These were attended by 45 and 49 people respectively (with quite a few different people attending the second workshop than the first). Though they were originally aimed at lay people exploring pioneer vocations, many attenders were either clergy or lay representatives of congregations looking to do pioneer ministry themselves. Around a third of workshop participants reported joining after a recommendation from a friend/colleague.

During the first national lockdown, three more 'How to Pioneer' workshops were held on Zoom. The first of these in April was held only two weeks into lockdown, with around 25 people attending. Unfortunately, there were some technological problems in this session, and this seems to have led to a drop-off in the numbers of people attending the final two online sessions.

Feedback from workshop participants (both in-person and online) was obtained through a survey administered by the Pioneer Development Officer and analysed by Church Army's Research Unit. The feedback provided was almost entirely positive. While there were some early concerns from participants about the suitability of venues and audio systems, once these were resolved, many praised the format, content and delivery of the workshops. Key words that featured multiple times in the feedback were 'creative', 'encourage' and 'explore'.

The feedback from several participants spoke of being 'pushed out of their comfort zone', while another said the input had 'confirmed to me that I am a pioneer'. On the scoring metric used in the evaluation after each workshop session, responses to the question 'How confident are you about taking your next step in applying the principles you've learned in the session?' had seen an increase in scores overall by the final session. This demonstrates the increased confidence participants had gained from their time with the course.

We also spoke to the following three clergy who had taken part in the workshops and were willing to share their experiences:

- **Vicar and a large group of church members from an Anglo-Catholic context:** Church members found the content very engaging and pushing of their comfort zones. One advantage of being a large group meant that they had to be broken into separate groups for discussion time; this meant that the lay members were able to share and discuss without the vicar being present and so able to 'own' their own thoughts. The vicar describes the congregation as previously viewing church as transactional and 'it's been exciting to see them expanding and growing in their faith'. The church has begun two social enterprise projects following on from attending these workshops.
- **Vicar and a group from an 'older' congregation:** Lay members felt out of their comfort zone simply by the setup (bad acoustics, unknown people, etc) and the vicar felt this produced defensive reactions, such as 'we can't do that'. Some felt that the course moved too fast and so the team were left behind. The vicar reports that subsequently the lay members have had good discussions on the topic of pioneering and so perhaps the workshops were able to sow some early seeds.
- **New vicar from an Anglo-Catholic tradition:** Attended without any lay members and describes feeling out of their comfort zone, but also that these workshops were 'an awakening'. They seem to have had a truly transformational experience during this course and are now starting to step out into new pioneering ministry.

Thank you for having people willing to pull people like me out of their comfort zone and realise that this [pioneering] is ministry

The feedback forms and those who were interviewed also held lots of praise for the Pioneer Development Officer, drawing particular attention to his approach in leading and accompanying those exploring pioneering and his teaching and delivery style:

Greg is enormously helpful and helps us to reflect – he’s a reflector and encourager. And because he’s walked the talk and done it, he gets what we’re going through when it’s hard.

us ordinary folk in parishes can feel intimidated sometimes if the person just feels so amazing, we think ‘we’re not like that so how can we do it’ – he’s got such a gentle manner that it helps people to feel we can do it

4.3 Pioneer vocations

A new full-time DDVO began in post in December 2018; his role includes a brief to encourage lay and ordained pioneer vocations. This followed a six month vacancy in the DDO role and a period of long-term sickness with the previous DDO (from October 2017). Key headlines from the milestone reports compiled by the diocese over the lifetime of the project are as follows:

Pioneer ordinands

- To date, there has only been one formally designated ‘Pioneer Ordinand’ in the diocese.
- As of March 2019, there were no candidates training for pioneer ministry from the diocese.
- The one diocesan candidate training at CMS on the pioneer pathway transferred to standard residential training as this was more suitable for their training needs.

Harbour ordinands

- Although ordinands from Harbour Church do not explicitly express an interest in pioneer ministry, they come with an expectation and experience of church planting.
- As at March 2019, one ordinand from Harbour was in residential training, two candidates from Harbour Church were training through a mixed mode course, four were preparing for BAP, and one other was in the discernment process.

Ministry Experience Scheme

- Over the life of the Pioneer Project, attempts have been made to run the Church of England Ministry Experience Scheme (CEMES) in different parts of the diocese, including the Western Wards parishes and Lock’s Heath. Unfortunately, these have proved unsuccessful due to lack of applications and other factors.
- However, a new ministerial experience scheme began at Harbour Church in September 2017 with financial support from the diocese, with an initial group of nine participants. The diocese report that the ministry experience scheme at Harbour has been a significant contributor to ‘an uplift in the number of younger candidates entering the discernment process who wish to train on mixed mode pathways with a view to church planting’. Our conversations with Harbour Church suggest that a significant proportion of participants have been people coming to do an internship at Harbour Church from further afield, rather than previous Harbour Church attendees.

Total ordinands

The March 2019 DDO milestone report notes:

The long-term investment in the Harbour ministry scheme and the discipleship course support have allowed us to significantly increase the number of ordinands going to BAP. This is a long-term trend, and we predict that we will continue to present ten ordinands to BAP each year in the future. This represents both a doubling of our previous number of vocations, and has also involved a significant reduction in the average age of our ordained vocations.

5 Culture change

Alongside the project aims already considered in this report, the Pioneer Project also sought to create a 'culture change to a more pioneer-focused church'. The nature of the culture change desired was not defined precisely at the project outset (and a lot of the people originally involved have now moved on to new roles). But working with a broad understanding of pioneering, this section of our report draws together information and insights from the three main evaluation strands and other sources to consider what progress has been made.

5.1 Encouraging developments

Key signs of progress include:

- Leading Your Church into Growth (LCYIG) course
 - 68% of parishes in the diocese had at least one representative attend LYCIG between 2015-18
 - Of these parishes, 71% intended to or had subsequently run the course locally (46% had already done so)
 - 46% of these parishes had drawn up a LYCIG plan
- Raising awareness of pioneering in the diocese through the October 2019 REACH conference and other diocesan initiatives
- Investing in lay pioneers

There's been more focus on equipping lay pioneers, so the pioneer fellowship has now started to enable people who aren't labelled as pioneers to come into it and find support.

I think they've seen [that] we don't just need middle class men and women who have become ordained, we need lots of different people.

- The establishment of significant numbers of fresh expressions of Church, many of which are lay-led¹⁵
- A more 'permission-giving culture'
- Willingness to experiment

I'd say that Portsmouth diocese has definitely explored new forms of worship and ways of doing church over the last five years that they weren't doing before. And there's definitely a sense amongst the clergy and the church leaders that the diocese is keen to explore different ways of growing churches and different ways of working. It feels like there is an emphasis on creativity and doing things in a new way that wasn't there before.

¹⁵ 48% of the fxC leaders who took part in the 2020 Leaders' survey were 'spare-time volunteers'.

5.2 A more pioneer-focused diocese?

When we asked (paid) pioneers and other interviewees if they thought the Diocese of Portsmouth had become a more 'pioneer-focused diocese' over the lifetime of the Pioneer Project, the question prompted mixed reactions.

On the one hand, most pointed to evidence of the diocese's commitment to pioneering, including:

- The financial investment in paid pioneer posts
- Encouragement and support for pioneers from key diocesan staff
- The efforts being made to bring 'more pioneers on board' through supporting lay pioneering

Some participants, however, were less sure how to answer this question, admitting 'I'm not sure I know what the diocese get up to all the time', or:

I don't know really what their definition of pioneering is, I don't really know. And I think what they define as a pioneer project, pioneer ministry, and just church planting is quite muddled - it's confused as to what they mean by that.

Some also expressed the following questions and concerns about the diocese's commitment to pioneering:

- Short-term commitment?

Back in the day when I arrived, there was a movement of grassroots pioneers. [But] We've seen some of the real grassroots pioneers moved on, or move on.

This feels like a temporary project because the commitment is to five years.

- Less pioneer-focused, more church planting-focused?

I think the church, the diocese of Portsmouth, has become a much less pioneer-focused diocese and a much more church planting-focused diocese. The pioneer spectrum will be used to argue that it's more pioneer-focused, but I think it's less pioneer-focused.

For the last two years I think, it feels that it's all church plants... I can see it's an attractive strategy... I just question whether it reaches the most marginalised communities.

Additionally, some pioneers were concerned that, despite the financial benefits associated with SDF funding, some aspects of the SDF funding experience may have diluted or diminished the diocese's commitment to pioneering. Some expressed discomfort at the focus on measurable results or 'bums on seats' from project funders who 'don't completely grasp pioneering'. A further but related concern was the danger of 'changing goal posts' and 'leapfrogging mission initiatives' in the diocese. For some, this was linked to the experience of SDF funding because 'each time you apply for an SDF bid you need to show more vision of what you're hoping to do'.

Towards the end of the research process, we also discussed the question ‘To what extent has the Diocese of Portsmouth become more pioneer-focused?’ with a small focus group of central diocesan staff. Within this discussion, a key distinction emerged concerning the differences between becoming a more pioneer-focused diocese and a more pioneering diocese. Many of the focus group participants felt that whether the diocese had become more pioneering was a more important question than whether it had become more pioneer-focused. Although they acknowledged that the diocese has further to go in this regard, the consensus was that through the various encouraging developments noted in Section 5.1 (and elsewhere in this report), the diocese had certainly become more pioneering.

6 Conclusion

In this final section of the report, we both celebrate the achievements of the Portsmouth Pioneer Project and reflect on the challenges it has faced, before suggesting some key learning points for the diocese and wider Church.

6.1 Celebration

As summarised below, there has been significant progress and cause for celebration with relation to the aims and outcomes outlined at the start of the project.

Outcomes desired	Reasons to celebrate
New pioneer posts <ul style="list-style-type: none">Create at least 12 new fresh expressions of Church (fxC) with between 50-100 worshippers.	At least 39 fxC have begun in the diocese since the Pioneer Project began (though not all of these can be attributed to the Pioneer Project). Alongside the establishment of new worshipping communities, the pioneers appointed have worked across 'the pioneer spectrum', generating a diverse range of wider benefits and outcomes.
Harbour Church <ul style="list-style-type: none">A large (at least 200 worshippers) city centre resourcing church appealing particularly to younger peopleHarbour Church exploring a further church plant.	The original project outcomes have all been achieved or exceeded. Harbour Church now has around 500 worshippers, with an estimated average adult age of 27. Several new services or plants have also been started.
Pioneer training and vocations <ul style="list-style-type: none">A cohort of at least 20 lay pioneers	Though plans for a recognised lay pioneers scheme have been put on hold, over 50 people have attended 'How to Pioneer' workshops. There has been a significant uplift in the number of younger candidates entering the ordination discernment process with a view to church planting.
Culture change: <ul style="list-style-type: none">A more pioneer-focused diocese	Encouraging developments to date include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Leading Your Church into Growth (LCYIG) – high uptake across the dioceseOctober 2019 REACH conferenceInvesting in lay pioneersSigns of a more permission-giving culture and greater willingness to experiment

6.2 Challenges

Alongside these encouraging developments, the project has also faced significant challenges. While some of these challenges, such as those associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, were experienced across the whole project, others (such as those listed below) were more specific to the individual project elements.

Project element	Key challenges
New pioneer posts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations about desired outcomes (for example around the establishment of fresh expressions of Church) were not always clearly communicated or understood • Assessing and comparing impact across diverse projects, contexts and missional intentions has been difficult • There has been a very high turnover of pioneers – Although this was a five-year project, only two pioneers were in post for more than four years. Within such a context, establishing sustainable pioneer ministries is very hard.
Harbour Church	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though Harbour Church has engaged with significant numbers of non-churched people (definitive, up-to-date figures on this are hard to come by), its impressive growth is also attributable in part to people joining from other churches. • Despite significant progress promoting congregational giving, Harbour Church continues to be financially dependent on the wider Church. • Harbour Church has needed to work hard to overcome suspicion from local communities and other churches. Within this evaluation, we have not been able to hear from many such stakeholders directly, but experience elsewhere suggests this is likely to remain an ongoing challenge moving forward.
Pioneer training and vocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The delivery of this strand of the project has been significantly impeded by staff illness and recruitment delays. • During the life of the Pioneer Project, the diocese's approach to pioneer training and vocations has changed and evolved. Assessing impact and effectiveness in this context has been difficult because some of the original targets identified at the start of the project are no longer relevant and alternative measures have not always been put in place.
Culture change (cross-cutting theme)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There appear to be diverse and, at times, diverging understandings of pioneering within the diocese. • Some of the people we interviewed expressed concern that the diocese might be abandoning a commitment to 'grassroots pioneering' in favour of a traditional church planting model which, in their view, is not so pioneering. • Related to this, we also encountered concerns that with repeated applications for SDF funding comes the danger of 'changing goal posts' and 'leapfrogging mission initiatives'.

6.3 Learning points

Specific learning and advice for others emerging from the individual project elements have already been outlined earlier in this report. Reflecting more broadly on the experience of the whole Pioneer Project, we have also identified the following wider learning points about pioneering more generally.

6.3.1 The diversity of pioneering

The experience of the various and diverse elements of the Portsmouth Pioneer Project point to the diversity, complexity, and contested nature of pioneering itself. Key dimensions of this diversity and complexity highlighted by the experience of this project are as follows:

- Not all (paid) pioneers are involved in the establishment of new worshipping communities or fresh expressions of Church. As Bradbury and Hodgett helpfully highlight, there appears to be a wide ‘spectrum’ of activities with which pioneers are involved.¹⁶
- The relationship between ‘grassroots pioneering’ and church planting based on a resource church model is a source of contention, both within the Diocese of Portsmouth and the wider Church. While the pioneer spectrum referred to above helpfully encompasses both, we suggest that further reflection on the benefits and limitations of each approach is also necessary to better appreciate the ways in which different approaches can be most effectively used.
- Pioneering is not just about what paid and formally designated ‘pioneers’ do. Although much of the Portsmouth Pioneer Project has focused on paid pioneers, the results of our 2020 Leaders Survey suggest that around half (48%) of fresh expression of Church leaders in the diocese may be spare-time volunteers. And though the diocese’s ‘How to Pioneer’ course was originally aimed at lay people exploring pioneer vocations, many attenders were either clergy or lay representatives of congregations looking to do pioneer ministry themselves. This experience appears to highlight the importance of seeking to enable the whole Church to become more pioneering, rather than simply become more ‘pioneer-focused’ per se. Or as Michael Volland puts it:

The people of God do not need a few talented pioneering heroes. What is required are thousands of pioneers who lead by example and act to galvanize local churches into entrepreneurial communities capable of habitually creating and innovating to build things of recognised value around perceived opportunities.¹⁷

¹⁶ Tina Hodgett and Paul Bradbury (2018) ‘Pioneering Mission is a Spectrum’, *Anvil* 34.1

<https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/pioneering-mission-spectrum-tina-hodgett-paul-bradbury-anvil-vol-34-issue-1/>

¹⁷ David Goodhew, Andrew Roberts, and Michael Volland (2012) *Fresh: An Introduction to Fresh Expressions of Church and Pioneer Ministry* (London: SCM Press), page 144.

6.3.2 Practical implications

In view of the diverse, complex, and contested nature of pioneering highlighted above and other learning from the Portsmouth Pioneer Project, some more practical suggestions for similar future projects (whether in the Diocese of Portsmouth or in other contexts) are outlined below.

1. Choose models and approaches wisely

Each of the different approaches to pioneering and church planting considered in this evaluation has inherent strengths and limitations and will be better suited to some mission contexts than others. The decision about whether to invest in lay pioneer training, paid pioneers, or the planting of a resource church, for example, needs to be informed by a range of considerations. Such considerations include missional intention, type of mission context, desired outcomes, and existing resources available.

2. Set clear expectations but be flexible

When setting up complex projects like the Portsmouth Pioneer Project, it is important to ensure that expectations, desired outcomes, and reporting requirements are clearly communicated and discussed with new pioneers and other relevant parties at an early stage. Alongside this, however, the Portsmouth Pioneer Project's experience also highlights the need for flexibility within pioneer reporting and accountability systems to accommodate:

- Changes of plan (for example in response to reflection on practice, changes in diocesan strategy and personnel, recruitment delays, and international pandemics!)
- Unanticipated project outcomes (for example capturing the wider impacts generated by the appointment of paid pioneers over and above the establishment of fresh expressions of Church)

3. Beware the financial cliff edge!

When discussing financial sustainability, several interviewees used the striking metaphor of a cliff edge. In acknowledging that Harbour Church remains, to some degree, financially dependent on the wider Church, Harbour leaders described the 'SDF cliff edge' fast approaching. Reflecting on the relatively short-term nature of the Portsmouth Pioneer Project, one of the pioneers we interviewed commented: 'I think what the diocese and other institutions need to hear is that deploying people for five years and then there's this cliff edge, it isn't sustainable.' This pioneer went on to suggest that, instead of employing someone full-time for five years, it may be better to employ them half-time over ten years. Whilst this suggestion will not be appropriate for all contexts, the wider issue it highlights is the need for a longer-term perspective when planning pioneer projects and greater creativity when considering financial models.¹⁸

¹⁸ For more on the reimagining of financial models, see the Conclusion of our recent evaluation report for the Diocese of Oxford and the further resources signposted in Appendix 2. Church Army's Research Unit (2021) *New Communities Pioneer Pilot Projects: An Evaluation for the Diocese of Oxford*.
<https://churcharmy.org/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=277975>