



PAID PIONEERS: FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM?

Church Army's Research Unit

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FOREWORD

It's the 25th anniversary this year of Church Army's research unit! Over these years we have sought to discern how God is active in mission and how the Church may better join in. We remain committed to this endeavour.

The shift over this time of 'pioneering' from the margins of our institutional expressions of Church to the mainstream has been striking. In our collective wrestling with how we are active in God's mission, we mirror generations before us who have sought to serve faithfully. Like our predecessors, innovations have been met not only with suspicion, confusion, and fear but also with joy, hope and courage.

We are most grateful to all those who have partnered with us in our research and who have helped us to discern better our situation. The team's work over time and across contexts has enabled it uniquely to provide a synoptic account of pioneering ministry. This report draws on a range of contexts and experiences as it tells a story that transcends simple binaries and offers causes for hope and challenges for the future. In recognition that we are still on a journey it asks us to consider the question: from the margins to the mainstream? I hope that we are all disturbed by the question, the report's reflections, and are inspired to continue taking risks in reaching out and calling out: Come, Lord Jesus!

Dr Tim Ling
Director of Learning and Development, Church Army

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past two decades, many Anglican dioceses and other denominations have begun to embrace the language of pioneering and financially invested in projects that involve appointing paid pioneers in a way that would have been unthinkable in previous decades. This, it might be said, is one sign that pioneering is moving from the margins to the mainstream of church life. However, our research also highlights the diversity, complexity, and contested nature of contemporary pioneering and suggests that the relationship between paid pioneers and the wider Church is sometimes still an uneasy one. This report draws together recent learning about the experiences of paid pioneers by summarising the findings of three evaluations of pioneer projects conducted by Church Army's Research Unit (CARU) and brings these into dialogue with insights from CARU's internal research on Church Army Centres of mission. The four main sources we draw on here are as follows:

- *Pioneer Mission in New Communities - An Evaluation for the Diocese of Oxford* (Church Army's Research Unit, February 2021)
- *Pioneering in Portsmouth - Evaluating the Diocese of Portsmouth's Pioneer Project* (Church Army's Research Unit, May 2021)
- *Pioneering Pieces - An Evaluation of the Church of Scotland's Pioneer Pilot Project* (Church Army's Research Unit, October 2020)
- *Mission in a Pandemic: Church Army Centres of mission in 2020/21* (Church Army's Research Unit, September 2021), and various other internal sources about Church Army centres of mission

DEPLOYING PAID PIONEERS

Though the different projects considered in this report all involved appointing paid pioneers, deployment models varied in several notable respects:

- **Scope and Scale** - The Portsmouth, Oxford, and Church of Scotland projects each involved the creation of 5-10 paid pioneer posts. Church Army, in contrast, currently has 50 paid Evangelists in 32 centres of mission across the British Isles and Ireland. This makes Church Army (in partnership with host dioceses), as far as we are aware, the largest provider of paid pioneer ministry in the British Isles and Ireland.
- **Mission Contexts** - The four contexts all engaged with mission contexts or communities thought to be beyond the reach of the traditional church, but the nature of these contexts varied significantly. Some engaged with a diverse range of contexts, while others had a more targeted missional focus. The Diocese of Oxford's New Communities Programme, for example, was a strategic response to an unprecedented level of new housing development and population expansion, while Church Army centres of mission mainly operate in areas of high deprivation.
- **Funding Pioneer Posts** - Time-limited external funding was a feature of the Oxford, Portsmouth, and Church of Scotland projects. Most new posts were funded for up to five years, but some in Oxford were renewed for a further five years. Church Army centres of mission are established in partnership with host dioceses, with Church Army and the diocese sharing the financial costs. The length of the funding commitment varies from context to context, but for many centres of mission the initial commitment is for five years, with the potential for continuation beyond that subject to a review after the first three years.

- **Lay and Ordained Pioneers** - The Oxford and Church of Scotland Pioneer Projects involved mainly appointing ordained ministers. The Portsmouth Pioneer Project involved a mix of lay and ordained pioneer posts. Within Church Army centres of mission, most but not all pioneers are commissioned Church Army Evangelists. Though the majority of these are lay people, some Church Army Evangelists are also ordained.
- **Pioneer Teams** - The Church of Scotland, Oxford, and Portsmouth projects all involved appointing one person in each mission context. That person was, in most cases, responsible for trying to establish a new ministry 'from scratch' on their own. Church Army centres of mission, in contrast, typically involve appointing two full-time staff in each new mission context – a Lead Evangelist and Pioneer Evangelist. Though this makes establishing a centre of mission more expensive than setting up a standalone pioneer post, the centre of mission model offers greater potential for collaboration and teamwork.



WHAT IS BEING PIONEERED?

Pioneering and Fresh Expressions of Church

Across all four projects, there was a common expectation that paid pioneers would help establish new worshipping communities or fresh expressions of Church (fxC). However, our research has found that the relationship between paid pioneers and fresh expressions of Church is not always straightforward. The work of paid pioneers often encompasses a diverse range of activities, much broader than the establishment of fresh expressions of Church. Though for some pioneers, the establishment of a new worshipping community or fxC was a central overarching aim, for others this was a more marginal or distant aspiration. We also found different pioneers operating at different places along Bradbury and Hodgett's 'Pioneer Spectrum', with some focusing more on community activism or social enterprise and less on establishing new worshipping communities. All this suggests that pioneering is a much broader undertaking than landmark reports like *Mission-Shaped Church* at times appear to suggest. In this regard, we think it is important to note that:

- Not all paid pioneers establish new worshipping communities or fresh expressions of Church. Some express pioneering instead through community activism or social enterprise.
- Not all fxC are established by paid pioneers; many are led by spare-time volunteers. Pioneering is not only about what paid or formally designated 'pioneers' do.
- The relationship between 'grassroots pioneering' and church planting based on a resource church model is a particular source of contention within contemporary pioneering circles.

The Case for Pioneer Evangelism

Evangelism was not explicitly mentioned in the espoused aims of the of the Portsmouth, Oxford, and Church of Scotland projects. Instead, the aims of pioneering were often framed and articulated with reference to the wider, more inclusive, category of 'mission'. In many ways, this mirrors much wider contemporary discourse on pioneering. For Church Army, in contrast, there is an explicit linkage between pioneering and evangelism, with the work of centres of mission clearly aligned with Church Army's 'DARE' strategy for doing, advocating, resourcing, and enabling evangelism. As part of an organisation committed to transforming communities through 'faith shared in words and action', we think it is important to reflect on the absence, or at least reduced prominence, of evangelism within wider pioneering initiatives. In our view, any decoupling of evangelism from pioneering is problematic because:

- Without evangelism, church plants and new worshipping communities need to rely on transfer growth (people joining from other churches).
- Without some element of faith sharing or evangelism, pioneering community work or social engagement easily becomes indistinguishable from secular community projects.

ASSESSING IMPACT

Across the four projects, assessing, and measuring the impact of paid pioneer posts in a consistent manner was a recurring challenge. Assessing and comparing the impact of paid pioneering in different localities is often difficult because:

- The aims and intentions of different pioneer posts vary.
- Evaluation frameworks focused specifically on the establishment of worshipping communities are more useful and relevant to some pioneer posts than others.
- For some projects, project aims / intended outcomes significantly change or evolve over time.

We have also uncovered deeper tensions around target setting and measurement, with some pioneers critical or suspicious of particular approaches to measuring 'results'. In this regard there seems to be a tension between the desire of many pioneers to let things emerge gradually and not be too prescriptive about intended outcomes at the outset, with a wider institutional focus on target setting and measurement. Our research findings suggest that the impacts of new pioneer posts are often wide ranging, encompassing social impact, faith impact and resourcing impact. In this regard, we suggest that further work is needed to better understand the relationship between missional social action and the dawning of faith. And despite all the challenges of measurement, it is important to find ways of combining stories from pioneers with relevant quantitative measures.

SUSTAINING PIONEERING

Most pioneers had made some progress with relation to sustainable governance, finance, and local leadership. But if sustainability is defined primarily in terms of being able to cover all the costs associated with a full-time minister, all the projects still had a long way to go. As one team member from a pioneer project in Oxford diocese put it, the new worshipping community 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:

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.

Most of the projects studied employed a relatively high-cost financial model which involves paying for at least one dedicated full-time Pioneer Minister in each new area for 5-10 years. Replicating this model in every new mission context is unlikely to be sustainable so we suggest that some paid pioneering roles may need to be reimagined to include:

- A greater emphasis on resourcing and enabling others within some pioneer roles
- Moving beyond the traditional default assumption of 'one leader, one church'
- Exploring ways to enable pioneers to work together, support and learn from each other

Some of these things are features of Church Army centres of mission which operate on a slightly different basis to the other pioneer projects researched.

THE JOYS AND FRUSTRATIONS OF PIONEERING

Though not the primary focus of our recent research, some of our recent projects have gained valuable insights about the joys and frustrations of paid pioneers. Most pioneers particularly enjoy connecting with new people and getting new initiatives off the ground, but many also appreciate support and recognition from the wider Church and seeing strategic change at a wider, for example, diocesan level. However, relating to the wider Church and employing or sponsoring organisations is also a frequent source of frustration. Key challenges identified in this regard include:

- Pressure to meet targets and objectives or deliverable ‘measurable results’ from project funders who ‘don’t completely grasp pioneering’
- Onerous reporting requirements – a sense of being ‘checked up on’
- Worries around short-term funding and the longevity of pioneer projects / posts

Drawing on our wider observations over the past two decades, we suggest that some pioneers are more comfortable and temperamentally more suited than others to negotiating the opportunities and challenges associated with being funded by the institutional Church.

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM? PIONEERS AND THE WIDER CHURCH

The fact that there has been such significant investment in the creation of paid pioneer posts is an indication of how far the Church has come in its acceptance of pioneering since the days of *Mission-Shaped Church*. But our research also highlights that the relationship between paid pioneers and the wider Church is often an uneasy one. Within the current pioneering landscape, we identify four key risks with relation to pioneering, and four key messages in response:

Risk 1 - Dismissing Pioneering

The relationship between ‘grassroots pioneering’ and church planting based on the resource church model is currently a source of contention. Some of the pioneers we interviewed expressed concern that within some contexts, the former is being quickly disregarded in favour of the latter. However, we suggest that grassroots pioneering and traditional church planting do not have to be seen as mutually exclusive alternatives. There is potential for them to support and complement each other or be creatively combined.

Key message for the wider Church:

Discern carefully which models of pioneering (e.g. grassroots pioneering, traditional church planting, social enterprise) are most appropriate in different mission contexts and how these might be creatively combined.

Risk 2 – Domesticating and Stifling Pioneers

As pioneering has (in some ways) moved from the margins to the mainstream of church life, the wider Church has rightly required the pioneers it has funded to be accountable. But the very high expectations and demands that the Church places on pioneers can often be a source of significant frustration and distress, which distracts them from the core task of pioneering.

Key message for the wider Church:

Create space for risk-taking alongside appropriate accountability. Be careful not to impose over-simplistic performance management frameworks which can easily alienate pioneers. Instead, build in regular, relational reviews alongside contextually sensitive approaches to impact measurement.

Risk 3 – Decoupling Evangelism from Pioneering

As part of an organisation committed to doing, advocating, resourcing and evangelism, we suggest that greater attention needs to be given to the place of evangelism within pioneering and the distinctive role of the pioneer evangelist alongside other forms of pioneering.

Key message for the wider Church:

Put the 'evangelism' back into 'pioneer evangelism' and train pioneer evangelists.

Risk 4 – Dismissing Unpaid Forms of Pioneering

Whilst affirming the need for significant financial investment in paid pioneer posts, alternative forms of leadership such as those embodied by many Messy Churches should not be overlooked. Some paid pioneering roles may also need to be reimagined to include a greater emphasis on resourcing and enabling others.

Key message for the wider Church:

Look below the radar. Don't only take an interest in what you fund!

1 INTRODUCTION

Pioneers are people called by God who are the first to see and creatively respond to the Holy Spirit's initiatives with those outside the church; gathering others around them as they seek to establish new contextual Christian community.¹

Church Army's Research Unit (CARU) has been studying pioneering mission and fresh expressions of Church for over twenty years. Our previous work on these subjects included the 1999-2012 *Encounters on the Edge* series of booklets and the 2016 *The Day of Small Things* report which provided a comprehensive statistical analysis of all known fresh expressions of Church in half the dioceses of the Church of England.² In recent years, our focus has broadened and diversified, reflecting a wider research interest in other contemporary forms of mission and evangelism. However, pioneering remains a central interest and passion, not only for CARU but for Church Army more generally. Through 32 centres of mission established in partnership with host dioceses, Church Army directly supports pioneer evangelism in 'hard to reach' communities across the British Isles and Ireland. As part of our internal research for Church Army, CARU helps to gather data about and evaluate these centres of mission.

Over the past two years, CARU has conducted several external evaluations of projects that involved appointing paid pioneers. This report summarises the findings of three such external evaluations (conducted for the Church of Scotland and the Church of England dioceses of Oxford and Portsmouth) and brings them into dialogue with insights from our internal research on Church Army centres of mission.

This report is about paid pioneering because all the pioneer projects we have been asked to evaluate in recent years have been based on a model of appointing paid pioneers. But we need to be clear at the outset that pioneering is not only about what paid and formally designated 'pioneers' do. Though paid pioneering often gets most attention, some of our other research highlights the significance of other 'below the radar' forms of pioneering. Our 2019 *Playfully Serious* report, for example, noted that the Messy Church movement is pioneering alternative forms of leadership, with Messy Churches predominantly led by women, lay people and volunteers.³

In differentiating between paid and unpaid forms of pioneering, we do not want to suggest that one or other approach is inherently better than the other. As we acknowledge later in this report, the question of which model offers the best return on investment is a complex one. But we hope that, in focusing on paid pioneers, this report will enable greater understanding of the distinctive opportunities and challenges specific to this form of pioneering.

¹ <https://www.churchofengland.org/life-events/vocations/vocations-pioneer-ministry>

² Downloadable from: <https://churcharmy.org/our-work/research/publications/>

³ Church Army's Research Unit (2019), *Playfully Serious: How Messy Churches Create New Space For Faith*, p. 8. <https://churcharmy.org/our-work/research/recently-completed-research/playfully-serious/>

This report's subtitle, *From the Margins to the Mainstream?*, reflects our desire to acknowledge and explore the ways in which the place of pioneers in UK churches has changed and is changing. Between 1999 and 2012, Church Army's Research Unit produced a series of quarterly booklets on church planting and fresh expressions of Church called *Encounters on the Edge*.⁴ As the title of the series indicates, pioneering has often been associated with activities at the edges or margins of the institutional Church.⁵ But since the publication of *Mission-Shaped Church* in 2004,⁶ pioneering has become more widely accepted. The fact that Anglican dioceses like Oxford and Portsmouth and other denominations like the Church of Scotland have financially invested in paid pioneering is one indication of this. In this sense, then, it might be said that pioneering is becoming more mainstream. Yet this report also highlights that the relationship between paid pioneers and the wider Church is often an uneasy one and identifies important questions and challenges that all those with an interest in pioneering will need to wrestle with for years to come.

2 METHODOLOGIES

This report summarises the findings of three recent external evaluations of pioneer projects and brings them into dialogue with CARU's internal research on Church Army centres of mission.

The descriptions of the external evaluations outlined here are based on material from the following three publicly available reports:⁷

- *Pioneer Mission in New Communities - An Evaluation for the Diocese of Oxford* (Church Army's Research Unit, February 2021)
- *Pioneering in Portsmouth - Evaluating the Diocese of Portsmouth's Pioneer Project* (Church Army's Research Unit, May 2021)
- *Pioneering Pieces - An Evaluation of the Church of Scotland's Pioneer Pilot Project* (Church Army's Research Unit, October 2020)

These three evaluations were commissioned by different organisations, with varying aims, methodologies and budgets. All three were primarily qualitative in scope, based around interviews with pioneers and wider stakeholders in each context, though quantitative data was also summarised if available. Due to the different institutional contexts and methodologies employed, it would not be appropriate to attempt a 'like for like' comparison and assessment of the three projects. However, similar questions and topics were explored across all three projects and reflection on these has led to the identification of some recurring patterns and common themes summarised in this report.

⁴ These can be accessed at: <https://churcharmy.org/our-work/research/publications/>

⁵ The marginality of pioneering at this time is also reflected in the title of Stuart Murray and Anne Wilkinson-Hayes' 2000 Grove Book: *Hope From the Margins: New Ways of Being Church*.

⁶ Archbishops' Council (2004), *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*. London: Church House Publishing.

⁷ These reports can all be accessed at <https://churcharmy.org/our-work/research/recently-completed-research/>

The descriptions of Church Army centres of mission outlined in this report originate from several sources:

- Anonymised material from Church Army’s internal ‘story bank’ of information about each centre of mission based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered by CARU
- Centre of mission review reports – internal reports prepared by CARU team members and others as part of triennial reviews of centres of mission
- Two publicly available reports on the experiences of centres of mission during the coronavirus pandemic – *Mission Under Lockdown* (May 2020) and *Mission in a Pandemic* (September 2021)⁸
- An anonymised summary of key themes emerging from Evangelist appraisals and exit interviews prepared by a member of Church Army’s HR Team

It needs to be noted that, while the Portsmouth, Oxford and Church of Scotland material in this report was gathered through independent external evaluations conducted by CARU, the material about Church Army centres of mission was gathered through a form of ‘insider research’. As various commentators have noted, this type of research has both benefits and limitations. As researchers embedded within the structures of Church Army, we have a deep, first-hand, understanding of our organisational context. Yet by virtue of this, we are not able to provide as independent or ‘objective’ assessment of Church Army centres of mission as an independent researcher might. The material that follows needs to be read with an awareness of these benefits and limitations in mind.

3 DEPLOYING PAID PIONEERS

Though the different projects considered in this report all involved appointing paid pioneers, deployment models varied in several notable respects.

3.1 SCOPE AND SCALE

The Portsmouth Pioneer Project involved the creation of ten pioneer posts across different types of mission context. Five pioneer ministry posts across Scotland were created through the Church of Scotland’s Pioneer Pilot Project. And our *Pioneer Mission in New Communities* research for the Diocese of Oxford focused on the experience of eight paid pioneers in areas of new housing across the diocese.

Church Army, in contrast, currently has 50 paid Evangelists in 32 centres of mission across the British Isles and Ireland. (Most centres of mission have one ‘Lead Evangelist’ and one ‘Pioneer Evangelist’, but pioneering is an integral part of both roles.) As far as we are aware, this makes Church Army (in partnership with host dioceses) the largest provider of paid pioneer ministry in the British Isles and Ireland.

⁸ Also available from: <https://churcharmy.org/our-work/research/recently-completed-research/>

3.2 MISSION CONTEXTS

The four projects all engaged with mission contexts or communities thought to be beyond the reach of the traditional church, but the nature of these contexts varied significantly. The Portsmouth and Church of Scotland projects appointed paid pioneers within a diverse range of contexts, engaging with farming communities, artists, and university students (Church of Scotland), and deprived communities, choir members and people looking for co-working space (Portsmouth). In contrast, the Oxford diocese and Church Army projects had a narrower missional focus. The Diocese of Oxford's New Communities Programme was a targeted response to an unprecedented level of new housing development and population expansion in the diocese. And though every Church Army centre of Mission is different, all engage in some ways with disadvantaged or marginalised communities.

3.3 FUNDING PIONEER POSTS

Time-limited funding for pioneer posts was a feature of the Oxford, Portsmouth, and Church of Scotland projects we evaluated. The Diocese of Oxford's New Communities Initiative was supported by a grant of approximately £500,000 from the Church Commissioners and was accompanied by other internal diocesan funding. Most of the new posts created were funded for an initial five-year period, but some were renewed for a further five years. New paid pioneer posts in the Diocese of Portsmouth were one strand of a £929,000 Pioneer Project supported by Strategic Development Funding from the Church of England between 2016 and 2020. Though the Pioneer Project was for five years, delayed starts and staff turnover meant that only two pioneers were in post for more than four years. The Church of Scotland Pioneer Pilot Project was funded centrally by the Ministries Council of the Church of Scotland. Five years' central funding was provided, with the potential for presbyteries to continue funding beyond that.

Church Army centres of mission are established in partnership with host dioceses, with Church Army and the diocese in nearly all cases sharing the costs of employing Evangelists. The length of the funding commitment varies from context to context, but for many centres of mission the initial commitment is for five years, with the potential for continuation beyond that subject to a review of the centre of Mission after the first three years.⁹

3.4 LAY AND ORDAINED PIONEERS

The Oxford and Church of Scotland Pioneer Projects involved mainly appointing ordained ministers. Of the eight Pioneer Ministers we interviewed in the Diocese of Oxford, the majority (six out of eight) were Anglican clergy. There was one ordained minister from another denomination and one Church Army Evangelist. Within the Church of Scotland, the five pioneer ministry posts were all filled by ordained ministers. Only ordained ministers were eligible to apply. The Portsmouth Pioneer Project involved a mix of lay and ordained pioneer posts. Of the five pioneers we interviewed, two were ordained (one Anglican, one from another denomination) and three were lay, though one of these is now an ordinand.

⁹ As of January 2022, Church Army currently has 32 active centres of mission. 11 of these have been running for more than 5 years, 7 have been running for 3-5 years, 7 have been running for 1-3 years, and 7 are less than 1 year old. 14 centres of mission have closed over the past 10 years. Of these, 10 were older centres of mission, established before 2016, and without a financial partnership with a diocese. The other 4 were newer centres of mission, which have ceased to operate for a variety of reasons.

3.5 PIONEER TEAMS

The Church of Scotland, Oxford, and Portsmouth projects all involved appointing one person in each mission context. In a few cases, the appointed pioneer came with a wider church planting team or were able to build on existing local relationships and connections, having already lived in the area for some time. In most cases, however, the new pioneers were ‘starting from scratch’ on their own.

Church Army centres of mission, in contrast, typically involve appointing two full-time staff in each new mission context – a Lead Evangelist and Pioneer Evangelist. Though this makes establishing a centre of mission more expensive than setting up a standalone pioneer post, the centre of mission model offers greater potential for collaboration and teamwork, as well as working together across a wider area.

4 WHAT IS BEING PIONEERED?

Though there are various official definitions of pioneer ministry such as the Church of England one quoted in this report’s introduction, our research highlights the diversity, complexity, and contested nature of contemporary pioneering.

4.1 ESPOUSED AIMS

The espoused aims of the three Pioneer Projects for which CARU undertook external evaluations are summarised below.

| Project | Project aims |
|--------------------|---|
| Oxford | The new pioneer posts created through the New Communities Initiative typically aimed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build community in new housing areas, serving the common good • Create new worshipping communities aimed at people unlikely to be reached by existing churches |
| Portsmouth | The Portsmouth Pioneer Project was focused on forming new disciples and new missional communities by developing pioneering approaches, pioneering training, and pioneering posts for lay and ordained ministers. According to the original SDF bid, the primary desired outcome from the project was ‘the growth of fresh expressions in the diocese’. |
| Church of Scotland | The five posts funded through the Pioneer Pilot all had different aims, but the overall approach to pioneer ministry was informed by a Church of Scotland Ministries Council paper which suggested that pioneer ministry includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-cultural mission • Missionary entrepreneurship - imagining new possibilities and bringing them into existence • Establishing new ecclesial communities |

The specific aims of each Church Army centre of mission vary as these are often context-specific and agreed in discussion with partner dioceses. But Church Army's core criteria for reviewing and evaluating all centres of mission are summarised below:

- **Doing evangelism:** How is the centre of mission impacting and reaching the non-churched?
- How is it creating **fresh expressions of Church** for people who wouldn't attend an existing model of Church? How is the fresh expression of Church working towards a greater degree of sustainability?
- **Advocating, resourcing and enabling evangelism:** How are local churches within the diocese being resourced and equipped in evangelism and mission?
- **Diocesan partnership:** How is the centre of mission rooted into the life and ministry of the diocese?
- How is the centre of mission developing in practically becoming **mission community**?¹⁰

Though the aims of pioneering in each institution (Church Army, Church of Scotland, Portsmouth, and Oxford dioceses) were often specific to each context, some key differences and common themes are discernible, which we reflect on below.

4.2 FRESH EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH AND PIONEERING

Across the four institutions, there was a common expectation that paid pioneers would help establish new 'worshipping communities' (Oxford), 'ecclesial communities' (Church of Scotland) or 'fresh expressions of Church' (Portsmouth and Church Army). Given the close association of pioneering with fresh expressions within landmark reports like *Mission-Shaped Church*, it is hardly surprising that all four pioneer projects sought to facilitate the establishment of new ecclesial communities. However, our recent research suggests the relationship between pioneering and the establishment of fresh expressions of Church is not always straightforward. Among pioneers, we sometimes encountered confusion about what a fresh expression of Church or new ecclesial community is.¹¹ And expectations around the establishment of fresh expressions of Church were not always clearly communicated or understood by all parties. One pioneer interviewed, for example, reported being 'surprised' to find out, when they were one year into post, there was an expectation that a fresh expression of Church would be started within five years.¹² While for some pioneers, the establishment of a new worshipping community or fxC was their central overarching aim, for others this was seen as a more marginal or distant aspiration. As our report for the Diocese of Oxford noted:

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'.¹³

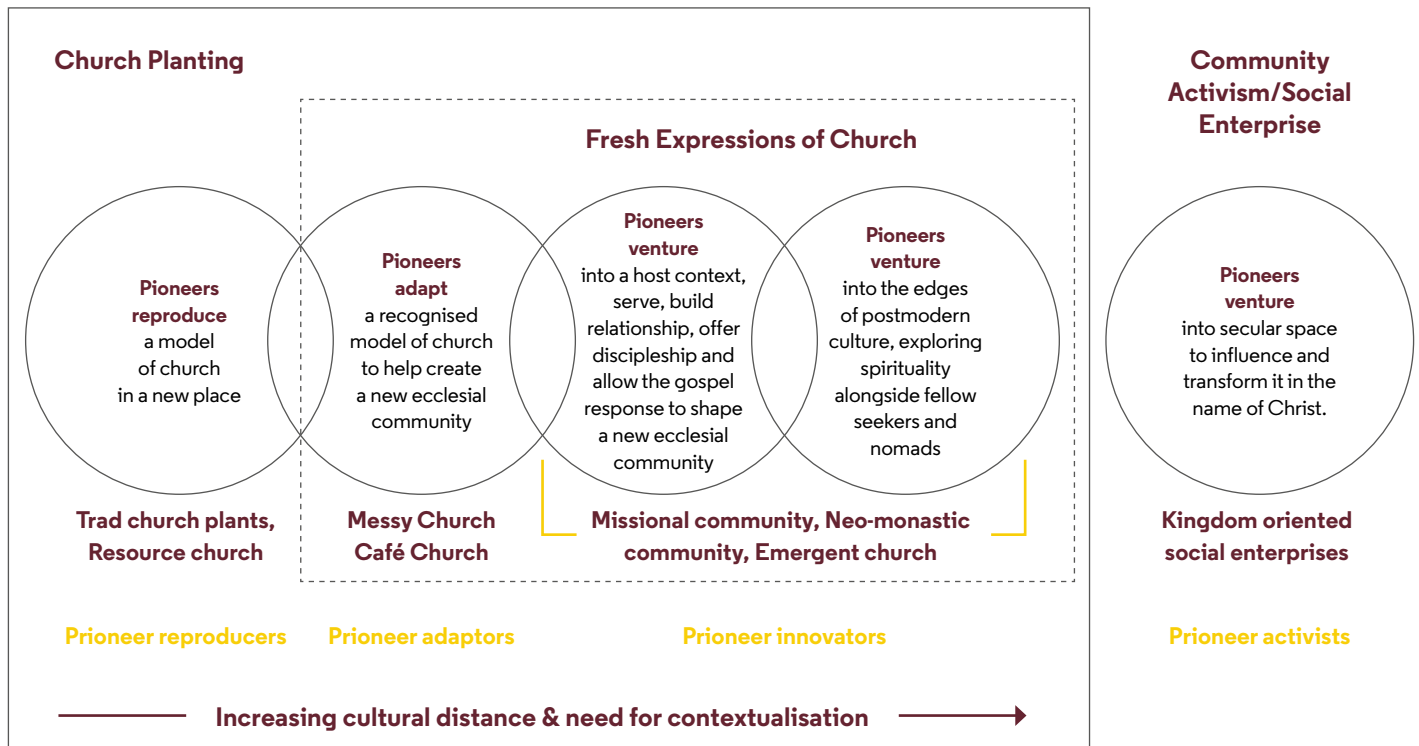
¹⁰ Taken from Church Army's Centre of Mission Review Protocol (internal document).

¹¹ See for example page 7 of our *Pioneering Pieces* report for the Church of Scotland.

¹² *Pioneering in Portsmouth*, p. 17.

¹³ *Pioneer Mission in New Communities* (report for the Diocese of Oxford), p. 4.

The work of paid pioneers also encompassed a diverse range of activities, much wider than the establishment of fresh expressions of Church. Our *Pioneering in Portsmouth* report, for example, noted that different pioneers seem to be operating at different places along Bradbury and Hodgett's 'Pioneer Spectrum', which is reproduced with the permission of the editors of *Anvil* below.¹⁴



All this suggests that pioneering is a much broader undertaking than landmark reports like *Mission-Shaped Church* at times appear to suggest. In this regard, we think it is important to note that:

- Not all paid pioneers establish new worshipping communities or fresh expressions of Church. Some express pioneering instead through community activism or social enterprise.
- Not all fresh expressions of Church are established by paid pioneers; many are led by spare-time volunteers.¹⁵ As we stated in the introduction, pioneering is *not* only about what paid and formally designated 'pioneers' do.

¹⁴ 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/>. More tools and resources on this can be found at <http://www.pioneerspectrum.com>.

¹⁵ For example, survey findings reported in *Pioneering in Portsmouth* (p. 41) suggest that around half (48%) of fxC leaders in the Diocese of Portsmouth may be spare-time volunteers.



GRASSROOTS PIONEERING AND TRADITIONAL CHURCH PLANTING

The relationship between ‘grassroots pioneering’ and church planting based on a resource church model is a particular source of contention within contemporary pioneering circles.

While the Pioneer Spectrum helpfully encompasses both, there needs to be further reflection on the benefits and limitations of each approach with a view to discerning which models are most appropriate in different contexts, or indeed how they might be creatively combined. Rather than thinking of grassroots pioneering and traditional church planting as mutually exclusive alternatives (as is sometimes the case in polarised debates), we suggest it will be more fruitful to see them as potentially complementary. This is illustrated, for example, by the developing relationship between Church Army’s Wrexham Centre of Mission, which has been engaged in pioneer evangelism on the Caia Park estate since 2015, and the newer Hope Street town centre resource church (established by the Diocese of St Asaph in partnership with the Church Revitalisation Trust and launched in 2020). As the following quotes illustrate, the relationship between Wrexham Centre of Mission and Hope Street Church is mutually beneficial:

Hope Street has become a real resource for the centre of mission by partnering on a number of projects such as the launch of a Bridge the Gap footballing community and a drop-in for college students, a number of which have links to the centre of mission’s youth work on the Caia Park estate.
(Josh Smith, Lead Evangelist, Wrexham Centre of Mission)

From Hope Street’s perspective the relationship with the Church Army centre of mission has contributed significantly to Hope Street’s effectiveness in making connections and evangelism. The depth and breadth of Josh’s embeddedness into the community, relationships which he has built through his mission within the town over the years he has been here, have been key to the early success of initiatives like Bridge the Gap. It has been a joy to work together.
(Andy Kitchen, Lead Pastor, Hope Street Church)

4.3 THE CASE FOR PIONEER EVANGELISM

In view of the diverse and complex nature of pioneering highlighted by our research, we recognise and affirm recent work (like the Pioneer Spectrum) to broaden established understandings of pioneering. Yet we are also aware that the word ‘pioneer’ is a very flexible and elastic term and that, when working with very broad and inclusive definitions, there is a sense in which virtually any mission-related activity could be labelled ‘pioneering’. As such, there is a risk that the term ‘pioneer’ may begin to lose its coherence and relevance.

On this point, it may be helpful to reflect on the place of evangelism within pioneering and the distinctive category of pioneer evangelism. Interestingly, evangelism was not explicitly mentioned in the espoused aims of the of the Portsmouth, Oxford, and Church of Scotland projects. Instead, the aims of pioneering were often framed and articulated with reference to the wider, more inclusive, category of ‘mission’. In many ways, this mirrors much wider contemporary discourse on pioneering. For Church Army, in contrast, there is an explicit linkage between pioneering and evangelism, with the work of centres of mission clearly aligned with Church Army’s ‘DARE’ strategy for doing, advocating, resourcing, and enabling evangelism. As Church Army is an organisation which commissions and deploys Evangelists, such a focus on evangelism is not surprising, but it is interesting to reflect on the absence, or at least reduced prominence, of evangelism within wider pioneering initiatives.¹⁶

We note that there seems to be a reticence in talking about evangelism within some pioneering circles. Whilst acknowledging that mission is broader than evangelism,¹⁷ we suggest that any decoupling of evangelism from pioneering is problematic. As part of an organisation committed to transforming communities through ‘faith shared in words and action’,¹⁸ we would argue that, within the context of Christian mission, effective pioneering requires some element of faith sharing. Without this, the risks are that:

- Without evangelism, church plants and new worshipping communities need to rely on transfer growth (people joining from other churches).
- Without some element of faith sharing or evangelism, pioneering community work or social engagement easily becomes indistinguishable from secular community projects.¹⁹

In arguing for a closer relationship between pioneering and evangelism, we recognise that some pioneers (and others) will have reservations or concerns about culturally insensitive, unethical, or imperialistic forms of evangelism or ‘proselytising’. We share these concerns, but as part of Church Army’s wider Learning and Development team, we are also committed to training evangelists and developing resources to help the wider Church develop respectful and responsible forms of contextual evangelism.²⁰

¹⁶ It is interesting that even the description of centres of mission on the Church Army website prefers the softer language of ‘meeting spiritual, social, emotional, and financial needs’. <https://churcharmy.org/our-work/centres-of-mission/>

¹⁷ Hence the Pioneer Spectrum’s affirmation of community activism and social enterprise, which may correspond with the 3rd, 4th and 5th marks of mission: <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>.

¹⁸ <https://churcharmy.org/who-we-are/our-mission/>

¹⁹ See Andy Wier (2015), *Creative Tension in Urban Mission*. Cambridge: Grove.

²⁰ For more on Church Army’s faith resources, visit: <https://churcharmy.org/growing-faith/resources/>.

5 ASSESSING IMPACT

5.1 THE CHALLENGE OF MEASUREMENT

Across the four projects, assessing, and measuring the impact of paid pioneer posts in a consistent manner was a recurring challenge. This is, in some ways, a reflection of the diverse range of aims and activities that paid pioneering encompasses. As our *Pioneering in Portsmouth* report noted, assessing and comparing the impact of paid pioneering in different localities is difficult because:

- The aims and intentions of different pioneer posts vary.
- Evaluation frameworks focused specifically on the establishment of worshipping communities are more useful and relevant to some pioneer posts than others.
- For some projects, project aims / intended outcomes significantly change or evolve over time.²¹

We have also uncovered deeper tensions around target setting and measurement, with some pioneers critical or suspicious of particular approaches to measuring ‘results’. For example, the Church of Scotland’s Pioneer Pilot Project was originally designed with a comprehensive evaluation framework and quantitative measurement developed by an external research agency. But this framework was rejected once the paid pioneers were in post because it was felt that decisions about how to measure effectiveness had been made prematurely and that the proposed framework focused too much on numbers, neglecting qualitative considerations. No alternative framework, however, was ever formally agreed until Church Army’s Research Unit were appointed to conduct an independent evaluation towards the end of the project. As there has been no consistent quantitative data collection or reporting for most of the project’s life, our final evaluation therefore had to be primarily qualitative in scope, drawing together whatever information was available from context to context.²²

Similar challenges were also encountered across other projects. Reflecting on our recent work, we recognise a tension between the desire of many pioneers to let things emerge gradually and not be too prescriptive about intended outcomes at the outset with a wider institutional focus on target setting and measurement. Within the Diocese of Portsmouth, for example, one pioneer commented: “the diocese likes to work on numbers, bums on seats shall we say, which... is very complicated when you’ve got this [pioneering] scenario”.²³ Our evaluation of the Diocese of Oxford’s New Communities Pioneer Pilot Projects found that expectations and requirements around target setting for these projects were relatively ‘light touch’ compared with other funding programmes. Though pioneers generally seemed to appreciate this ‘permission-giving environment’, our report suggested that in some cases a lack of specific targets or clear expectations had contributed to tensions, confusions, and disappointments further down the line.²⁴

²¹ *Pioneering in Portsmouth*, p. 18.

²² *Pioneering Pieces*, p. 9.

²³ *Pioneering in Portsmouth*, p. 18.

²⁴ *Pioneer Mission in New Communities – An Evaluation for the Diocese of Oxford*, p. 5.

Many of these challenges and tensions are also experienced within Church Army centres of mission. Some of the Evangelists we have worked with over the years have, for example, at times expressed frustration at what they perceive as top-down ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches to measuring results, which disregard context. With centres of mission, it is very hard to capture the full impact of their deeply contextual approaches to mission and evangelism in a consistent manner across the British Isles and Ireland. But over recent years, we have worked with Evangelists and others within Church Army to develop and refine our approach to documenting impact and reviewing the progress of centres of mission. This is still a work in progress but currently includes:

- Annual collection of quantitative and qualitative information in a relational manner – shared with other Church Army staff through a periodically updated ‘story bank’ of key information about each centre of mission
- Triennial reviews of each centre of mission – typically conducted by a reviewer from Church Army and a reviewer nominated by the host diocese

5.2 HOW PAID PIONEERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Despite all the challenges of measurement, our research findings suggest that the impact of new pioneer posts are often wide-ranging, encompassing several different types of impact. Our recent *Mission in a Pandemic* report on Church Army centres of mission distinguishes between three different dimensions of this - social impact, faith impact and resourcing impact.²⁵ Although these categories were not explicitly used in our other external evaluation reports, they appear to provide a useful way of distinguishing between the different ways in which paid pioneers have impacted their communities, not only during the pandemic but before.

Social Impact

Many pioneers are involved in meeting community needs and serving the common good in varied and diverse ways. The main areas of involvement include:

- Food provision – see for example, *Pioneering in Portsmouth* case studies 1 and 3 and *Mission in a Pandemic* Section 3.1.1
- Building community in varied contexts – from farming communities in Ayrshire (*Pioneering Pieces*) to new housing developments in Oxfordshire (*Pioneer Mission in New Communities*), and urban estates around the British Isles and Ireland (Church Army)
- Supporting children, young people, and families – a recurring theme across all four research projects
- Social enterprise – see, for example, *Pioneering in Portsmouth* case study 5

Faith Impact

Paid pioneers are often expected to report on faith development indicators like:

- number of new disciples or people becoming Christians
- number and size of new worshipping communities

²⁵ <https://churcharmy.org/pandemicreport/>

Though these indicators have some value, we suggest that they are more relevant to some pioneering contexts than others and that, taken in isolation, they provide only limited insight into the variety of ‘faith impacts’ generated by pioneers. Every pioneer project and context is different, so we would be cautious about developing a definitive list of faith impact measures for pioneers. But based on the projects we have studied, we suggest that, in addition to the above, any discussion of this topic needs to include an appreciation of the impact of pioneers in:

- Helping people explore and grow in (as well as come to) faith
- Drawing people into existing church communities – developing churches’ wider ‘footprint’ and ‘active fringe’²⁶

Resourcing Impact

As well as their frontline impact on local communities, pioneers often contribute to resourcing mission in a variety of other ways. Within Church Army centres of mission, this includes advocating, resourcing, and enabling evangelism through supporting volunteers, running courses on mission and evangelism, and advising local churches (see *Mission in a Pandemic* Section 3.3). Such activities were not necessarily such an explicit focus within the other projects we studied, though some of the pioneers we interviewed were involved in similar activities.

5.3 MEASURING AND REVIEWING WELL

As noted already, attempts to quantify, or measure the contributions of paid pioneers are fraught with difficulty. ‘One size fits all’ performance management frameworks which are insensitive to local context are of little value. These have the potential to do more harm than good because they can alienate pioneers and stifle risk-taking and creativity. Yet it is also important to balance an emphasis on risk-taking in pioneering with appropriate accountability. Indeed, risk-taking and accountability are two of Church Army’s core values.²⁷

In this regard, we suggest that further work is needed to develop contextually sensitive approaches to impact measurement. Or as the 2020 Church Urban Fund / Theos report, *Growing Good*, puts it, the Church needs to ‘explore new ways of understanding and measuring church growth and impact’ because ‘existing measures do not adequately capture the contextual and local factors or the changing shape of church life’.²⁸ Church Army’s CEO, Peter Rouch, reflects on some of these issues in a recent blog for CUF’s Living Theology Forum.²⁹ Whilst acknowledging the complexity of mission on the margins, he poses the question:

Can we be more sophisticated in understanding the relationship between missional social action and the dawning of faith?

²⁶ See Hannah Rich (2020), *Growing Good: Growth, Social Action and Discipleship in the Church of England. The Final Report of the GRA:CE Project*. Theos and Church Urban Fund. <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/research/2000/01/31/the-grace-project>.

²⁷ <https://churcharmy.org/who-we-are/our-mission/>

²⁸ *Growing Good*, p. 19.

²⁹ <https://www.livingtheology.cuf.org.uk/blog/mind-the-gap>

For Church Army, this is very much a live question, one with which we are still wrestling. Though it is tempting to hide behind ‘theological smokescreen[s]’ or give up on measurement because it is ‘just too hard’,³⁰ our research team are continuing to develop and refine our approach to impact measurement through a mixed methods approach that combines stories from pioneers with relevant quantitative measures.

Alongside this emphasis on contextually sensitive measurement, we also strongly advocate the need for regular, relational reviews. These are another key mechanism for ensuring appropriate accountability within pioneering. Within Church Army, each centre of mission is formally reviewed every three years, with the reviews typically conducted by a reviewer from Church Army and a reviewer nominated by the host diocese. Though guided by a set of evaluation criteria common to all centres of mission, the review process is sensitive to local context and nuance. Over the course of a two-day visit to the centre of mission, the reviewers attend and observe the activities of the centre of mission and spend time talking to Evangelists, volunteers, community members and other local stakeholders. In doing all this, the reviewers seek to be ‘critically appreciative’ – recognising and appreciating, encouraging developments and signs of life within the centre of mission - at the same time as naming key challenges and things that may need attention. This culminates in the preparation of a report for Church Army Management Group and diocesan partners, which informs decisions relating to the future direction of the centre of mission.

Aspects of this review process are obviously particular to Church Army. However, we believe the wider principle of reviewing well is vital for all projects that involve appointing pioneers. Though end of project evaluations (like the ones considered in this report) can be useful, their impact is limited by the fact that, by the end of a five-year project, it is usually too late to change very much. Regular, relational, context-sensitive reviews earlier on in a project’s lifetime, in contrast, have the advantage of ensuring accountable conversations and informed decision-making well before the funding runs out.



³⁰ See the ‘Populating the Gap’ section at <https://www.livingtheology.cuf.org.uk/blog/mind-the-gap>



6 SUSTAINING PIONEERING

Most projects had made some progress with relation to the various dimensions of sustainability highlighted by our previous research on sustainable fresh expressions of Church.³¹ 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

³¹ See Andy Wier (2016), *Sustaining young Churches: A qualitative pilot study of fresh expressions of Church in the Church of England*: <http://churcharmy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/sustaining-young-churches.pdf>. Appendix 2 of this report contains a list of further resources and research on financial sustainability.

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 a pioneer project in Oxford diocese 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”.³² Or in the words of another church leader:

*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.*³³

6.1 EXPECTATIONS AND CLARITY

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. Not all projects, however, 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 in the Diocese of Oxford, 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.”³⁴ And at risk of stating the obvious, these challenges are likely to be experienced even more acutely in economically disadvantaged areas.

³² *New Communities Pioneer Pilot Projects*, p. 7.

³³ *New Communities Pioneer Pilot Projects*, p. 7.

³⁴ *New Communities Pioneer Pilot Projects*, p. 7.

6.2 FINANCIAL MODELS

Most of the projects studied employed a relatively high-cost financial model which involves paying for at least one dedicated full-time Pioneer Minister in each new area for 5-10 years. As our previous *Sustaining Young Churches* report noted, high-cost models are much harder to sustain financially than volunteer-led models, though the question of which approach offers the best return on investment or most sustainable fruit is a far more complex one.³⁵ 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.

Our report for the Diocese of Oxford noted that appointing a stipendiary Pioneer Minister is not going to be feasible within every new community. In view of this, we suggested that some paid pioneering roles may need to be reimagined; 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 other³⁶

Some of these things are features of Church Army centres of mission which, as noted already, operate on a slightly different basis to the other pioneer projects researched. Within each centre of mission, there is a focus not only on doing mission and evangelism, but also advocating, resourcing, and enabling it. And in most cases, two people (typically a Lead Evangelist and Pioneer Evangelist) are appointed, not just one. This reflects an explicit emphasis on the importance of working in teams to achieve a greater impact over a wider area. This approach (employing two people) brings its own sustainability challenges, and many of the issues noted earlier in this section are also experienced by centres of mission. Yet it provides one concrete example of the potential for reimagining paid pioneer roles.

³⁵ Andy Wier (2016), *Sustaining young Churches*, p. 47.

³⁶ *New Communities Pioneer Pilot Projects*, p. 9.

7 THE JOYS AND FRUSTRATIONS OF PIONEERING

In this section, we identify some of the joys and frustrations of paid pioneers. Though exploring these was not the primary focus of our research on pioneering, the work we have undertaken nevertheless provides some insight on them.

7.1 JOYS AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT

One of the questions we sometimes ask Evangelists from Church Army centres of mission is ‘Can you think of a recent experience within your centre of mission that has encouraged you or brought you joy?’ This question generates diverse and wide-ranging responses from Evangelists, but common themes include:

- New initiatives getting off the ground
- Connecting with increasing numbers of people
- People from non-churched or de-churched backgrounds exploring faith
- Seeing those they have invested in grow in confidence
- Opportunities to train others and run courses for other local churches
- Strategic change at a diocesan level
- Support and recognition from the wider Church

In preparation for this report, a member of Church Army’s HR Team also produced an anonymised summary of themes emerging from Evangelist appraisals and exit interviews. Many of the themes noted resonated with wider issues identified in our Pioneering in Portsmouth report. Taken together, these sources appear to suggest that pioneers particularly appreciate:

- Encouragement and support from senior leaders and central staff
- Wider support networks – including helping to know people are praying for you and finding spiritual directors and / or mentors
- Opportunities to connect with other pioneers – for example via the Portsmouth Pioneer Fellowship or the Church Army Mission Community and centres of mission conference
- Access to specialist support and advice on IT, HR and safeguarding issues (whether from Church Army or the diocese)
- Access to training and learning opportunities, particularly around leadership

7.2 FRUSTRATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Alongside these joys and encouragements, our recent research has enabled us to identify the following frustrations and challenges experienced by paid pioneers:

- Pressure to meet targets and objectives or deliverable ‘measurable results’ from project funders who ‘don’t completely grasp pioneering’³⁷
- Onerous reporting requirements – a sense of being ‘checked up on’, sometimes having to provide similar information to different stakeholders in different ways
- Worries around short-term funding and the longevity of pioneer projects / posts
- Inflexible funding programmes with limited discretionary budgets
- Feeling disconnected from employing / sponsoring organisations and ‘out of the loop’
- Mixed messages about self-care and work/life balance – being told to ‘look after yourself’ at the same time as being given more things to do
- Changes of direction within employing / host organisations and the wider Church, which can lead to some pioneers going from ‘flavour of the month’ to ‘out of favour’ within a short space of time

7.3 CHOICES FOR PIONEERS

As the language of pioneering has become more mainstream, the number of paid opportunities with the word pioneer in the job title seems to have increased. But as the above list of frustrations and challenges shows, being paid by the institutional Church to pioneer has its downsides as well. Drawing on our wider observations of the UK church scene over the past two decades, it appears that some pioneers are more comfortable with ‘mainstreamed pioneering’ than others. Some have learned to live with and negotiate, or at least become reconciled to, the challenges and compromises that come with pioneering on the margins whilst funded by the central church. But other pioneers we have met, particularly those who seemed to be more pioneer starters than pioneer sustainers, appear far less comfortable and temperamentally suited to this. This changing landscape raises difficult questions for anyone with a vocation to pioneering – questions such as:

If I take a paid pioneer post to enable me to spend more time doing the things I love, can I live with the frustrations and challenges that come with being funded by the institutional Church?

If it is important for me to pioneer with greater freedom and autonomy, is it better for me to pioneer in my spare time or at least without funding from the central Church?

³⁷ *Pioneering in Portsmouth*, p. 34.

8 FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM? PIONEERS AND THE WIDER CHURCH

Risks and Opportunities

The fact that there has been such significant investment in the creation of paid pioneer posts is an indication of how far the Church has come in its acceptance of pioneering since the days of *Mission-Shaped Church*. But our research also highlights that the relationship between paid pioneers and the wider Church is far from straightforward. *Mission-Shaped Church* noted that ‘Neither pioneer nor entrepreneur leaders find life within Anglicanism easy’³⁸ and in many ways this still stands. Within the current pioneering landscape, we discern four key risks with relation to pioneering, which we summarise and respond to below.

Risk 1 - Dismissing Pioneering

The relationship between ‘grassroots pioneering’ and church planting based on the resource church model is currently a source of contention. Some of the pioneers we interviewed expressed concern that, within some contexts, the former is being quickly disregarded in favour of the latter.³⁹ In response to this, we suggest that there needs to be further reflection on the benefits and limitations of each approach with a view to considering which models are most appropriate in different contexts and how they might be creatively combined. While resource churches and other ‘traditional church plants’ have the potential to generate quick results in some contexts, a ‘worship first’⁴⁰ model of church planting is less likely to be effective in profoundly non-churched or marginalised communities. In these contexts, the task of pioneering often requires starting a long way back and engaging with the tasks of ‘double listening’ and ‘serving first’ as advocated in more grassroots models of pioneering. But as the examples provided in Section 4.2 illustrate, grassroots pioneering and traditional church planting do not have to be mutually exclusive alternatives. There is potential for them to support and complement each other, or be creatively combined.

Key message for the wider Church:

Discern carefully which models of pioneering (e.g. grassroots pioneering, traditional church planting, social enterprise) are most appropriate in different mission contexts and how these might be creatively combined.

³⁸ *Mission-Shaped Church*, p. 130.

³⁹ *Pioneering in Portsmouth*, p. 34.

⁴⁰ See Michael Moynagh (2012), *Church For Every Context* (London: SCM), p. 246.

Risk 2 – Domesticating and Stifling Pioneers⁴¹

As pioneering has (in some ways) moved from the margins to the mainstream of church life, the wider Church has rightly required the pioneers it has funded to be accountable. But as noted in Section 7, the very high expectations and demands that the Church places on pioneers can often be a source of significant frustration and distress, which distracts them from the core task of pioneering. As such, we suggest that the wider Church needs to combine accountability with risk-taking in order to more fully benefit from the ministry of paid pioneers.

Key message for the wider Church:

Create space for risk-taking alongside appropriate accountability. Be careful not to impose over-simplistic performance management frameworks which can easily alienate pioneers. Instead, build in regular, relational reviews and contextually sensitive approaches to impact measurement along the lines suggested in Section 5.1.

Risk 3 – Decoupling Evangelism from Pioneering

As we saw in Section 4.3, there sometimes seems to be a reticence, within some pioneering circles, in talking about evangelism. But whilst affirming a holistic view of mission, we suggest that any decoupling of evangelism from pioneering is problematic. Without any evangelism, church plants and new worshipping communities can only rely on transfer growth (people joining from other churches). And without some element of faith sharing, pioneering community work or social engagement easily becomes indistinguishable from secular community projects. As part of an organisation committed to doing, advocating, resourcing and enabling evangelism, we suggest that greater attention needs to be given to the place of evangelism within pioneering and the training of pioneer evangelists.⁴²

Key message for the wider Church:

Put the 'evangelism' back into 'pioneer evangelism' and train pioneer evangelists.

⁴¹ See Mark Russell (2021), 'Wild or tamed: the dangers of domesticating pioneers' in Dave Male (ed) *Pioneers 4 Life: Explorations in theology and wisdom*. Abingdon: BRF.

⁴² For more on Church Army's approach to training and commissioning pioneer evangelists, visit: <https://churcharmy.org/growing-faith/be-an-evangelist/commissioned-evangelist/>.

Risk 4 – Dismissing Unpaid Forms of Pioneering

In this report's introduction, we stressed that pioneering is not only about what paid, or formally designated pioneers do, yet it is paid pioneering that typically gets most of the attention. Whilst affirming the need for significant financial investment in paid pioneer posts, alternative forms of leadership such as those embodied by many Messy Churches should not be overlooked. As suggested in Section 6, some paid pioneering roles may also need to be reimagined to include a greater emphasis on resourcing and enabling others.

Key message for the wider Church:

Look below the radar. Don't only take an interest in what you fund!



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