

EVALUATION
of the
MISSION AREAS
and
RESOURCING CHURCHES
PROGRAMMES
in the
Diocese of Bristol

Church Army's Research Unit, November 2023

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Executive Summary

1. Church Army's Research Unit was commissioned to review the Mission Areas and Resourcing Churches programmes which were initiated in the Diocese of Bristol in 2017.
2. The implementation of the programmes involved the significant investment of at least £15m, including almost £4m provided through the SDF of the Church of England.
3. This review has involved the analysis of extensive data, documents and the discussions with 90 people through confidential interviews and focus groups.
4. The review covered a wide variety of churches and contexts in the diocese, in rural areas and in Bristol and Swindon.
5. The achievements of the ten outcomes across the different programmes have been assessed, concluding that there is mixed picture.
6. Depending on the particular programme, the outcomes related to attendance, percentage of unchurched or de-churched, involvement of young people, financial giving, facilitation of vocations, engagement in prayer and small groups, the impact on the local community and learning.
7. Only one outcome was not met, which was attendance in the Mission Areas.
8. Six outcomes have been met in part. In the Mission Areas, this included giving and training, and in with the Resourcing Churches, this included the percentages of unchurched or de-churched and young people in the attendance, giving, vocations and church planting.
9. Three outcomes were met in full. In the Mission Areas, this included learning, and with the Resourcing Churches, this included church life and societal impact.

10. The analysis of why some outcomes have not been met, at least not in full, presents a complex situation dependent on external and internal factors.
11. The Covid pandemic was cited as an issue which to an extent frustrated the achievement of some outcomes, but it was not the only factor.
12. There was a review of how the outcomes were perceived by those in the programmes who were asked to fulfil them.
13. In order to get a wider perspective, there was also a review of how the programmes were seen by those in other churches not directly involved.
14. Suggestions have been made as to how the work of the programmes can be sustained and replicated, particularly in seven key aspects: ownership, learning, timescale, finance, contexts, personnel and outcomes.
15. The programmes present significant examples of how mission can be put into practice in different contexts and the learning that has emerged has the potential to be a valuable resource.
16. With confidence it can be stated that the programmes have increased the capacity of the diocese to deliver future growth.

Background

In the Diocese of Bristol, as an important part of the 2016-20 Strategic Plan, three Mission Areas and two Resourcing Churches were established as part of separate programmes with significant investment from the Archbishops' Council's Strategic Development Fund and other sources.

Mission Areas

The three Mission Areas were awarded funding of £950k from SDF in 2017, as part of the total budget of £3.1m. The original aim was 'to bring together geographically coherent parishes to serve alongside one another, with a coordinated and collaborative approach to mission and growth'. This would be achieved through the sharing of resources and ideas under the oversight of a lead incumbent of the area's designated resource church that enables all the churches to do things better together, thus reducing the burden and releasing energy for mission. In each Mission Area, missional communities were to be formed, with teams and leads holding specific responsibilities, an important principle of working out how to do mission in a structured way in each area. Resource churches within the Mission Areas were identified, with the expectation that headed by the lead incumbent these would spearhead the focus on mission and growth.

The main overall outcomes were defined as a six-year growth in average weekly attendance (AWA) at worship of 600 (35% growth in resource churches and 15% growth in other parishes), a four-year growth in giving of £240,000 (30%), the significant increase in the training capacity for curates, and the learning for potential ways of revitalising suburban, outer estate and rural ministry. Each Mission Area was launched through covenants signed between 2017 and 2019. These did not directly mention the outcomes in full but the local interpretation of them. Through the covenants, members of the churches and their leaders were committed to a cultural change focused on mission and growth. Each Mission Area has produced mission plans that plot the way the outcomes can be fulfilled.

Avonside Mission Area, made up of parishes in the suburban and outer estate areas of North West Bristol, enacted a covenant in October 2017 where they committed 'to work in partnership with Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about the social, cultural and spiritual transformation of all our communities.' This was later translated into aims in the key areas of children's and youth work, evangelism, living well, prayer as mission, social justice and the mental awareness group. The recent Activity Plan was to maintain Sunday and weekday services, deploy two curates cross the Mission Area, establish a pattern of leadership meetings and hold an away day.

Yate and Fromside Mission Area, also established in 2017, recently expanded to include an extra parish, covenanted in January 2018 to engage in prayer, listen to their communities, establish a youth and children's ministry, improve communications, develop creative worship and connect with missing generations. The context is suburban and semi-rural with areas of new housing. The Interim Plan for 2022 has the key areas of enlarging the Kingdom of God, developing Christ-

centred relationships across the community, engage in mentoring and discipleship, stimulate a culture of prayer and deepening spirituality, work with children and young people, and improve communications.

North Wiltshire Mission Area, made up of 31 rural parishes in six benefices, started slightly later in 2018 while the leadership was established. In the covenant of June 2019 they committed to be attentive to what the Holy Spirit is already doing, develop a strategy for mission and discipleship, support one another in prayer, share resources and expertise generously, and reach out to those outside the church family. The mission plan of 2022-25 sets the goals for the corporate life of prayer, a stronger shared identity, resourcing and encouraging discipleship, reaching out beyond traditional church, promoting good stewardship of creation, theologically reflecting on social justice issues, and helping children and young people hear the Gospel and grow in the faith.

It is important to note that this research is primarily the assessment of outcomes as designated at the onset of the programme. The Mission Areas have had the freedom to express how the outcomes can be fulfilled, involving interpretation through covenants and mission plans, which have all been a crucial part of the process, particularly because the programme relates to very different contexts and a variety of local church groupings. Thus, the programme outcomes remain the main focus.

An Interim Evaluation of the Mission Areas was undertaken by Peter Webster and Ian Jones of Saltley Research and Evaluation in February 2020, consisting of 14 interviews and two focus groups. Recognising that at this stage the Mission Areas were only recently established, there was concern that outcomes based on numeric measures should be sensitively interpreted and other measures needed to be more fully developed. The main achievements noted included the creation of a stronger culture of team-working and collaboration and the setting up of missional communities, which enhanced the sense of intentional discipleship and shared vision. The Evaluation stressed that as the aim was for a cultural change, the five-year period of funding was likely to be insufficient. The report came out just before the onset of the pandemic and therefore could not have foreseen the effect of the Covid restrictions.

Resourcing Churches

The establishment of the Resourcing Churches as a separate programme had a different original aim, which was to create large worshipping communities that can continually resource mission and ministry in their localities and more widely across the diocese through planting churches.

St Nicholas Church in Bristol (St Nicks) was set up with £1.5m from SDF in 2017, part of a project cost of £5.6m. The aim was to create a church with ‘a vibrant life of prayer, worship, discipleship, evangelism and service, connecting primarily with those under 30 and those that are unchurched or de-churched’. It would engage in ‘social action and transformation work’ in the context of Bristol city centre. Furthermore, it would grow leaders and train planting curates, as a major part of diocesan strategy. The outcomes for five years were to reach an AWA of 600,

including 40% unchurched or de-churched and 60% under 30-year-olds, an annual budget of £500k which would include a net contribution in Parish Share, grow eight to ten vocations to ordination, plant or graft into at least three churches, and address local social needs, such as food poverty, homelessness and youth unemployment.

Pattern Church in Swindon was set up in a historic railway building with £1.49m from SDF in 2018, as part of a project initially costed at £6.45m. Similar to St Nicks the aims were to develop 'a vibrant life of prayer, worship, discipleship, evangelism and service, connecting primarily with those under 40 and the unchurched or de-churched', the key difference being the age of those to be evangelised which is a diocesan priority of engaging younger generations. The focus on 'social action and transformation work', and support of diocesan church planting strategy, is the same through the training of leaders and planting curates. The original outcomes to be achieved in five years were an AWA of 430, of which 50% were either unchurched or de-churched, and 70% under 40 years old, a self-sustainable income with a net contribution to Parish Share, four to six vocations to ordination, and a capacity for training new church leaders deployed to plant at least two new churches. Pattern Church would become 'a visible and effective sign of Christian witness and service in the heart of Swindon', enhancing social transformation in areas such as urban estates, addressing youth unemployment, homelessness and having a ministry to children, young people and their families.

Methodology

The diocese contracted Church Army's Research Unit in April 2023 to review the progress of the programmes, with particular regard to the extent that the outcomes of the original plans have been achieved and how best to share the final learning. Initially a range of questions were posed:

- Were the anticipated outcomes achieved?
- What is the anticipated long-term impact of the programmes? Is there evidence that the outcomes will be sustained beyond the funding period?
- Are the programmes financially sustainable going forward in line with original expectations?
- To what extent are the outcomes achieved likely to continue and potentially increase over time?
- To what extent have the programmes increased the diocese's capacity to deliver future growth?
- What was learned about how and why the outcomes were (or were not) achieved?
- Is there other key learning to draw out from what did and didn't work within the various strands?
- How has diocesan 'business as usual' changed as a result of learning during the programmes?
- What can the Diocese of Bristol learn from this strategic programme to inform setting up new Mission Areas and in meeting the objectives of the new *Transforming Church. Together* vision and strategy?

These questions and others that inevitably arise are answered in the two major parts of this report:

Outcomes Finding and Analysis which assesses to what extent the programmes have met the original aims, the factors involved, and how the outcomes are considered by those charged with fulfilling them and those less directly involved.

Long-term Sustainability and Replication which seeks to address key aspects of the programmes, including ownership, learning, timescale, finance, context, and personnel, with specific recommendations about the outcomes. This will inform how the development of *Transforming Church. Together* and the setting up of new Mission Areas.

The first stage of the evaluation was the review of the available data in the form of proposals, bid documents, minutes of meetings, statistical returns and other files and notes. Over 1900 documents and pieces of information were received, some of it extending back to 2015. These were reviewed in order to ascertain the original aims of the programmes, and how they have developed over the past seven or so years. It is important to note how the programmes have been affected by local changes, such as issues in staffing or other resources, and the wider changes, such as the experience of the restrictions imposed during the Covid pandemic and a perceived shift of diocesan focus. The most recent documentation has been harder

to assess because the Mission Areas and Resourcing Churches are ongoing and subject to change and development, and there can be the inevitable lag in the relaying of information and the reporting of data.

This information provided a useful foundation to inform the next stage of research which was to arrange interviews and focus groups. The diocese was instrumental in suggesting those who might be personally interviewed, such as those involved with the programmes at the national, diocesan and local levels, including church leaders and their associates. We were able to arrange interviews with all those suggested, either in-person during our visits to the diocese or online. Also, a few others were suggested as the research progressed and these were included in order to obtain as full a picture as possible. During this research 24 people were interviewed. An important aspect of these interviews was strict confidentiality so as to encourage people to speak openly and share their thoughts and ideas freely. No comments in this report are attributed directly to any one of the interviewees. They were all made aware of our data protection policies and anonymous research procedures.

The other part of this stage of research was the setting up of focus groups so as to gather views from a wider cross section of those involved in the programmes at the local level. These people tended to be the committed members of the churches, those most invested in the work with the experience of implementing the aims of the programmes and those representing a view at the point and place where the programmes succeed or fail. Local church leaders did not contribute to the focus groups, as they had the opportunity to share their views through the interviews. Seven focus groups were arranged as in-person events during our visits to the diocese, including one in each Mission Area, Resourcing Church and church plant. The size of the groups varied between eight and twelve people, lasted up to two hours, and centred on the discussion of the experience of programmes, the key issues that have arisen and the hopes and vision for the future. Usually, two members of the research team were involved in the focus group meetings, one to chair the discussions and guide the conversation to ensure important areas are covered and that everyone had the opportunity to contribute, and the other to record what was said in a full and accurate way. As with the interviews the focus groups were treated as confidential meetings where thoughts and ideas could be shared freely but not attributed outside the meeting. At the beginning of each focus group this was explained, and participants were made aware of our data protection policies and anonymous research procedures. As a consequence, in this report we will not be linking any comments to anyone in a particular focus group.

With the significant amount of data provided by the diocese and the data collected through the interviews and focus groups, the next stage was to undertake an in-depth analysis with regard to the key research questions that have been posed. This process informs, raises more questions, helps establish conclusions and provides ideas and suggestions for future development, which are put forward in this report.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have been involved in this research, at the national, diocesan and local levels, providing information and answering questions, and agreeing to be interviewed or take part in a focus group. It is not possible to name all of these 90 or so people, but particular thanks are due to Elizabeth Bergen, TCT Programme Officer and Rebecca Cross, consultant working for the diocese, who have helped us extensively in providing data for this research.

Outcome Findings and Analysis

The anticipated outcomes set out in the Mission Areas and Resourcing Churches programmes are varied, although in general the focus has been on the three key areas of growth, discipleship and finance, translated into Key Performance Indicators. Some aspects of these are quantitative, such as attendance, percentage involved in small groups, and congregational giving, and thus can be assessed and compared relatively easily. Other types of assessment, which are considered qualitative and thus inevitably harder to measure, help to provide a more complete picture. These include aspects such as involvement in prayer, learning highlights and social transformation.

The outcomes have been reported to the programme boards on a regular basis, although there is a greater lag in those for the Mission Areas. We have worked with the most recent data available, October 2022 for the Mission Areas and August 2023 for the Resourcing Churches and church plants. We have been able to supplement this with information provided through the interviews and focus groups, but what has been officially reported remains the primary source of quantitative data.

Generally, the outcomes set out at the beginning of the programmes have not been met in many cases, and although this may be due to a range of factors, it is accepted that the effect of the Covid lockdowns on the mission of the churches was significant. Typically we have heard that it set back the progress of the programmes by about two years. If this is the case then it is reasonable to suggest a Covid adjustment to the outcomes, which can be offered as a point of comparison for those who wish to use it. This is not to say that Covid is responsible for all shortcomings, for indeed we have come across ways in which the pandemic helped to galvanise church life, develop online connectivity and give the Church a new relevance in the community. Also, more recently there appears to have been in some areas a positive rebound after the pandemic restrictions were lifted.

The analysis of the outcomes is not a detailed summary of every activity, nor a granular analysis of all the figures. Neither is it a forensic assessment of whether individual covenants and mission plans have been delivered in full since these are seen as the vehicles to achieve the outcomes rather than outcomes in themselves. This is an overview of the trends and significant developments, with the prime focus on whether and to what extent the outcomes have been fulfilled, and the learning that arises from this observation.

Mission Areas Outcomes

The Mission Area programme has four main outcomes, two of which are quantitative, related to attendance and finance, and two of which are qualitative, related to training capacity and learning. Prime statistical data has been collected to directly measure some outcomes, along with supplementary data to present a fuller picture, such as attendance of young people, the number of baptisms and confirmations, more details of giving, and small group participation. The qualitative data has been made available through written records, interviews and focus groups. Each of these main outcomes will be considered in turn.

AWA increase

For each Mission Area the first outcome was to **increase AWA by 600 over six years**, accounted for by an increase of 35% in the resource churches and 15% in other churches. In the period 2018-2022 there was actually a significant decrease in attendance in each Mission Area: Avonside (29%), Yate and Fromeside (27%), and North Wiltshire (30%). Over the same period the decline was less in the diocese as a whole (24%) and in the Church of England (26%), but comparisons made with similar parishes in the diocese show the Mission Areas declined less or increased more in certain periods. Some of those interviewed commented that the baseline figures set at the beginning of the programme were too high, making it difficult to fulfil the outcome. The pattern varies across the Mission Areas in different periods: in 2015-2017 two were in decline, Avonside (16%) and North Wiltshire (17%), and one was showing an increase, Yate and Fromeside (13%); in 2017-2019 as the programme becomes established there was an increase in Avonside (12%) and Yate and Fromeside (16%), and little change in North Wiltshire, although this had a later start. Thus it would seem that in the beginning the decline in two areas had been significantly arrested or reversed and in one the increase accelerated.

The effect of the pandemic is significant and seems to have led to the reversal of the growth of the initial period. It is not possible to know to what extent that growth would have been sustained if Covid had not struck. Various comments were made about the Covid period, with some thinking that it may have revealed the true state of the churches: *'It cut out the people who just did social church,'* and *'Covid exposed just how shallow some people's discipleship was.'* It is interesting to note that although the Mission Areas experienced an increase or arrested decline just before the pandemic started this did not help them maintain their AWA during that difficult period. Some measure of the recovery from Covid is indicated by the growth in AWA in the period 2020-2022: Church of England (7%), Bristol Diocese (85%), Avonside (16%), Yate and Fromeside (226%) and North Wiltshire (330%). These recovery rates are affected by how low AWA was at the height of Covid and the various local responses to the pandemic in different types of churches. As such the long-term effect of Covid cannot be fully assessed until the more recent AWA figures become available to show the new levels of attendance.

Within the Mission Areas there was a variation between churches or benefices, not in line with the expectation that the resource churches would experience significantly higher growth and lead the way. In Avonside, Avonmouth showed an increase against the trend of the Mission Area, in Yate and Fromeside the decline

ranged between 8-39% in different churches, and in North Wiltshire the decline ranged between 5-47% in different benefices. It should be noted that any AWA change in the smaller churches produces a more extreme percentage.

Also monitored as part of the AWA was the percentage of people under 16 who were attending. The expectation was that there would be an increase over the six years of 50%, but by 2022 there was a decline in each Mission Area: 50% in Avonside, 36% in Yate and Fromeside and 56% in North Wiltshire. It is possible that the pandemic restrictions were a factor here as the returns for 2019 show an increase in such attendance of at least 5% in all three Mission Areas in the first years of the programme. With the Covid adjustment, discounting two years out of the five, it would still mean the outcome had not been met, but the scale of decline would be less.

In all the Mission Areas the work with children and young people remains a priority, and there are some good examples of success. People in the focus groups were very keen to talk about this work. In Avonside they said, *'we are being experimental, trying to reach all, but particularly the younger community,'* and *'young families have things to do on Sunday mornings so changing the time of the service is important.'* In Yate and Fromeside, the youth missionary has led valuable work with young people and in schools, and there have been initiatives such as Regenerate, Praise and Play, and Messy Church. In North Wiltshire parishes came together to fund the appointment of a mission youth enabler in line with the Mission Area youth plan. This has had a unifying effect across the whole Area: *'When the youth group pray together, I see a picture of the whole Mission Area praying together.'* In the same Mission Area, the informal outdoor Wild Church has drawn in young people and those outside the traditional church communities. Many of the examples of the increased children's and youth work seem to have been in events beyond Sunday morning, perhaps indicating a necessary shift in practice. Furthermore, the appointment of youth workers to lead and support volunteers has been difficult, and much will depend on continued funding for such posts.

Although not one of the main outcomes, it is interesting to note that the baptism rates in the Mission Areas are yet to return to the number recorded in 2017. From the latest figures the annual return is still significantly below the pre-pandemic level: 44% in Avonside, 27% in Yate and Fromeside and 39% in North Wiltshire. Other occasional offices seemed to have been affected as well: there are no confirmations recorded since 2019. No assessment of the number of weddings or funerals was undertaken for this research. *'Covid has had a lingering effect on baptisms and weddings'* is an example of a common comment. It remains to be seen if there can now be a recovery to the previous levels.

Finance

The second main outcome identified for Mission Areas was a **four-year growth in giving of £240,000 (30%)**. This was to meet current costs and pay for the investment of resources that the programme instigated, such as associate ministers. It is also seen as an indication of commitment. There was an increase in giving over the first four years in each Mission Area, but well below the target percentage. In Avonside giving increased 14% by 2021, in Yate and Fromeside 9% by 2021 and in North Wiltshire 11% by 2022. Over the same period UK inflation was about 10%. More

recently these rates have been maintained, except in Avonmouth which has now reached the 30% target. Within Mission Areas churches, some churches or benefices have done much better than others. Some thought that finance was not a true reflection of what is going on in the churches: *'Not all things can be measured by pound coins,'* and *'It is shocking and disappointing that income is an objective,'* while others recognised giving as an indication of commitment and discipleship, and noted that people do respond generously when they see a real need: *'Every church contributed to the youth worker, even if they didn't have any young people.'*

It is to be expected that finance relates to the number of people at worship, but there is an interesting relationship between levels of giving and attendance. The overall giving increased in each Mission Area in the period, but the number of planned givers decreased by a greater percentage: 17% in Avonside and North Wiltshire, and 10% in Yate and Fromeside. Conversely, the percentage of the adult givers within the congregations slightly increased in all three Mission Areas. Thus, there are fewer people who are giving more, significantly more in the case of Avonside. It is a complex picture, but it might be possible that had the number of planned givers been maintained or slightly increased it is likely the financial target would have been met in the four-year time frame. It remains to be seen if Yate and Fromeside and North Wiltshire can match the increase recently noted in Avonside.

Training capacity

The third main outcome for Mission Areas was the **significant increase in the training capacity for curates**, although no actual figures for this were stipulated. There is concern that the diocese has not provided curates to the extent that was suggested, although this varies across the Mission Areas, there have been a total of 19. Where curates are appointed, they can be deployed across the Area according to their skills and strengths. Similarly associate ministers can serve the wider area, although this has not always been well defined or managed. One spoke of *'some misunderstandings from the beginning about the role.'* Pragmatically, the view has developed that where this cannot be a clergyperson it can also work well as a lay appointment, if the right person can be found. The placement of students from Trinity College helped the development of leadership in some places, but on the whole this was a continuation of a previous practice: *'I don't think lay people are empowered across the Mission Area.'* This is important because lay ministry is seen as crucial. Some made the point that lay people are essential *'because clergy come and go,'* but *'lay people are not always appreciated.'* The pandemic restrictions seem to have a more detrimental effect on lay ministry and the offering of volunteers: *'The impact on volunteering was really significant, and the ministry team was reduced.'* Interns have been a valuable feature in some places, offering support on the Mission Area as well as showing how young people can explore their vocation. They were described by one as *'the most important thing that we do.'* Support in this from South West Youth Ministry and the Ministry Experience Scheme has been important, although the recent failure of such schemes to recruit nationally has reduced the numbers that are available.

Learning

Representatives of the Mission Areas have come together regularly in learning sessions, **to share together what has arisen from their experience**, most recently in order to support the work of *Transforming Church. Together*. This is the fourth main outcome of the programme which states that such learning will provide 'potential ways of revitalising suburban, outer estate and rural ministry'. The sessions have generated interesting debates about some of the key issues, such as ownership, leadership, governance, and the use of buildings. There has been a particular focus on how Mission Areas can encourage trust, promote adaptation and provide resource sharing. The programme board meetings have informally reported on the learning, and the bulletins and learning logs summarise the experiences and advice that can be disseminated more widely. Information sessions in Diocesan Support Service meetings enabled sharing of progress and learning, and an online conference entitled 'Sharing experiences and learning for mutual growth and blessing' was held during the pandemic lockdown for all clergy to learn from developments across the programmes.

There are issues to be considered further. Firstly, how much of the learning arises from the range of people in the Mission Areas, including those who are less enthusiastic and committed? Recognising that their involvement is problematic, their views could present a useful insight into how the concept of Mission Areas can enthuse as many people as possible in the local churches. Secondly, there needs to be a disengagement of learning from assessment, or finding ways to share learning in a confidential and accepting way. One person commented on the need to be able to make mistakes and talk about the experience of failure, which did not seem to always be possible in a learning session. Thirdly, much of the leaning is pragmatic, necessarily so in the period of setting up new systems and ways of working. However, the benefit of theological reflection and relation to key biblical themes would help to inform what is being discussed. A recent session based on the Parable of the Sower is an example. Some historical context would also be useful, as Mission Areas are not an entirely new idea, as would some comparison with what is currently being tried in other dioceses.

Other outcomes

Although not directly part of the outcomes, data is provided as a possible measure of discipleship, in the form of small group participation. This is an aspect that appears in covenants and the mission plans, sometimes seen as part of building up missional communities. The aim is to increase small group participation to 60% of the AWA from the baselines of between 20-36% in the Mission Areas. However, it has been difficult to establish a definition of small group participation, a confusion shared by people in the focus groups: *'It is a great target, but what does it mean!'* For some it is taking part on a regular or weekly basis in a house group, Bible study or prayer meeting. For others it is attending a Holy Communion service in the week, or even being present at a church event. Some said that meeting in small groups was not easy because *'it is not in the DNA in our community.'* It would be helpful to have a clearer definition of this measure, and one that recognises context and church tradition.

Before 2020 the small group participation level was 42% in Avonside, 21% in Yate and Fromeside and 35% in North Wiltshire, generally showing small increases since the beginning of the programme. Obviously as the pandemic restrictions were imposed from March 2020 this kind of activity, however defined, was severely limited. Since then no figures have been returned. It is not that Mission Areas have given up on such things, as we gathered plenty of evidence that they were returning to these kinds of activities soon after the restrictions were lifted, but the collection of such data no longer seems to be taking place in a systematic way. Certainly, there are house groups and Alpha groups running in the Mission Areas. In Avonside there are groups in the churches, some with a particular focus of evangelism, such as the 54321 enquirers' group. In Yate and Fromeside the discipleship groups have been '*freshened up with an agreed missional focus,*' and there has been a focus on the Stepping Stones of Faith, the journey of discipleship. An assessment was made that small groups can be intimidating. In North Wiltshire the CPAS Thrive course was used to enthuse people in the beginning, and now there is a discipleship pathway of Bible and prayer courses, parish prayer cards, and a pilgrim way that brings together church buildings and the landscape as a mission tool. They report a small group participation rate of 30-35%, the same as it was in 2020.

In all the Mission Areas people want to talk about the impact in their local communities, even though this not a main outcome for consideration. There are some examples of good work, such as mental health groups, food banks, and help with Ukrainian refugees. In Avonside there is the specific aim of transforming local communities, but this was thought to be unlikely in the short term: '*There are pockets of new life, people flourishing, but not communities transformed - that is a bit unrealistic.*' In Yate and Fromeside there are groups that reach out to people, such as coffee mornings, craft groups and Tea at Three. In North Wiltshire there has been work with Ukrainian refugees, and desire to make community connections. Much of the focus is on individuals, although the power of the Church to affect society is recognised: '*I ask what is the gift of the parish church to the parish? It is discipleship worked out through the desire to serve.*' Being with people at important points in their lives is seen as a mission opportunity: '*Meeting people when they are in need leads to a spiritual journey,*' and '*Working in the community presents amazing missional opportunities.*' At the same time there is difficulty in assessing this influence: '*how on earth do you measure what we are doing in the community - it's impossible.*'

An important aspect of the programmes has been the enhancement of cooperation between parishes. One said, '*The Mission Area creates fuzzy boundaries between the parishes, so we can do so much more together.*' There is a lot of evidence that this has taken place, though in some areas more than others, as a degree of parochialism remains in some parts of the Mission Areas. The benefits of working together have been shown in such things as shared administration, resources, and the funding of youth work. It has also helped maintain stability during periods of vacancies and staff shortage. Several noted that the Mission Areas were in a stronger and more resilient position when the pandemic restrictions came into place, because there was support for church leaders and congregations who were already part of the system. One the clergy said, '*I felt really supported during Covid because of the Mission Area.*' Interestingly one of the more positive consequences of the pandemic

was the online services where people from different churches could come together to worship online. Speaking about this, one person said, *'The greatest benefit has been getting people to work together - clergy and lay - in a way we never did before.'* An important aspect is good communication between people, churches and the communities, a task perhaps all the more difficult in the larger rural areas.

In another Mission Area the cooperation and joint working between parishes and clergy seemed to be less evident. *'A lot of people don't think we are in a Mission Area, which makes me sad,'* said one church leader, while another noted, *'Some people in some of the parishes, can't or don't want to think beyond their own church.'* In one Mission Area one person thought that the geography is an issue because the communities are shaped by the valleys and hills, and in another the geography is right but the ethnography is not. Maybe there should be a greater capacity to change and develop the Mission Area to make it work together better. The relationship between parish or benefice and Mission Area requires sensitive handling. Not everything must be done together. Some events work better at the local level, such as harvest, and it is important that the Area events do not disrupt that rhythm, whereas others work better across the Area, such as Lent courses.

Mission Areas work well when the clergy and laity see themselves as a team, cooperating together and generally fully appreciating the gifts and strengths of each. This has not always been the case, and some spoke of misunderstandings and of the failure of the teams in some respects. Part of this is due to how the Mission Area works as a defined community, and it is probably also due to personalities. The concepts of mission community and streams of work are part of the mission plans, but people did not refer much to these in the focus groups. For many the mission community is less defined and relevant than their own church, even where this includes people less committed to mission. There is evidence that church tradition does not get in the way of cooperation between clergy and churches. Sensitive management by the lead incumbent, who is not necessarily at the largest church, the appointment of new people who will be supportive of the concept, and the relationship to the clergy of the deanery, where it is not co-terminus, are important factors.

Ownership and shared vision seem to vary within Mission Areas. Not all local churches are engaged, committed and energised by the programme to the same extent. In the focus groups people spoke of *'people not knowing about the Mission Area, or even wanting to know,'* and *'they only care about their own church and nothing else - the Mission Area is meaningless to them.'* One said, *'In my church I am the only one who has anything to do with the Mission Area, the rest haven't got a clue.'* There is no doubt that there are many people at the local level committed to and enthusiastic about the programme, including ordained and lay leaders, and other key people in the churches, but there remains a significant group, who for whatever reason are less interested in supporting the concept and reality of Mission Areas. Unfortunately, such people are unlikely to attend the focus groups, and their views are in many cases only reported second-hand. Perhaps some of this disinterest or even opposition is expressed in some places by the reduction in AWA and decline in giving.

Resourcing Churches Outcomes

Across the Resourcing Churches programmes there are the four quantitative outcomes of AWA, including size and percentage unchurched or de-churched and of a certain age group, financial targets, vocations goals, and the number of churches planted or grafted. There are also the two qualitative outcomes of creating churches with ‘a vibrant life of prayer, worship, discipleship, evangelism and service’, and engaging in ‘social action and transformation’. As with Mission Areas, the prime statistical data has been collected to directly measure some outcomes, along with supplementary data to present a fuller picture, such as attendance of unchurched or de-churched and young people, the number of baptisms and confirmations, more details of giving, and small group participation. The qualitative data has been made available through written records, interviews and focus groups. Each of these outcomes will be considered in turn.

St Nicholas (St Nicks)

AWA size and characteristics

St Nicks has the outcome of reaching an **AWA of 600 within five years**, and it was agreed that those attending planting churches would be included. In 2023 the combined AWA is 364, 309 at St Nicks and 55 at Concord. The outcome was revised to 480 for 2022, although in that year the AWA was 332. There are several factors at play here. These include the negative effects of the pandemic restrictions, which also led to the more positive development of an online presence, although this has an ambiguous place in the statistical return. It was not envisaged that churches would face the issue of how to include online attendance, and this remains a point of debate. Churches covered in this report measure online involvement in different ways, which makes comparisons difficult. Also, there is the general fluidity of St Nicks as a city centre church which attracts students, creating a rhythm of the church year where certain months, such as in the summer, have reduced congregations. Characteristically there is a high turnover, as shown in a recent survey when over a third of the congregation said they joined St Nicks in the last year. Another factor is the capacity of the building, which is around 150, so that growth is only possible through the creation of more services.

The target for **unchurched or de-churched was set at 40%** of AWA, but this currently stands at 20%, although the percentage has been gradually increasing over recent years. There was a particular effort made to not attract people from other churches at the setting up of St Nicks, an emphasis made public and recalled at the focus group: *‘I remember when we started there was a definite desire to discourage anyone already attending a church somewhere else.’* There is the issue that if many of those attending have come from other places beyond Bristol, as is the case with students, these could be classified as transfer growth. The diocese would consider such not to be transfer growth because they are from beyond the same geographical area. However, in a recent survey 30% of the congregation said they had transferred from other Bristol churches, mostly Anglican. Also, some define ‘transfer’ as referring to someone who has been involved in another church within the last year, and a longer period makes then ‘de-churched’. However, in the era of Covid and changing patterns of attendance and online involvement, this definition is in need

of revision. One indication of reaching the unchurched is the number of baptisms, and there have been 42 adult and 21 child baptisms at St Nicks.

Within the AWA the aim is that **60% will be under 30**, which is recently recorded at 61% and therefore on target. In meeting the focus group there is a real sense that this is a church of and for young people, though recognising this can be limiting as well: *'We are a young church, perhaps a bit too young and professional'*, although another said, *'Our strengths lie in our children's work and student work.'*

Finance

St Nicks aimed to have **an annual budget of £500k**, which has been achieved, to become **self-sustainable**, and in the end to pay a significant Parish Share, plus a minimum of £50k, which is yet to be achieved. It would seem that for the moment the giving has reached a plateau, which means there can be no growth in expenditure despite the needs. The focus group regarded giving as *'very important'* but were not fully unaware of the details of the financial arrangements and commitments. *'We might run a little economic debt, but it doesn't mean we are unsustainable.'* They said one issue was the high proportion of students which had a direct effect on income. There are two giving Sundays in the year, and although regular giving has not matched expectations, any shortfall is often met by one-off donations. Giving is seen as part of discipleship: *'It is good that we have to ask people to give, as giving is a sign of faith.'* St Nicks has relied on grant aid up until this point, and it is not clear how in the short term it can become a significant contribution to the diocesan budget. There is the hope that they can apply for more grant aid and also start to derive an income from the building. Some in the focus group wanted to move the conversation away from money to other resources, and in many ways they thought they were rich in the resources of prayer, worship leadership and vision. Some thought that the church would share such resources quite willingly with more churches: *'It is the way we are - we are the kind of church that wants to share.'*

Vocations

The outcome of growing **eight to ten vocations to ordination** has not been achieved, with no one coming forward from within the congregation. This will be due partly to the pandemic restrictions, but also the way the church has been unable to fully accomplish its remit for planning or grafting more churches. However, there has been a steady flow of interns, with eight completing by 2022. St Nicks has an ethos of growing lay leaders in the church, and often people are personally selected to explore their vocation. Mentoring people is also a strong feature of the church, with a particular push to expand this in the last year. Members of the focus group were very aware of the encouragement of seeking and fulfilling vocation: *'People are eased into leadership.'* In the focus group there was support for the style of leadership: *'The leadership team is very open'*, *'The leadership team is very humble and asks for help when they need it,'* and *'We trust the leadership team deeply.'* St Nicks has reached a stage where the culture of lay leadership can be developed as the number of paid staff are reduced. *'We need to move on from the set-up culture to something more long term.'* Lay leadership will provide *'longevity in the church'* and this will be developed through house groups and social action.

Church planting

One church plant, Concord Church, was launched in October 2022. The preparation for this took over two years, much longer than was originally envisaged. There seem to be fewer opportunities for planting or grafting in the city and certainly there was an underestimation of the complication and extent of time it takes to set these up these operations. As such it is unlikely that the target of at least three church plants or grafts can be achieved, which presents a problem for those recruited as planting curates according to the original aims of the programme. There is a sense, expressed by a few people, that diocesan policy is less focused on the church plant model than in previous years, with a perceived shift to revitalisation instead. This was raised in the focus group with some concern for the planting curates. *'Are there places where they can go?'* it was asked. One person wondered if *'the vision of the church is matched by the vision of people in the diocese.'* What has been stressed more recently is the need for a rationale for church planting in the context of the future funding of stipends, and the need to establish where a church can be planted before the right people are recruited to such a role.

Church life

The outcome of creating a church with **'a vibrant life of prayer, worship, discipleship, evangelism and service'** is less easy to quantify. It was said, *'We can measure spiritual growth in three ways: praying, serving and giving.'* By their very nature some of these activities are hidden: *'I can tell you how many people came to the prayer meeting, but I can't tell you how many actually pray.'* The focus group members described St Nicks as *'welcoming, hospitable, community focused, pioneering, spiritually empowered'* and *'scripturally accurate'*. There was a genuine desire to share their faith with an expressed goal of reaching out to those *'people who don't know Jesus'* and enabling people to turn from *'knowing of God to knowing God'*. In a recent survey 64% of the congregation said they engaged in prayer on a daily basis and 93% weekly. Interestingly, the St Nicks focus group was one of only two groups where there was the strong desire to end the session in prayer.

Other activity can be measured, such as the small group participation. As a church that uses Alpha extensively and has a high expectation that people are part of house groups and hubs, the small group participation at St Nicks is high at 75%. Members of the focus group were enthusiastic about the system, which includes activity groups as well, for those interested in cycling or walking or climbing, etc. New people are always encouraged to join a small group.

Societal impact

The last outcome of engaging in **'social action and transformation work'** is also difficult to measure, but there is plenty of evidence of involvement in several social issues. The key elements are the needs of people, the purpose of the help and the place where the church is called to be. Set in the city centre, St Nicks inevitably has to deal with people in urgent need: *'We have lots of walk-ins off the street - our door is always open.'* In the focus group people spoke of the food hub that supports five hostels, helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds, working with people with mental health issues, supporting Beloved that works with sex workers, providing

debt advice, and assisting expectant and new mothers, amongst many other activities. Some of the work is seen as successful because it presents an opportunity for sharing faith, such as the Little Nicks toddler group. Faith underpins the activities: *'We address the social ills through prayer in the streets.'* The approach is to allow members of the church to get involved in the social projects that they feel called to, and then to support them with space or resources as necessary. There was some discussion in the focus group as how much this work is meeting the needs of individuals rather than tackling the deep-seated societal reasons, but St Nicks is definitely a church with a social conscience and active approach to setting up projects, partnering with others in projects, and supporting members to engage with some challenging issues in their community. It is estimated that about 40% of St Nicks' congregation are serving the community in some way or other: *'There is so much we could do in the community, and we have a vision for the next five years.'* It is hard to measure what effect this has had in Bristol, as this would involve extensive analysis, and for this reason it is not an outcome for which there is sufficient evidence.

St Nicks is a vibrant city centre church with a vision and commitment, which shares the faith and serves the local community, and has a particular ministry to students. Starting from scratch has provided many opportunities and is seen as a great privilege. They face particular issues as they seek to grow the congregations and expand what they do, but they do so with faith: *'We are taking the blessings and the battles together.'*

Concord Church

Concord Church was planted in September 2022 at the Aerospace Bristol in an area of new housing. The name is inspired by the Collect for Purity and the very setting of the church. The area which it serves includes much new housing, some still being built, and covers three parishes, two deaneries and two archdeaconries. Concord has inherited some of the same outcomes as St Nicks, but because it is little more than one year old it is inappropriate to form solid conclusions from the data that has been provided.

AWA size and characteristics

However, there are outcomes that can be considered. The **AWA for Concord is 55**, exceeding the target of 50 at this stage. The worship community size is estimated at 80, and by September 2024 it is hoped that the AWA will increase to 100. In the focus group it was said that the pattern of attendance is monthly for many, which might be part of a post-Covid change to attendance generally. If this was so, there would be implications for the AWA outcomes for all the programmes. The focus group also said that new people were attending every week, and the congregation is diverse and not majority White British. However, the average age is higher than expected: the **percentage of those under 16 is 20%**, lower than the target of 34%.

They report that it is **too early to state the proportion of unchurched or de-churched**, and as a recently established congregation the expectation is that that many people will have transferred from other churches even if the desire is for new Christians: *'We have a real vision to reach out to the non-churched, the disillusioned*

and those hungry for faith. There was mention in the focus group that some people had joined from a local independent evangelical church in the area which had recently closed. It was said, *'People just turn up because they are bored with their old church,'* and *'Transfer growth is not necessarily wrong, because it can be a sign that people are growing in faith and finding a new church as part of that journey.'* An indication of attracting the unchurched is adult baptisms, and in September 2023 at Concord Church three adults were baptised as part of the first year celebrations. The aspiration for September 2024 is that the unchurched or de-churched will have reached 30%.

Finance

In terms of giving, 22% of the church are committed to regular giving, a fall from the 36% of November 2022. The aim is to reach 45% in September 2024, although *'this will not be easy in the current cost of living crisis, or with the people who come here,'* and *'people give to Christian charities as well, which is really important'.* The plan is that Concord Church will be **self-sustainable by year 5 and pay a full parish share by year 6.** The next two years will be difficult as support funding is withdrawn: *'We recognise the need to be self-sustainable eventually'* but *'asking people for money soon after they join can put people off.'*

Church life

Concord Church aims to have **'a vibrant life of prayer, worship, discipleship, evangelism and service'**, and although this is harder to quantify, there are strong indications of these features. *'Our priorities are Sunday and Alpha,'* and there were about 35 on the first and the second Alpha courses. However, not all are content with the structured house groups: *'Some people find the house groups didn't help people, and what worked better were activity groups.'* It is suggested that it is too early to record the percentage involved in small groups, although in May 2023 this is stated as 35%. The aim is to reach 45% by September 2024. Other signs of lively faith are the desire to *'pray with one another', 'talk about the sermon after the service'* and *'have a real eagerness to serve.'*

Comments in the focus group were made about the **style of leadership**, which is described as *'servant based'*. Those who lead *'are willing to clean the toilets and put out the chairs'* and they are really approachable. *'We don't use the words "vicar" or "pastor" and there is "no sense of us and them" at all.'* We believe *'everyone gets to play, everyone is part of the team.'*

Societal impact

Concord Church seeks to bring about **social transformation**, and so has become involved in different activities in the local area. The litter picks, prayer walks and BBQs in the community raise the profile of the church, all part of reaching out and making connections. *'People in the church are so willing to step up and step out.'* Some groups have been identified with particular needs, such as those who have come from Hong Kong, Ukraine and Iraq, for whom there are language cases, and young single mothers attracted to the Stay and Play sessions. We like to *'join in the noise of the community,'* and *'be seen in public'* as people are *'watching to see*

what we are like. Around 400 people came to the community events at Christmas and in May. It is all about *'investment, ownership and belonging in the community.'* The leaders have built up relations with the museum where they meet and with the development company on a regular basis.

Concord Church in its first year has displayed confidence, vigour and vision. It has all the advantages of being a start-up in a new housing area, with none of the ties of a traditional building, and having a small enough worshipping community where people can serve and be cared for. To a large extent at this stage it has fulfilled its outcomes, even though they recognise that in subsequent years this will remain a significant challenge.

Pattern Church

Pattern Church was set up as *'a visible and effective sign of Christian witness and service in the heart of Swindon'*. The eight five-year outcomes - six quantitative and two qualitative - are similar to but not exactly the same as St Nicks. The focus group described Pattern Church as *'welcoming, encouraging, family orientated, Jesus centred, outward-looking,'* and *'full of joy'*, with a mission to those *'on the margins, diverse, young, underprivileged, vulnerable'*, and *'ordinary people uninterested in Church.'*

AWA size and characteristics

The first outcome was an **AWA of 430 by 2024**, with the agreement that this should include the church plants. The actual number for 2023 is 344, 224 at Pattern Church and 120 at The Well, a slight fall from the previous year. Again Covid was a factor, as it reduced the anticipated growth in recent years. Recognising the ambiguity over online attendance, Pattern Church has an average Sunday online viewing of 130. It is not clear whether this can be taken into account and to what extent. People in the church think growth is important: *'We expect to have numerical growth - but it is not the only measure.'* The effects of planting a church were noted: *'Because we are a sending church, we will never have our own growth as the main target.'* Some of the growth was recognised as transfer growth: *'We have a very effective children's work and youth work, which other churches don't have.'* The issue of a high turnover was also mentioned: *'We see several new faces, but some leave, and church hoppers tend to come and go,'* and *'Swindon is a transitory place, so people come and go.'* Others thought that the AWA was an insufficient measure: *'What we ought to count is those who get involved, not just those who turn up.'* For instance, knowing how many are engaged with Alpha and small groups is considered significant, as least as important as the number who attend worship. There is a large fringe beyond those involved in the church in a regular way.

The five-year outcome for either **unchurched or de-churched is 50%, but the actual number is 27 or 16% of adults.** There are those who have transferred from other churches: *'They come here because they have found a home here and can develop their gifts here.'* Some of these may have been de-churched along the way, and are therefore not simple transfers, as discussed above. As it stands it is some way off the expected figure. If baptisms are an indication of reaching the unchurched, then Pattern Church has now done 35 since starting, very close to the target of 40.

The target for those attending under 40 is to achieve 70%, and with the latest return showing 67%, this outcome is virtually met. They said, *'We are quite a young church.'* There is a focus on families with children but also a desire not to make others feel excluded.

Finance

Financially the outcome is to have a **self-sustainable income with a net contribution to Parish Share within five years**. Regular givers make up 45% of AWA, with a target of 60% for next year. The focus group thought sustainability was important, recognising that they need to support a building and staff, but *'we are not run as a business'*. Also, *'we are a young church so there will be no legacies.'* The finances are considered to be *'looking positive - best team on it'* and there was an encouraging response at the giving day. It was thought, *'we are quite confident that we will be sustainable.'* However, there was the need for redundancies in the past year, which was a difficult decision but considered to be a right one. Also, there was reference to the pockets of deprivation in Swindon, and the financial needs of those they work with. Ways to increase the use of the building to bring in an income are being looked at, helped by the employment of a booking coordinator.

Vocations

The aim **within the five-year period was to grow four to six vocations to ordination**, and at present there is one ordinand and three that are in the process of exploring ordination, so they are in line with expectations. Over 2020-2021 there were ten interns. There is a structured approach to the development of leadership, where people perceived to have the gifts are actively encouraged. An example is Squad Preach, which is a safe way of exploring people's gifts. Mentoring is important and *'there need to be boundaries'*, particularly as they are a younger church. Some in the focus group were unaware of the processes for leadership development, and did not know how people chose to be part of the church plant: *'The leadership network needs to be more visible'*, and *'information is not always passed on.'* Others thought that there was a lack of clarity about the management structure of the church, especially if you are a new person. There is a recognition that more people need to own the vision: *'Wider ownership is down because we need to put a bit more work into growing our volunteer teams.'* A priority is to make the leadership more diverse, and new service leaders have been appointed. Of the adult AWA, 65% are serving on a team, which is above the target of 55%. The leadership recognise that there should not be a core of people who do everything.

Church planting

The setting up of The Well in September 2021 is a clear indication of a capacity for training new church leaders for church planting. With another two possible church plants under consideration this outcome is very likely to be met if not exceeded. *'We think it is worth planting churches, taking risks, feeling the pain of people, when it happens. People are worth it and what God does is wonderful!'*

Church life

Another main outcome is to be a church with **‘a vibrant life of prayer, worship, discipleship, evangelism and service’**. In the focus group it was said, *‘Our aim is to change an experience into a lifestyle.’* Much of this is achieved through small groups, and the participation rate is 50%, with a target of 55% next year. Activities take place on Sunday and Wednesday so as to free people up, and to ensure people are not over-burdened with ‘church’. Alpha is the vehicle for so much of the activity: *‘We do morning and afternoon Alpha, youth Alpha, children’s Alpha, prison Alpha and Ukrainian Alpha.’* Alpha groups become Pattern groups, an essential part of the structure of the church.

Societal impact

The church is committed to enhancing **‘social action and transformation work’** in the area of urban estates, youth unemployment, and homelessness. This means being involved in the ministry to children, young people and their families. For examples, the work of Crosslight Debt Advice has grown with new volunteers, and Growbaby which is thriving. They recognise they have an important part to play in certain issues in the community: *‘We are a key player in the development of Ukrainian refugee support.’* Swindon is seen as a growing town that is less and less connected to the Church, with a low attendance figure across the town, and community involvement may help to counter this.

Pattern Church has brought faith hope to Swindon in new and vibrant ways. It has not attracted the full numbers of people that were expected, but it has successfully planted and encouraged many people in their discipleship and vocation. It has brought a distinctive Christian presence in facing some of the key issues in the community.

The Well

This church plant was set up in September 2021 on a housing estate in north Swindon. Meeting at first in a local school, it has recently moved to its own church building which has been a key focus of time and effort in the past few months. The outcomes for the Well are similar to Pattern Church, but taking into account that this is newly established church. The focus group described their church as *‘Welcoming, family orientated, supportive, inclusive’* and *‘on the right side of chaos’*. It is reaching out to local people who *‘have a varied economic status, are isolated, unchurched or lapsed,’* and *‘have a very basic grasp of the Christian faith.’* The name was inspired by the story of the woman at the well who met Jesus (John 4) which sets the tone for an accepting yet mission-focused church.

AWA size and characteristics

The Well **exceeded its target of 90 AWA** with an attendance of 120 this year, peaking at 150 in May. There is a seasonal change in attendance, which is deemed hard to explain at this point. The fortnightly worship and prayer evenings attract over 50 people. There is some hesitation about growing too quickly: *‘If we get too*

big then we are no longer a community but an audience. We are *'still a very young church.'* There is also the sense that numbers should not be the focus: *'If you can't be disciples, then numbers don't matter,'* and *'If there is no opportunity to serve, you will not grow spiritually ... it is just bums on seats.'* The community size beyond the congregation is estimated at 220.

Of the AWA, **34% are under 16, just exceeding the target of 33%.** Recent illness in the children and families team does not seem to have affected this outreach too severely, perhaps because *'wonderful team members stepped up.'* Some in the focus group thought much needed to be done in this area: *'There are not enough kids' leaders and not enough being done.'* For example, the weekly toddler group, Little Wellies, is already at full capacity.

The aim was to **attract at least 30% unchurched or de-churched people, and the latest figure is 46%.** There is a strong desire not just to attract people from other churches: *'If there is transfer, then it is just a carousel.'* There have been ten baptisms and three confirmations since The Well began. There is an openness in the church to accept people from all backgrounds: *'We are a church for people with complicated lives.'*

Finance

The regular **giving last year was 66% of the congregation,** with no figures for this year, although as the target is 45% it is likely this has been exceeded. However, this is concern because the area is not affluent: *'It is tricky to ask for money from people who don't earn much,'* and *'In this community, if a family gives to church, it means an adult will not eat.'* Anticipating the issue of self-sustainability and future expectations, members of the focus group felt strongly that *'the Parish Share must be decided by the demographics of the community.'* It was thought that they will need *'the right culture of stewardship'* to be able to become sustainable.

Church life

The Well aims to have **'a vibrant life of prayer, worship, discipleship, evangelism and service.'** Prayer is at the centre of what they do: *'In the teams we come in early to pray, so that there is a spiritual development in the life of the church.'* **Small group participation is 45% of AWA,** as with other churches extensively using Alpha, but there are reasons why some who they are seeking to reach cannot be part of this, for example, *'single mums will not be able to go to a house group.'* There is also a resistance to trying to assess growth in this way: *'Targets for spiritual growth feel ungodly and our leaders should not be judged through them.'* Vocation and service are key elements within the life of the church. Recently an intern joined them to explore a vocation to youth ministry. Squad Preach is a feature, as are teams for different ministries. About 54% of the church are in teams and people are encouraged in their discipleship: *'Everyone is called to serve, and everyone can serve in some way.'* Leadership is naturally developed and there are lots of opportunities.

Societal impact

In the context of north Swindon, The Well is committed to ‘**social action and transformation work**’, specifically by providing a community in an ‘*area lacking a sense of community.*’ They describe the area as ‘*socially mixed, lacking in resources, lots of houses without much gelling together, lacking local churches and faith schools.*’ The confusing road system and the infrastructure of the area adds to the sense of isolation and lack of neighbourhood focus. A particular ministry to work with children with Special Educational Needs has been started, arising from the experience of church members. There was a benefit to meeting in the local school as this created natural contacts with parents and children. Some are sad to be leaving the school but recognise all the effort involved in setting up for worship and the advantages of having their own dedicated building.

The Well has become a vibrant community of faith in an area in need of both community and faith. It has established its own identity separate from Pattern Church building on the support that they have given. The Well has attracted a wide range of people, including the young and those previously distanced from church, and the move to their own building with a ‘*huge sense of excitement*’ opens up new possibilities.

Other outcomes

Although not part of the main outcomes but assumed to be an important element of the programmes is the aspect of shared learning. As with the Mission Areas the learning is seen as a way to inform the new strategy, *Transforming Church. Together*. In the Resourcing Churches programmes there has been a particular focus on how church plants and grafts can revitalise under resourced areas, and how to prioritise the unchurched and de-churched. There is a wealth of firsthand experience that can be shared in the diocese, and also drawing on others involved in church planting in other parts of the country. Some spoke of the value of gatherings such as HTB Focus and other network events. This stimulates a wider perspective and some comparison with what is happening in other dioceses. The programme boards receive regular updates on learning, and the highlight reports include a ‘commentary on what learning should be captured’. Although this section has not always been completed in all cases, it includes references to team recruitment and training.

As mentioned above with Mission Areas there are issues to be considered further, including how the learning reflects all the experiences of those involved in the programmes, how learning is disassociated from assessment, and how to instil further the opportunities for theological reflection. Again, some historical context would also be useful, as neither resource churches nor church plants are new concepts or practices with the Church of England.

Summary of Outcomes

Mission Areas Programme Main Outcomes		
Attendance		Not met Decrease overall, but some increase in initial period Large variations within Areas
Finance		Partly Met Some increase before Covid. One Area has met target after stipulated date
Training		Partly Met Not fully met although no precise number set, and several curates trained
Learning		Met Significant sharing by representatives of Areas
Resourcing Churches Programmes Main Outcomes		
Attendance		Partly met Size targets not all met, but examples of targets exceeded in unchurched and de-churched and age groups
Finance		Partly met Goals of sustainability and contribution to diocese budget yet to be reached
Vocations		Partly met Vocations target reached in one church
Church planting		Partly met More plants being planned
Church life		Met Self-evident in character of churches
Societal impact		Met Involvement in variety of ways to address local issues

How outcomes were perceived

It is important that the leaders and participants in the programmes who have been asked to account for the progress towards the various outcomes have the opportunity to express their views on these various outcomes and the targets that were set. Their views were gathered through the confidential process of interviews and focus groups.

1. Some said that they were not involved in setting up the outcomes, and therefore did **not necessarily fully understand the reasons for them**. This could include leaders appointed after the programmes were initiated but also members of the churches not directly involved in the setup. It is interesting to note that quite few members of the Mission Area focus groups had not been a signatory of the one of the original covenants five or so years previously and were not fully aware of what was agreed at that first stage. Where the covenants have been renewed, often at a well-attended service, this is less likely to happen. There was a greater awareness of outcomes and targets in the Resourcing Churches and plants, perhaps because they are new churches with a fresh agenda and sense of new venture. Ownership and understanding of the outcomes are critical factors in ensuring they are fulfilled.
2. Some expressed the **dislike of the concept of outcomes with targets** principally because they argued that the life and health of the local church cannot be adequately measured in such a way. Through the covenants and the mission plans of the Mission Areas the outcomes have been translated into less precise terms and the targets as such were often absent. Some felt quite strongly that this was right because the Kingdom of God defies mechanistic scrutiny. There was a view expressed by a few that the focus on the AWA data was actually counter-productive: *'Our aim shouldn't be to get people into Church - that is only the by-product of them coming to faith.'* Another said, *'Attendance alone is not the right outcome, we should include the full community of people and try and capture all our missional relationships.'* In one focus group the question was asked, *'Why this obsession with bums on seats?'*
3. However, others saw the **outcomes as a good measure** because they were precise, allow comparisons, instil responsibility and are also inspiring. They are seen as 'ambitious' but this helps to stress the urgency of the situation and gives people a vision to strive for. One clergy person said, *'We need to be accountable, because we have been trusted to do something new.'* Others asked why these kinds of outcomes cannot be applied to other churches in the diocese as well, to those beyond the programmes, as a way of shifting the culture of the diocese *'from one of stagnation to expectation for growth.'*
4. However, **growth, in whatever way it is expressed in the outcomes, was not always considered to be healthy**. There was quite a lot of debate in the Resourcing Churches and plants about transfer growth and how it is accurately measured. *'It is right that we are not sheep stealing, since that does not add to the Church,'* was a typical comment. It was recognised that it was necessary to ask who is new to Church, and who has never been to Church

before: *‘What is really exciting is finding those who have never been involved in Church, perhaps never even been to Church.’* This is seen as a tangible way of seeing the Kingdom of God grow: *‘We need to be able to measure the right sort of growth and be able to show it.’* However, this will require a tighter definition of the unchurched or de-churched category, about which there was some uncertainty in the discussions in the focus groups. For some, the concept of the unchurched meant people who might have attended traditional community events at Church, such as at harvest or Christmas, but had not come at other times of the year. Others saw de-churched as referring to someone who had not attended a church for at least a year, though it was unclear whether online attendance counted. The very fact that they are de-churched might simply mean that they are looking for a new church to join where their faith can grow.

5. It was considered that **outcomes should take into account the local context**, and that this has not always been the case. Different types of communities and the varieties within them, from city centre, urban, suburban to rural, provide a range of contexts that are best understood by those who live there. *‘We are not the kind of community where people want to join small groups,’* one said, and another commented on how *‘the real poverty in this place means people cannot give much more to the church.’* It was understood by most that the context also includes non-Anglican churches, whose presence or absence can be an important factor not necessarily accounted for in outcomes. In one focus group it was asked, *‘Does this mean we shouldn’t work ecumenically anymore?’* In some places there is a seasonality to attendance and the period when the figures are taken will affect the result: *‘We always have a dip in the summer,’* was one comment. Furthermore, every community will have experienced some change over the last five years, and those that include new housing will have changed more than others, depending on how quickly the community has been built up and the types of houses provided. Also, recent aspects, which were not foreseen, such as the cost-of-living crisis and the arrival of Ukrainian refugees, will have had an effect on outcomes. Some were arguing for more individual and adjustable outcomes closely related to the context and adjustable for any variations that take place over time.
6. **Covid** was the obvious example of a change that might require adjustment, although not all the consequences were necessarily negative. For instance, the pandemic restrictions increased the online profile of most churches, and helped to break down some of the barriers between some parishes. The Covid experience does raise the question about how to include online attendance, an issue talked about in the focus groups: *‘Do we count the people joining us for worship online?’* and *‘Are they part of the church, even if they join us from miles away, even from the other side of the world?’* People were unsure how this affected the AWA but they regarded the pandemic as a very significant experience: *‘Covid changed everything and this has to be taken into account or else it is meaningless,’* and *‘You can’t ignore the biggest event of the last five years.’*

7. There was less concern about the outcomes that were not quantitatively based because they seemed to give a **fuller picture with which people could engage**. Greater practice of prayer, deepening discipleship and extending learning were outcomes that most people enthusiastically supported. The way these outcomes are assessed is through the sharing of examples and stories, a style of investigation which people found more comfortable and helpful, and perhaps less threatening. Such outcomes contribute to the narrative of churches engaged in mission and are an important part of any assessment, even though they might be considered more subjective and less precise.
8. There were aspects which some thought **should have been outcomes but were not directly assessed**. These included what some consider essential for healthy churches, such as team working and cooperation, ownership throughout the church, and discipleship expressed through the service of individuals in the community. It might be difficult to see how such aspects could be developed into outcomes, although there was opportunity to report on these areas in the learning sessions. They are part of the complex picture that people want to convey when they refer to the possibilities and evidence of growth in their churches, and how their experience can be assessed.

Other views from beyond the programmes

An important element of our research involved talking to those who are not directly involved in the programmes, but who can give a view from a national, diocesan, deanery and other local church level. This included both clergy and lay people as part of the confidential interview process. These views are not necessarily representative nor comprehensive but are offered as part of the wider viewpoint.

1. Some said they **could not see how outcomes were agreed**: *'I don't understand the reason for these particular outcomes or the targets that are set,'* and *'How much consultation was there with the local churches?'* The need for the interpretation of the outcomes at the local level was generally commended but it may have created a tendency for vagueness: *'How do you translate these into what happens in that place?'* and *'How on earth do you precisely measure the growth of the Kingdom of God?'* Some outcomes present particular issues: *'How do you measure discipleship?'* and *'Small group participation is subject to many different interpretations.'* It was thought that there is a danger of creating two tiers of outcomes, those reported to the diocese and funders, which tend to be more precise, and those owned by the local church, which are part of the narrative of the reality of local experience. Others saw this relationship more positively. The interaction between diocese and local churches is an encouraging feature, leading to the nurturing of an ecology that allows different kinds of churches to flourish. However, the variety can be confusing: *'The trouble is this has created a mishmash of outcomes and mission plans, which makes it hard to do comparisons and to know what has worked and what has not.'* Linked to this was the thought that the level of scrutiny needs to be better: *'We need a system of outcomes that means people are accountable.'*

2. Some **questioned the reason for the outcomes**: *'I wonder whose outcomes these are - they seem to be very much from the view of the institutional Church, rather than the local church.'* Another spoke of the dissonance that the programmes had created: *'KPIs are not part of the culture of this diocese,'* and *'It takes a change of ethos to see things in this way.'* It is inevitable that this is part of the ongoing debate about church growth and how it is measured, but there were strong views for something more nuanced and reflective of local contexts, and yet well-defined and comparable.
3. An abiding issue was **the question of timescale**: *'The programmes need much longer to be embedded', 'This is asking for a culture change that may take a generation,' 'It is sowing seed, and we don't know when the harvest will be,'* and *'All of this is in God's time not ours.'*
4. The relationship between **current diocesan structure and the programmes** was brought up. The benefits of a Mission Area being co-terminus with the deanery were discussed, with a stress on the need for good working relationships between area dean and leading incumbent and their respective leadership teams, and the need to avoid duplication. Where the Mission Area and deanery do not match there was more concern about duplication and the possible unhelpful divide between those churches in one of the programmes, with the associated investment and outcomes, and those that were not. One said, *'It is not fair that we are judged by different outcomes than they are,'* and *'They get a lot of attention and support.'* The incorporation of Resourcing Churches and plants into the deanery structure was thought to be important, and it was welcomed where this has been achieved smoothly. There were suggestions for future development: *'Going forward the diocese needs to consider how Mission Areas relate to deaneries,'* and *'Maybe the agility of Mission Areas can help the deanery to be more agile as well?'*
5. The **dynamic between programme churches and other churches** in the diocese was commented on by several people. Some of the comments point to a perceived unfairness: *'There is a lot of resentment that they have received funding', 'With the same investment we could have done a lot of things,'* and *'Because they are new and exciting, they have attracted a lot of our people, the young and the talented ones.'* Some describe the Resourcing Churches as being *'disruptive'* when they started, while on the other hand one said they had been *'blessed by them through their willingness to share resources'*. Transfer growth is definitely an issue where it has seen to be significant, a problem compounded by the way it is measured. There was more support for the planting of churches in new areas of housing where there is an obvious need, and for a focus on revitalisation rather than planting.
6. There was **praise for the inclusion of the culture of learning** and the hope that this can be made available to other churches as well. Also, it needs to be developed beyond just the sharing of good practice and examples: *'From this can emerge a theology of church growth,'* and *'This can help to inform ongoing work and plans.'* The learning is seen as a way to start a debate about church growth and sustainability *'from two very different programmes with very different approaches, and probably very different ecclesiologies.'* The learning process should be *'extended to include people at the local level,*

built into the everyday life of the church, and not just be for church leaders and their teams' and, 'This would mirror much of the debate that is going on in the Church of England at this time.' It was recognised that as one of the outcomes for Mission Areas it is hard to measure how it is being met, other than through the publication of the learning logs.

7. There was recognition that **since the programmes began there has been a shift in focus in the diocese**. Some spoke of the diocese being less entrepreneurial and more parochial ministry centred. One perceived that there was now a *'hesitancy about in church planting,'* and this was seen to be affecting those called to this role. It was unclear whether this was actually a *'change in culture'*, but it was certainly seen as a *'change in business as usual.'* Some wondered if the change was significant, since the diocese has always been *'more supportive than strategic,'* and *'there will always be a variety of approaches in the diocese.'*

Reasons for any underachievement

An important aspect of the assessment of outcomes are the factors that have determined the extent to which they have been fulfilled or not. Some of these were suggested through the interviews and focus groups, and others have arisen from specific observation.

1. **Covid** has been the most mentioned factor, and it is generally agreed that this put the progress back two years at least, although this is hard to determine. Also, there were both negative and positive effects. What was detrimental encompassed several things that people referred to, including the restrictions on worship and meetings in small groups, the sense of isolation felt by many, the extra stress and limitations on pastoral work, the difficulties in recruiting volunteers, the reduction of income from services and building lettings, and in a more general way the distraction from the attention to the programmes as recently launched initiatives. Post-Covid it is reported that some people have drifted away, fewer are contributing to the finances, and it is more difficult to find those who are willing to take up roles on the churches. On the more positive side, though not adequately compensating for the negative aspects, there was a sense of unity in the face of the pandemic challenge, greater focus on the essentials of church life and of faith, and an improved connectivity in online services and meetings. On balance it may be too early to say what effect the pandemic had on the programmes in general, but its overall effect on the outcomes is perceived to be negative.
2. Another crucial factor has been **personnel**, that is appointing the right people for the right job at the right time. There have been difficulties in recruitment, delayed starts and sickness, that have led to a limiting of work and results. This applied to paid and voluntary roles, including incumbents, curates, associate ministers, youth workers and interns. Finding the people called and willing to take on the positions has been challenging. More positively it has led to the necessary rethinking of some roles, such as lead incumbent and associate minister, and the essential qualities that are required for these,

such as whether associate ministers need to be ordained. Beside this, the ability to build teams is considered important, and although not a simple task that has happened in some places more than others, it has a direct effect on how well a programme is put into practice. Where members of the original team who were there at the beginning have moved on, there will be some disruption that will be likely to affect some outcomes. This is particularly so where the enthusiasm of the original team has not been fully shared throughout the local church. Part of the issue has been the short-term nature of some appointments, which may have limited the scope of who might apply. For example, finding youth workers has been difficult, and the funding for these posts is dependent on sources of funding that are not secure or guaranteed.

3. Another aspect related to personnel which is influential on the outcomes is **well-being of those involved**. Some clergy speak of the personal cost to them and their families to be involved in the programmes, due to the extra work that is needed, the upheaval of moving house and the uncertainty of appointments. There is a need to be aware of the well-being of all involved, a point that some are very keen to highlight. Particularly when outcomes are not fulfilled, for whatever reason, the church leaders and their teams may feel a degree of despondency. It is at such times that personal support in appropriate ways is particularly needed.
4. Some spoke of the **miscalculation of the baseline assessments**, which made the targets harder to achieve. This may be particularly true where the leadership has changed, and those now leading do not feel responsible for the original figures. The arbitrary nature of some of the historic data, even AWA, has meant that they can be disputed. Furthermore, figures in the smaller churches are subject to greater percentage variation by nature of their size. In one of the Mission Areas, one of the small churches recorded a large percentage increase explained by an actual increase of less than ten people. Some say that no account was taken of what might have happened immediately prior to the start of the programme, whether it was a period of growth or decline, although there is material that shows the trajectories from 2015. Other outcomes are perhaps less subjective, such as financial giving, although some said that this could be volatile if key givers in the church either left or joined.
5. For some in the Mission Areas the **grouping of churches does not seem natural**, and they speak about an imposed arrangement. This will affect the work of the churches if the communities to which they relate are pulled in different directions. Some of this disquiet may be the result of parochialism and an excuse for not getting fully involved either as individuals or a church in the new arrangements, but there does seem to be some evidence that not all Mission Areas cover a cohesive wider community. For example, comments were made about Avonside in this respect. An answer is to ensure that Mission Areas need not be fixed and thus have the agility to adjust their boundaries when required after careful assessment. This has already been proved possible with the new parish added to Yate and Fromeside.

6. One of the most significant reasons for underachievement in Mission Areas is the fact that in some churches the **enthusiasm for the programme is not felt by all in the local church**. In all three Mission Areas there are committed clergy and laypeople who make up a core that has the vision and energy to support the programme, but this is not necessarily replicated in every member of the PCCs or the congregations. It was reported that there are some people in the churches who at least pretend to be unaware of the existence of the Mission Area, although this may be an expression of disinterest rather than ignorance. The programme needs to attract the involvement of the vast majority, although this may only be achieved over a longer period. Resourcing Churches and church plants do much better in this respect largely because as new entities they attract people who share the vision.
7. Another reason for underachievement was the **difficulty of moving on from the initial stage to the stages of ongoing growth**. The enthusiasm at the beginning, particularly if not shared by everyone in the church, will need to be enduring if the programme is to be sustained. Beyond the excitement of starting something new and the initial funding, it is not easy to maintain the required momentum. This was expressed across the programmes and is as much an issue in churches in Mission Areas as it is in Resourcing Churches and plants. Indeed, the latter might find it particularly hard to move from something that is fresh and new because that is so much part of their initial phase.
8. Related to this is **the short-term nature of the programmes**, which is cited by some as a further reason why outcomes are not fulfilled, or not yet fulfilled. It is argued that too much is asked too soon, whereas a longer period of support would ensure new models of Church become more established and instil the cultural change that is needed. In Mission Areas, getting churches to cooperate and united with a shared vision has been difficult in some cases. With Resourcing Churches it is not surprising that church plants can take much longer to get set up than was envisaged, and the development of buildings is more expensive and complicated than was expected. It is a view that the change the programmes are encouraging takes years to come to fruition, perhaps 10-15 years or more.

Long-term Sustainability and Replication

The comments and suggestions related to sustainability and replication are of a general nature and not all the points made will relate directly to every part of the programmes. Seven main areas are considered: ensuring ownership by everyone involved of the vision of the programmes, enabling that the learning has both depth and reach, being mindful of the need for a long-term view where possible, noting the implications of the financial aspect, having regard to the contexts which are variable and changing, continuing to value and support all the people involved and making sure outcomes are a useful device. Taken as a whole, these suggestions will help to inform the further development of the vision and strategy of *Transforming Church. Together* and the setting up of new Mission Areas.

Ownership

As with all successful initiatives the key to sustainability and culture change is ownership by all those involved. In these programmes this is tangibly expressed in measures such as AWA and giving, amongst others, but is also revealed in the experience and thoughts gathered through the interviews and focus groups that we arranged. The views of those at the local church level are particularly important because they are the embodiment of the vision. Notwithstanding the effects of Covid and the cost-of-living crisis, the indication across the programmes is that ownership is not fully shared at all levels, and thus remains an issue that needs to be addressed. Reduced AWA can be seen as inevitable consequence of greater demands made of people, a sifting out of the less committed, as some have suggested. A shrinking of the number of those giving, even if total giving has risen, is also a sign of a reduced core within the churches. A few of the comments made in the interviews and focus groups revealed a disconnect between the espoused vision of the programmes and the aspirations held by some of those involved. There were signs that the aims of the programmes were not fully understood, or there was a very limited focus on the local church, sometimes with a nostalgia for the former parochial life or historic methods of evangelism. We were told that some people in the churches, particularly those beyond the core, had little knowledge of or concern for the Mission Area as such. It should also be noted that the interviews and focus groups, because of their nature, largely involved the more enthusiastic members of the local churches and thus the view of those indifferent or even opposed to the programmes was harder to gather. It is important to expand the number of those committed to the programmes if they are to be sustainable. One way is to ensure an annual renewal of the covenants to remind people of the commitment to the vision, and how it has a relevance to the local church. Generally, ownership is more of an issue within Mission Areas than with Resourcing Churches, mainly because the latter by their very nature as new initiatives have tended to attract those who share the vision and have the energy to help bring it about. Perhaps new Mission Areas have to ensure that they can engender that kind of enthusiasm and sense of creativity through the depth and breadth of the programme.

Learning

Greater ownership is achieved through successful sharing of the vision and genuine cooperation and joint responsibility expressed at all levels. If the communication of this is more of a dialogue than just the sharing of information, the changes of wider ownership will be enhanced. The communication needs to be two-way so that the experiences of implementing and living out the programmes at the local level, both positive and negative, can be communicated and reflected upon. The learning aspect of the programme, which has been commended, is a vital part of this process, and it needs to be extended to include more people, not just church leaders or representatives. Perhaps to encourage wider involvement some of the learning could take place in the local areas, emphasising how context is crucial and the view of the people in the churches is essential, determining the sustainability of programmes. Even more enhancing would be the bringing together of people from very different churches within the programmes, who may not even be fully aware of each other's existence. For instance, imagine the learning outcome of an encounter between those from a small rural church and an urban church plant, and the debate and understanding this might engender. Only the diocese as the overarching body can facilitate such encounters.

Furthermore, within the learning aspect it is important to differentiate between the need to share good practice where good advice and ideas provide answers to practical problems, and the need to theologically reflect on the experience of people participating in the programmes. The extensive notes of the learning sessions reveal that much time is given to the former, which is very necessary, but less time is available for the latter. Learning is not just about finding out what works and what does not, but in a more fundamental way knowing why we do certain things and how these connect to the work of God. There was a session based on a biblical passage that raised some interesting and relevant thoughts and ideas about evangelism which arose from people's experience. There may be a resistance to theological reflection, or worst still a feeling that it is reserved for the clergy, but if properly facilitated it can be both relevant and enriching. For instance, in the debate about outcomes of the programmes there is an opportunity to reflect on whether God's desire is for faithfulness or success, or how the Kingdom is actually revealed in the local community. There was a wish to start to engage in such debates in some of the interviews and focus groups, but time prevented such questions to be fully explored. Delving into such important themes, informed by the experience of those involved in the programmes, could provide a valuable resource to share with the wider church in the diocese and beyond. It would certainly inform and undergird the development of Mission Areas. Maybe it requires someone to have the specific responsibility to ensure that theological reflection takes place and is disseminated.

Timescale

Several people referred to the timescale of the programmes and how outcomes were hard to fulfil in the five or so years provided. In addition, as has been noted, the Covid pandemic reduced this period by perhaps two years. If the aim is to bring about a culture change, then it is likely that a longer timescale is required. Some spoke of ten to fifteen years, others a generation, knowing churches can be slow to

change even in the face of an urgent crisis. Thus the programmes can only be seen as an initial phase that begins a process that has to affect all parts of the Church and lead to some fundamental changes of attitude and practice. Recognising that funding is often time limited the future strategy should provide for the extension of funding, and the more gradual withdrawal of support in order that elements of change can be rooted. For instance, if the reduction of funding for youth work occurs too quickly the range of valuable contacts and volunteer support is soon lost because the work has a fragile foundation, particularly where it is developing new work in areas where for years there has been very little. Also, the desire for programmes to become self-sustainable has to be realistic. We found that many people across the programmes thought that the goals in this area were unobtainable, but it tends to be an issue largely ignored until towards the end of a programme. If the aim is cultural change, which is both ambitious and fundamental, then a longer-term scale is necessary. It would be interesting to consider the possibilities and advantages of programmes set with a ten-year outlook.

Finance

One part of this review is to comment on the financial sustainability of the programmes beyond the funding period. It is noted that this is only possible with a degree of culture change in giving, which is unlikely to be achieved in the short period of five years or so, although we have observed a significant development. In one of the Mission Areas the financial outcome has been achieved, albeit at a later date than anticipated. However, generally the number of people giving has reduced even though the total of giving has increased. This is a worrying trend because both elements, the number of givers and the total, are important. The shrinkage of the financial base, the number of people pledged to support the local church, creates a risk of being dependent on fewer people. A crucial question to ask is why has the base reduced and has any work been done to ascertain why people have ceased to give? We raised the question in interviews and focus groups, but this tended to be addressed to people who were committed and therefore there was a degree of speculation. It may be an indication that ownership has not been taken up by people beyond the core, as noted above, or that the programmes have led to some people reassessing their commitment and deciding to reduce it. Although there were those within the core group who were content to see a smaller but more committed Church, this is not a general aspiration of the programmes. It would be useful to include as an outcome in new Mission Areas an aspiration not just for increased total giving, but also a larger number of givers.

Finance was a concern for several of the people we met, although more so amongst the church leaders rather than members of the churches. We were aware that some posts within the programmes had been made redundant, and others remain unfilled, because of funding and there is a perception by some that failure to meet a financial outcome leads to anxiety and uncertainty about the future. It would be helpful if possible to make explicit that job security is not dependent on financial outcomes, at least in the short-term.

Context

Related to the previous points is the observation that these programmes have all taken place in different contexts, varying from city-centre to suburban, new housing estate to rural village. All those involved recognise the importance of context, and most acknowledged the need to respond to changing contexts. However, when asked to describe their local community, members of focus groups often displayed a limited view of context, citing the personal struggles of people rather than a wider perspective that includes the features and characteristics of the area. The aspects of the local community, from individual to communal, need to be fully understood if mission is to be relevant and targeted. Some parts of the programmes had the aim of transforming the local community, though people were unable to say what this would mean or how it would be achieved, particularly in a short period of just five years. If a context is to be transformed, or even just significantly influenced, then it needs to be fully understood in all its diversity and complexity. Such information is provided through statistical data, local history and personal experiences. Also in many communities it is likely that there will be other agencies who share some of the same aims, and it was good to record where churches in the programmes were cooperating with local groups and organisations. However, this was not part of the strategy across the programmes. It was interesting to note that very few people interviewed or in the focus groups spoke about the work of non-Anglican churches in their area, and any sense of an ecumenical vision was almost entirely missing.

Furthermore, Mission Areas do not necessarily encompass a recognisable whole, and local churches may have been brought together despite or in conflict with the patterns of community cohesion or foci. Where churches in Mission Areas do not naturally relate to one another, either because of geography or socio-economic features, then the sustainability is harder to achieve. It is interesting to note that we found that church tradition did not prevent churches working together, and it was less important as a factor in joint working than characteristics of the local community. There has to be the capacity, which has been shown, for the programme geographical areas to be adjusted and redefined where necessary, most obviously but not uniquely in the areas of new housing. Similarly there needs to be some further consideration of how the programme churches as a group relate to the deanery, so as to avoid duplication. Though it is not necessarily the right path, there is the precedent elsewhere of the merging of mission areas and deaneries. A further point is that the wider context is not just the programme area, and that good relationships with other local churches who are not part of the programme are crucial. Inevitably there is some degree of disappointment that funding has been directed to certain churches and not others, and perhaps there is further work to do in reassuring everyone that the vision of the programmes is to benefit all churches in the wider area.

Personnel

An area which is at least as crucial as all the others is personnel. The risk factors rightly identify that getting the right people to lead and to be involved in the programmes and to remain committed to them is essential. Quite simply without the appropriate leadership and support roles these programmes cannot adequately function. Over the last five or so years there has been a degree of turn-over of staff and an inability to fill some appointments, both paid and voluntary. This has led to some reconsideration of some of the roles and who can fulfil them, which itself can be a positive development, for instance when an ordained role is reconfigured for a lay person. However, some of those interviewed clearly expressed how they felt a personal cost to being involved in this work, both to them and their families. This is due to a range of factors, such as the short-term nature of posts and the expectations raised by outcomes. There needs to be assurance where possible that positions have a longevity that enables the outcomes to be fulfilled, for instance in the case of youth workers. Furthermore, if there is an adjustment to the programmes and original plans cannot be carried through, those involved need to be affirmed, for instance in the case of planting curates. Most of all there needs to be a system of support outside the reporting of outcomes and programme management to ensure the well-being of those involved. Some of course already have access to such a system in an informal way, but it is important to ensure such support is available to all.

There is also scope for a discussion about the types of leadership style that have worked best in parts of the programmes. Much was said in the focus groups about how good leadership deeply affected what could be achieved, often expressed in terms such as 'servant leadership' and 'practical hands-on'. This can be seen as part of the culture change needed in successful programmes. People felt supported in their exploration of vocation, lay or ordained, and they could see others within the congregation on a similar path. This was particularly the case in the Resourcing Churches, whereas in Mission Areas the focus of the vocation outcome was on training curates. Sustainability will depend on the encouragement and building up of lay leadership, and this needs to be an important outcome for future Mission Areas.

Outcomes

For some the main element of the programmes was the outcomes, and where such measures have not been met there can be some anxiety and a sense of failure. If this is the case, there needs to be a reiteration of the purpose of outcomes, that they are not ends in themselves, but a means to understand how a programme is progressing. Besides this, there are six features of outcomes that, although already apparent in part, could be strengthened.

1. Outcomes, whether quantitative or qualitative, need to be **explained and justified**. Those asked to collect the data could be more fully consulted about which data is most useful and what will help with assessment, which might vary according to context or church tradition. Questions were asked by some in the interviews and focus groups why certain categories of outcomes had been chosen, and whether they were suitable for their church. For instance,

some were uncomfortable with an outcome linked to giving, and they needed to appreciate the relationship between giving and discipleship. They might argue that commitment can be equally expressed in other ways such as the giving of time. There may have been some growing unease about this particular outcome because of the cost-of-living crisis. Another instance is the outcome of small group participation, generally interpreted as involvement in a house group which is less common in some church traditions. To re-interpret this outcome as attendance at a mid-week Holy Communion, as some have done, raises certain questions, not least the possibility of double counting through the AWA statistic.

2. Outcomes need to be **clearly defined**. For instances, to what extent does AWA include online participants or what does constitute the transformation of the local community? These are just two measures where people in the programmes worked with different definitions, which makes comparisons difficult. Some outcomes might be considered too raw and therefore in need of an explanatory narrative. For instance, AWA in one month may be very different from another because of the composition of the congregation, but is there a straightforward way to show this?
3. Outcomes need to be **realistic**, recognising that church growth is not necessarily a straight upward trajectory from the beginning. A success profile is more likely to be shown in the arresting of decline in the early years, followed by stability and then actual growth in later years. If the programmes are predicated on culture change leading to sustainable growth over the long-term then there may be little to show apart from a few hopeful indications in the early years.
4. Outcomes need to be **adjustable** because of local and national factors. The main example of this is Covid, but it is impossible to know exactly what might be a factor in the future. The need to nuance outcomes has to be built into the system, recognising that to some extent it will be an inevitability, and thus recognised from the beginning. Outcomes cannot exactly predict how the Holy Spirit will work in any one community and thus adaptation through discernment will be a necessary part of the system.
5. Outcomes need to be **easily collected** through a system that is streamlined and less cumbersome, as gathering the data is not the principal aim of the programmes and should not be time consuming or an administrative burden. Maybe the outcome returns can be required less frequently or built into the collection of data required of all churches, which is already partly the case. It can be argued that as outcomes are a useful means to assessing growth and potential they might be applied to all churches in the diocese. That would probably be one way to ensure the system of collection was more streamlined.
6. Outcomes should **not be regarded as 'targets'**, although that word is used in the programme documents. Neither should they be used as part of performance review, which was a perception of some whether justified or not. It would be useful to re-emphasise how outcomes are 'faithfully expected' and part of the conversation with a 'critical friend'.

Conclusion

The Mission Areas and Resourcing Churches programmes that have been considered have a rich variety of experience and practice, from large to small churches, from the traditional to the new, and across a wide range of contexts in the diocese. They are an example of the mixed ecology that is necessary if the Church is to flourish and grow. The different programmes have been reviewed separately as they have distinctive features and approaches to mission. The main outcomes of all the programmes have been assessed in detail, through an examination of the data, records and documents, and an engagement with more than 90 people. Inevitably there are outcomes that have not been fully met, and the reasons for this are analysed. Covid was a significant factor but not the only one to make it harder to fulfil outcomes. From the assessment there emerge suggestions to how the new Mission Areas could be developed, as part of the strategy of *Transforming Church. Together* in the diocese. There is no doubt that the programmes have through the many examples and valuable experience generated an increased capacity of the diocese to deliver future growth.

We are sure all will agree that mission is the work of God in his world, expressed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that the Church will grow in many different communities and situations where we have the energy and commitment to love all people.