

Fresh expressions of Church in Bath and Wells Diocese

This research looks at fresh expressions of Church (fxC) in the Diocese of Bath and Wells from 1999 to 2017. It was sponsored by the diocese and Church Army. It builds upon a national picture from the work of Church Army's Research Unit, which formed part of the 2013 Church Growth Research Programme and, in 2016, the report *The Day of Small Things*.

By the end of August 2017 all of the 118 leads had been contacted by Church Army's Research Unit. Data from those fxC that qualified was gathered and analysed. We always include traditional church plants as one type of fxC, because their essential dynamics are the same; also, historically, that was the view taken by the seminal report *Mission-shaped Church* in 2004. Usually there was a phone call with the leader of the fxC, or with the incumbent if needed. As with all other dioceses, there are signs of encouragement and of vulnerability. At some points broad comparison is made with data from other similar dioceses. The diocesan leadership must decide how the information is shared, future policy is informed and what work and strategy follows.

Some headlines

Attendance figures: 1416 people

Growth ratios

Across the Bath and Wells set of 45 fxC, 436 people have been involved in beginning an fxC and the resultant attending figure is 1416. This is an overall net growth ratio of 2.2, meaning 2.2 new people for every one person sent out. This is below the average across other dioceses of 2.6.

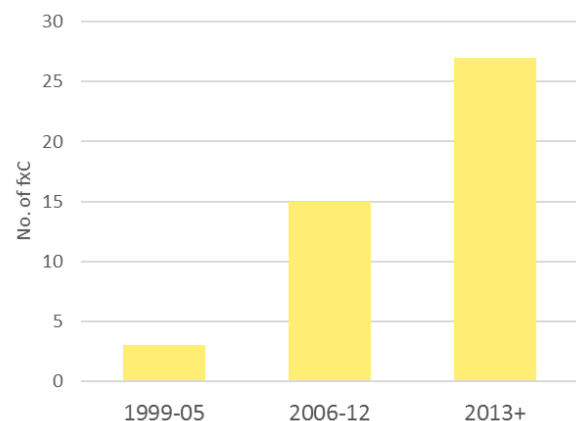
However, a significant proportion of this growth was new children, at a net growth ratio of 6.6, with the new adults alone at 1.4. Yet it continues to be true that starting fxC is an investment in people bringing a return seldom seen elsewhere in Anglican missional life.

A growing trend

Only 3 fxC were begun between 1999 and 2005. By contrast 15 fxC began between 2006 and 2012, and 27 started between 2013 to 2017.

This is a clear story of an increase of fxC beginning in each successive period. The figures also suggest that Bath and Wells, like other dioceses, is seeing growth in fxC greatly expand since *Mission-shaped Church* was published.

When were fxC started?



Some characteristics of Bath and Wells diocese

Background statistics derived from the 2015 Statistics for Mission - and our own comments - may be worth noting:

- A population density of 580 people per square mile is towards the more sparsely populated end of the spectrum, comparable to dioceses such as Gloucester, York and Norwich. This reflects the largely rural nature of the diocese.
- In 2015 just 14% of the diocesan worshipping community was aged 0-17, while 42% were aged 70 and over.
- During 2006-2015 its population increased by 5.3%, but its average weekly attendance (AWA) decreased by 14.4%.
- From this, the diocese appears to be declining in influence, particularly among younger generations. However, in this report there are signs of encouragement too.

What variety of types of fxC are there?

We listed 20 different types of fxC to select from; 17 were represented. There were no cluster-based churches, network churches or youth churches encountered. Because fxC often multiple classify themselves, the figures can be misleading. Some headlines are as follows:

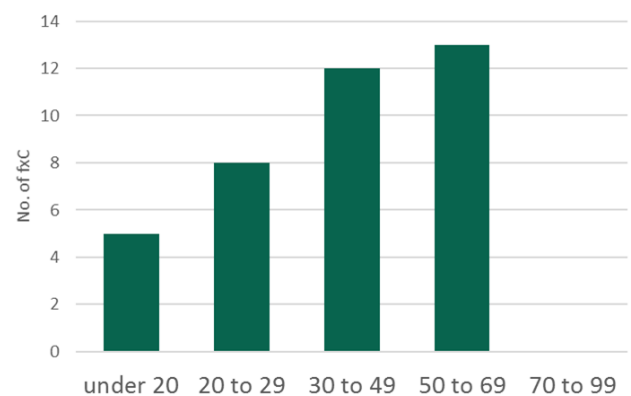
- The most common type of fxC present was all age worship. 42% of fxC (19/45) identified with this type.
- The next most common types were café church (with 29% or 13/45 fxC identifying) and Messy Church (with 24% or 11/45 fxC identifying).
- No other type has more than four examples (9% of the 45 fxC) that identify with its characteristics. 9 types of fxC were represented by only a single fxC.
- Across all dioceses, Messy Church is by some distance the most common type of fxC, so its third-place ranking in Bath and Wells is notable. This is by no means a bad thing, but the question of the role Messy Church plays or can play in the diocese may be one for further discussion.
- There were two traditional church plants in Bath and Wells, accounting for 4% of the 45 fxC. This compares to a national average of 12%, though this figure is somewhat distorted by the large number of church plants in London and Southwark dioceses.
- Children account for 38% of fxC attenders in Bath and Wells (533/1416 attenders). However, the overwhelming majority of fxC were aimed at all ages (89%), while the remaining 11% catered solely for adults. There were no fxC that were aimed exclusively at children. We hope this dispels any lingering myth that fxC are merely Sunday schools rebranded.

Patterns across the fxC

A few things stand out from the attendance log:

- There is some variation among the size of fxC. The mean size of the fxC is 38.8, which is very close to the mean of 40.2 for the other Bath and Wells diocesan churches. The median figure is 36.5. Of the 38 living fxC, 25 have an average attendance of 30-69 people. There are no fxC with a larger average attendance than this.
- The national average size for fxC thus far has been 50, so this overall figure is somewhat smaller than elsewhere.

Size of fxC



In regard to attendance over time, with 11 of the fxC we cannot comment, having less than three years' worth of attendance figures. Of the others, summed to 100%, 15% continue to grow in size, another 44% quickly plateaued and 3% grew but then plateaued. For 18% the numbers fluctuate, and 21% grew but later shrank. Compared with pictures from other dioceses, there could be concern that the continued growth proportion is below the average (28.2%) and the proportion that quickly plateaued in their first year is above the average (26.1%). The shrinkage is below the average of 23.9%.

We cannot be confident what factors make fxC expand, plateau or shrink. It might be prudent for the diocese to find out by conversation with individual cases. Our wider experience suggests the following factors can lead to a plateau: limited capacity of lay spare time leaders, no suitable larger public buildings to grow into, the lack of a relational fringe in a small congregation, reaching the natural unit size of either particular social groupings or a particular type of fresh expression of Church, and lack of vision or leadership resources to aid reproducing elsewhere. Our report on fxC from 21 dioceses, *The Day of Small Things*, published in November 2016, has investigated further.

Missional factors

Christians, de-churched or non-churched?

We asked the leader of each fxC what group (or a mixture) they intended to reach: Christians, de-churched or non-churched (the categories employed in *Mission-shaped Church*). Then we asked them to compare this intention with what happened. From 2014 onwards we asked the leaders to estimate the *percentage* of attendance across the three groups. As ever the responses contained both stories of surprises and disappointment, with some aspirations that were never met. Though these figures accurately represent calculations from what the leaders told us, there may well be a margin of error and optimism in their estimate.

Christian	De-churched	Non-churched
42.4%	16.5%	41.1%

If their impressions are close to reality then the Christians present are just over 2/5ths of the attenders, the same is true of the non-churched, while the de-churched account for a little under 1/5th of the overall number.

These figures compare to an average across all dioceses of 40% Christians, 27% de-churched and 33% non-churched. The non-churched percentage is among the highest we have encountered and a sign of encouragement. The Christian figure is slightly above average while the de-churched figure is the lowest we have encountered. Given that previous dioceses only included fxC started until the end of 2014, and that the majority of initiatives in Bath and Wells were started since 2013, it is possible that this low figure is indicative of a wider social trend: that the de-churched pool of people in the UK is shrinking. This is somewhat supported by a similarly lower than average figure of de-churched (21.3%) in Lichfield diocese, the only other diocese surveyed since *The Day of Small Things* report was published. While it would be hasty to draw conclusions from such a limited data set of two dioceses, given the decline in church attendance over the past decades one would assume that fewer people nationally would fit into this de-churched category over time. More national research would be needed to explore this area further.

Comparison of intention and what happened suggests an overall picture of fresh expressions of Church:

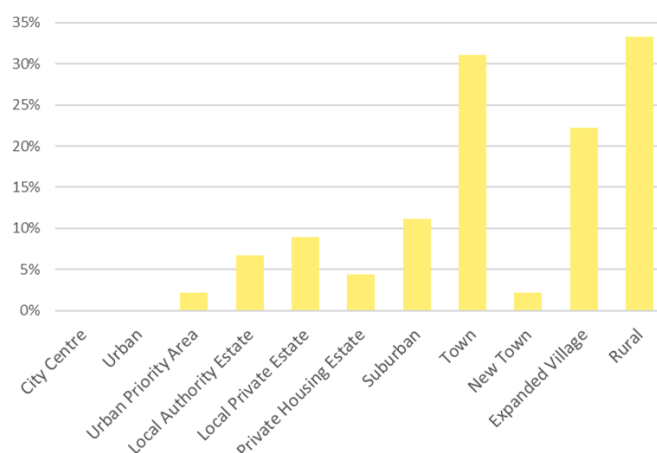
- Aiming low in respect of attracting Christians yet drawing two-and-a-half times as many as they aimed for, though the result is still a minority of the whole picture and this figure includes the team members.
- Attracting 30% less de-churched than they tried for.
- Attracting 20% less non-churched than they hoped for.

In summary, the data, here as elsewhere, continues to face down the myth that the impact of fresh expressions of Church is only to attract overwhelming numbers of existing Christians. We know from our overall research work in 21 dioceses that different types of fresh expressions of Church connect better with different parts of this spectrum. See *The Day of Small Things* section 6.4.

Types of social/geographical area

The leaders interviewed selected from 11 possible urban to rural options. Many cases chose more than one type, thus the totals do not sum to 100%. The spread was not evenly distributed, containing three larger proportions that may, across them, be typical of the diocese taken as a whole. 33% were in rural areas, 31% in towns and 22% in expanded villages. 11% designated themselves as suburban, 9% as mixed local authority and private estates and another 7% as local authority estates. Curiously, no examples met in city centres or urban areas and only one example met in an urban priority area. This will certainly be due in part to the rural nature of the diocese, and only the diocese will know if this spread represents what is on the ground. However, the spread across the diocese confirms that fxC can put down roots in a variety of contexts and are not merely an urban phenomenon.

Geographical areas of the fxC



We also asked how typical those who came were of the area or context served. Leaders thought in the case of 89% of the fxC the attenders were either mainly or totally typical, which is higher than the usual 80% overall. 2% attracted people from a wide diversity of ethnic backgrounds, 38% had a few ethnic backgrounds represented and 60% attracted people from one ethnic background. The responses may reflect the diversity of settings within the diocese. One background 2011 census figure is that Bath and Wells diocese is 93.6% White British.

Neighbourhoods or networks?

Part of the background to this question is the genesis and destination of the fxC begun. The vast majority of Bath and Wells' fxC started life from a sending parish, and 91% had their resultant meeting place within the parish. 98% (all but one fxC) were deemed 'runners', meaning there is active and ongoing mission support from the parish and normally no other parish is involved. The remaining example is a transplant, meaning a large sending team was taken to another area to plant an fxC. Some in the wider Church argue that parish structures and their boundaries are all that is needed and here they are clearly the majority option.

We also asked each fxC leader whether attendees came from a neighbourhood roughly coterminous with the parish, or out of wider relational networks. In 31% of the cases no one came from wider networks, in 40% of examples network played only a minor role, in 27% of cases network was found to be a major factor and in 2% of cases it was the only or overriding factor. Overall, network as the dominant or major factor was true in 29% of cases, which is somewhat lower than the 21 dioceses' average of 39%. It is, however, still evidence that network has a significant part to play in the life of the church. It is evidence that affirms both neighbourhood and network matter in the mission of a diocese. Reliance on geographical parish alone is a mistake.

FxC meeting beyond the parish boundary

This section should be read with the one above. Although the meeting place of 91% of the fxC stayed within the parish starting them, two further cases fell within the benefice, a further example was contained within the deanery and the final example fell within the diocese. None reached beyond the diocesan boundary. Depending on which way the benefice figure is counted, either 9% or 4.4% crossed some boundary to fulfil their mission calling. We think there are links between the need to cross boundaries and the dynamics of social networks.

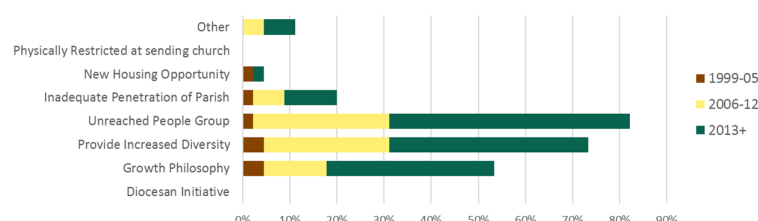
The pioneer-progression variable

Leaders were also asked to what extent they were responding to a context of church weakness or relative absence (pioneering), or alternatively were they building on its existing effective presence and strength (progression)? Various combinations between the two could be selected, thus figures do not sum to 100%, but the single largest group, 51%, felt they were entirely in a pioneering context. We suspect this is linked to the relatively high figure for non-churched attendees. It may relate to the dominance of the unreached people group and diversity motives. 80% of cases thought that what they embarked upon was at least mainly pioneering. However, 29% were at least mainly building upon existing presence or strength. It is good for the Church of England to be able to do both (9% of cases identified both pioneering and progression as major factors).

Motives for beginning fxC

Eight options were offered and combinations allowed. What is clear across the country, and here in Bath and Wells, is that it is less common now for initiatives to be a response to church buildings being full, or new housing areas being created. It is more likely to be due to *cultural* factors such as identifying a distinct people group as unreached.

Motives for beginning fxC

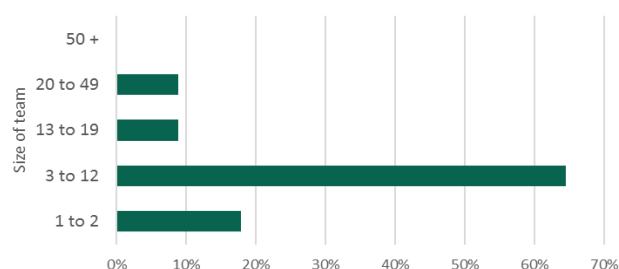


Bath and Wells is similar to dioceses across the country in that the two cultural factors of reaching an unreached people group (82% of cases) and providing increased diversity (73%) are the two most common motivations behind starting an fxC. A belief in a growth philosophy was a factor behind 53% of examples, while aiming to reach a part of the parish with little to no Christian presence influenced 20% of cases. 11% identified other motivations not listed among our eight options, 4% identified new housing opportunities while no fxC were started in response to a diocesan initiative or due to being physically restricted (i.e. full) at the sending church.

Team sizes

As elsewhere the majority of teams were small: taking 3-12 members was true in 64% of cases, similar to the 68% norm across all dioceses. 18% were started by 1 or 2 people, a little above the 12% norm. 9% were of 13-19 size, another 9% had 20-49 team members and none were 50+. These figures are of adults only. Sometimes children accompanied their parents on the team but these numbers are not used here.

Team sizes



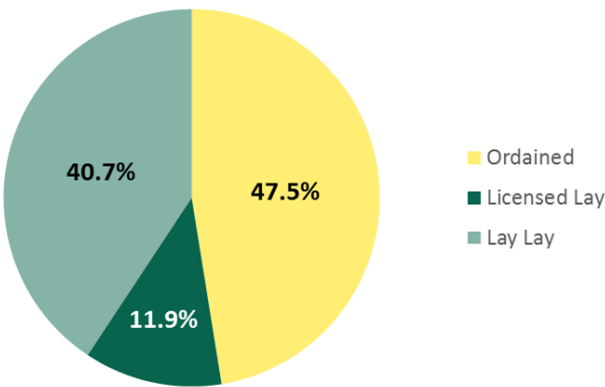
Two lessons may be inferred. A diocese with many smaller churches can begin many fxC, as only modest numbers are required for a start-up process. And the stereotype, based on stories in London diocese of a large team sent out from a larger church in order to begin a transplant, barely applies.

Ecclesial factors

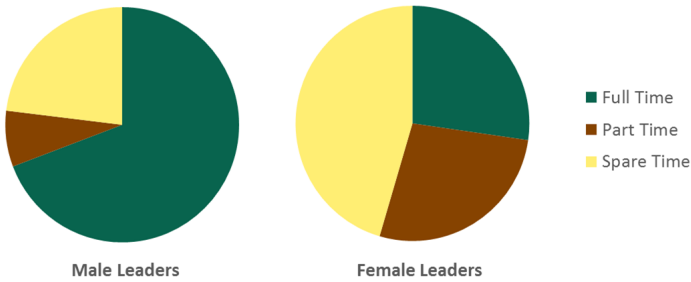
Leaders at fresh expressions of Church

Because the leadership in some cases has changed over time, 59 people have led the 45 fxC. 52.5% of them are lay and 47.5% ordained. The former includes 4 readers and 1 Church Army Evangelist. The lay national average is a bit lower at 48%. What is new, compared to twenty years ago, is the rise of the local lay person being the leader - here 41% - whom we have dubbed 'lay-lay', meaning without any ecclesial badge or often training. Bath and Wells has the 8th highest figure for these and is to be compared to the 36% average. Of the ordained, 23 are incumbents or priests-in-charge, 3 are various designations of assistant clergy and one is an Ordained Pioneer Minister.

Ecclesial status of the leader



44% of the leaders are males; 56% are females. This contrasts with the 21 dioceses' average in which 50.5% were male-led and 49.5% led by females. 46% are full time (not necessarily with all their time devoted to the fxC which is true of only a few), 19% are part time and 36% lead in their spare time. These figures show less full-timers, much the same part-timers and more spare-timers, than the averages. 46% are stipendiary, 15% locally paid and 39% operating in a voluntary capacity. These remuneration figures are almost identical to the national average. It is apparent nationally that the most frequent combinations are ordained men as stipendiary and full time, with lay women working voluntarily part and spare time. Bath and Wells fits this pattern.



Training taken

We asked how many leaders had been through any fxC training. One had been on the *mission shaped ministry* course, 5% had studied church planting and 14% had forms of training such as for Messy Church. None had received consultancy and 29% brought previous fxC experience. 49% had no training whatever, and with another 10% it was not known. Wider data we now possess suggests that taking some forms of training is better than taking none for seeing continued numerical growth in fxC, and by some measures aiding ecclesial maturity. Of these forms of training, consultancy is, by a narrow margin, the most effective.

Progress with discipleship

Leaders were asked if they mentored people 1-1, provided courses, ran groups or drew people into working teams. 12 of the 45 (27% of cases) did none of these, somewhat higher than the 20% average elsewhere.

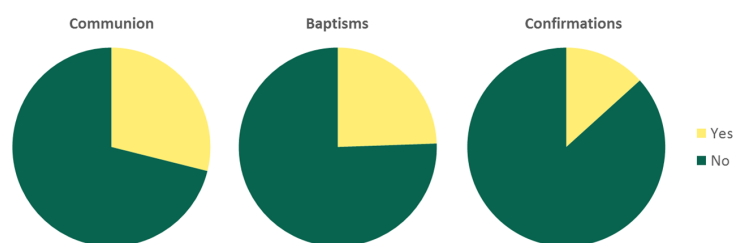
	Small groups	1 to 1	Running courses	Serving in teams
Bath & Wells	40.0%	51.1%	26.7%	33.3%
Average (21 dioceses)	48.0%	51.4%	34.6%	38.8%

It can be seen that the Bath and Wells fxC vary from the averages of three of these measures, being equal to the 1 to 1 average. Low figures for courses, small groups and serving in teams may be related to the large proportion of all age worship fxC and Messy Churches engaging with families with young children, but this should not become an excuse. Yet we do add that 27 of the extant 38 cases are at most 4 years old at the point of research. Here are some indicators that fresh expressions of Church in Bath and Wells diocese are not merely interested in attendance and most are trying to form disciples.

Use of the sacraments

Our team do not think this is the best and certainly not the only measure of being church. But being dominical, the sacraments rightly demand inclusion at some stage in the maturing of fresh expressions of Church. 28.9% of the 45 cases have had communion services, below the 42.8% average. Of these, 31% celebrated communion monthly, 15% quarterly and 46% annually, with another 8% even less often.

24.4% have held baptisms within the fxC, again lower than the 37% average elsewhere, while 13.3% held confirmations, compared to 27% nationally. It may be that these results again reflect the fact that 27 of the 45 fxC in the diocese were started from 2013 onwards.



Dioceses seem to vary considerably in this measure of the incidence of the two sacraments, most likely because of differing proportions of different types of fxC. What is common, here and elsewhere, is that most fxC lacking sacramental practice see themselves as 'not at that stage', rather than intending to resist that progression. This is true of 65% of the Bath and Wells fxC that are not yet celebrating communion, 71% of those not yet holding baptisms and 73% of those not yet seeing confirmations. 15% of fxC not celebrating communion don't see any need to do so; for baptisms, this figure is 17% and for confirmations 15%. A further 15% do not celebrate communion for practicality reasons; for baptisms, the figure stands at 11% and for confirmations 13%. The remaining 6% of fxC not celebrating communion are restricted by a lack of presider; this wasn't a factor for those not offering baptisms or confirmations.

Engagement with Scripture

We have ten dioceses with whom we have posed specific questions about the use of Scripture, thus comparisons can be made. The following table reveals Bath and Wells and the averages.

	Bath & Wells	Average (10 dioceses)
Sermon or talk	91%	79%
Passages read in public	71%	56%
Study in groups	38%	38%
Devotional reading	20%	33%
Memory verses	13%	18%
Storytelling	62%	61%
Creative activity/resource	73%	68%

As the table shows, these figures broadly compare favourably to the averages elsewhere, and it is certainly encouraging to see the young fxC in Bath and Wells engaging with Scripture in a variety of ways. A higher percentage of fxC in Bath and Wells have a sermon/talk and read passages in public than elsewhere, with slightly more engaging with creative Bible activities. Slightly fewer engage with devotional reading and memory verses than elsewhere.

Steps taken in evangelism

This was another new question in our second round of investigations and we have ten dioceses with whom we have posed specific evangelism questions. The table gives overall figures and those for Bath and Wells diocese.

	Bath & Wells	Average (10 dioceses)
Enquirers' course	20%	35%
Building relationships with others	84%	74%
Members share their stories	42%	44%
Invite to worship	82%	73%
Invite to events	49%	66%
Acts of service	27%	38%
Other	7%	11%
Not at this stage yet	2%	4%

As in all dioceses, the routes most used are building relationships, invitations to worship and (to a lesser extent) invitations to events. From the 21 dioceses, we have seen that there are links between choices in evangelism made and varying types of fxC. For example, traditional church plants tend to run enquirers' courses. In Bath and Wells, there are few church plants which may explain the low score. Conversely, it is certainly healthy that scores are so high for building relationships and invitations to worship, and that so few cases describe themselves as not at this stage.

Venues

50% of cases used an existing church, 16% used a church hall and 34% met in a secular venue. This could be interpreted in two ways: the significant majority of fxC meet on church-owned premises, but equally 50% meet at some distance, culturally or geographically, from the church building itself. These figures show a lower proportion of secular venues than elsewhere. All this may underline the need for a both/and – not an either/or – mentality about venue, and sensitivity about choices made in context.

Three-self identity

(financing, governing and reproducing)

We recorded the intention for, and presence of, some steps taken towards these goals as a measure of young churches taking responsibility for their life together. In Bath and Wells diocese 82% have taken steps towards financial responsibility and 80% have taken steps towards responsibility for governance decisions. 64% demonstrate the self-reproducing feature, with only 4% taking no steps.

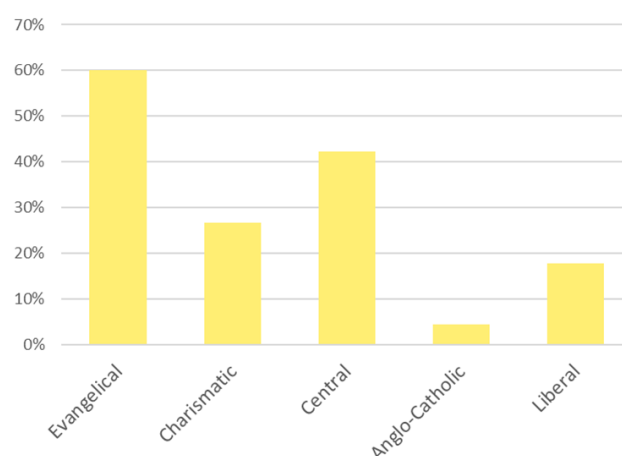
These figures compare very favourably with the average of steps elsewhere towards self-financing (56%), self-governing (70%) and self-reproducing (39%).

The cautionary note is that Bath and Wells is only the second diocese for which we have modified our questions and sought some detail to justify ticking each of these three boxes. At this stage we cannot know if this change contributes to more respondents realising they have begun elements of this journey towards ecclesial maturity. However, the Bath and Wells scores are comparable to the scores in Lichfield diocese (the first diocese in which we used revised questions) of 81%, 92% and 70% for the three selfs in turn.

The spread of Anglican traditions

Traditions within Anglicanism are often not held in neat distinction, but rather combined, so the figures do not make 100%. They are given for cases owning a tradition in part or a whole. Bath and Wells varies in part from the averages, scoring higher for liberal and lower for Anglo-Catholic.

Traditions identified with



Our comment is that all are represented to some degree. Beginning an fxC is not an exclusive evangelical or charismatic preserve, as some can assume. It is even less so here.

Ecumenical partnerships demonstrated

7 examples, or 16%, were undertaken in informal ecumenical co-operation, with a further one as part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP). 82% were Church of England only initiatives, marginally lower than elsewhere where the average has been 84%. As elsewhere, the Church of England is usually pressing on by itself in these local fxC ventures, although at the national level there is shared learning through the ecumenical Fresh Expressions team headed by the Archbishops' Missioner.

Wider considerations

The fxC contribution to the diocese

Our ten indicators towards what is a genuine fresh expression of Church excluded 61.9% (73) of the 118 cases examined, but 38.1% (or 45 examples) were included, of which 38 are still alive and functioning. There are various ways to assess their impact.

- If, as they should be, the fxC numbers were included in the 2015 diocesan AWA of 22600, then the 1416 attendance at fxC is 6.3% of the diocesan attenders. This is lower than the average across the 21 prior dioceses surveyed thus far, but nonetheless a considerable contribution. The first set of 11 dioceses averaged 9.3% and the first set 10.2%.
- In 2015 the diocese had 562 churches. If the 45 fxC are included in the number of churches (from the national returns this is uncertain) then the fxC are 8.0% of them. If only those fxC still extant are included this drops to 6.8%. This is below the 15% average from the first 21 dioceses, though the number of inherited churches in Bath and Wells is among the higher number across all dioceses.
- Another measure is that if the 1416 people attending were not included in the returns, this offsets some of the 14.4% of the decline in Bath and Wells AWA 2006-15. If they were included, then the decline elsewhere across the diocese is yet more serious.
- Some leaders asked us to note that, as with many parishes, the number of people they are actively linked to is far larger than the number attending any one meeting.
- Some assert that fresh expressions of Church are only peripheral to the life of the Church of England. By the measures above that looks harsh and implausible in Bath and Wells diocese.

When and how often do they meet?

The examples are spread across the week and a number meet on multiple days. There is a slight midweek preference for Tuesdays and Thursdays, but 64% meet on a Sunday. 36% could be classified as in the week, including the 6 on Saturday, less than the 49% average elsewhere. In general terms the range of choices may evidence a desire to fit with local cultural realities as well as facing social factors against meeting on Sunday, like sport and divided or extended families. However, the large proportion meeting on Sundays may suggest this is still the most contextually appropriate meeting day for church communities.

On the other hand, onerous work schedules and travelling may mitigate against the usefulness of starting midweek churches.

Only 24.4% of the fxC meet weekly. This is far lower than the average for 21 dioceses at 46%. It is linked to the high number of all age worship fxC and Messy Churches. These tend to meet monthly. The monthly figure is 71.1%. Monthly can be a splendid place to start but may be a weak end point. The sustainability of this pattern will probably depend upon the dynamics of pursuing forms of discipleship within or beyond the monthly meeting. Again, it may be worth reiterating how young the vast majority of fxC are in Bath and Wells. Meeting fortnightly is the least frequent choice at 4.4%. This might prove wise, as evidence from research figures put out in 2016 suggests fortnightly may be the most vulnerable frequency.

FxC mortality

7 out of the set of 45 have come to an end. In all cases their data has been included except for current attendance, unless they stopped in 2017. The average death rate elsewhere has been 12.1%, so this diocese at 15.5% is higher than that, though not drastically. A variety of causes are behind the fxC mortality, the most common of which is leaders moving on and not being replaced, which was true in 3 of the 7 cases. Other factors which are each behind the mortality of one fxC include returning to former church groups, decline in attendance, a new incumbent not being supportive and a group running its course and no longer being contextually appropriate. It should also be noted that one initiative hasn't died per se, but is now meeting quarterly; for the purposes of this work we classified this as died as it no longer meets our 10 criteria (see appendix).

Overall

Ways in which Bath and Wells fxC are fairly typical

- The considerable growth among children taken as part of the sending team to children attending now.
- A wide variety of different types of fxC are represented among the Bath and Wells fxC.
- The vast majority (89%) of all fxC are aimed at both adults and children.
- Existing Christians accounting for roughly 2/5^{ths} of fxC attenders (this includes the sending team).
- FxC reaching more Christians than aimed for and fewer de-churched and non-churched people.
- The vast majority of fxC are runners, supported by the sending church. However, the 98% figure is the highest we have encountered.
- Relatedly, the vast majority (91%) of fxC meet within the parish of the sending church.
- Cultural factors, specifically reaching an unreached people group and providing increased diversity, are the most common motives for starting fxC.
- Most fxC were started by a small team of people. 68% were started by 3-12 people (compared to 64% nationally), while a further 18% were started by 1 or 2 people.
- Roughly half of all fxC leaders are lay and half are clergy. Approximately 40% of leaders are lay-lay, slightly above the national average. Similarly, the male/female leader split is roughly half and half.
- Two-thirds of fxC meet in existing ecclesial venues, of which 50% meet in the church and 16% in church halls.
- Most fxC engage with evangelism in a number of ways. As is the case elsewhere, building relationships with others and inviting to worship are the most common ways of engagement.

Ways in which Bath and Wells fxC are unusual

- The relative youth (even compared to fxC in other dioceses) of the Bath and Wells fxC. This goes some way to explaining many of the ecclesial vulnerabilities of these young churches.
- All age worship fxC being the most commonly occurring type of fxC and Messy Churches only the third most common.
- The average size of fxC at 38.8 is somewhat lower than the national average of 50. It is also unusual that this average size is almost equal to the average size at inherited churches (40.2) in the diocese. These may both be indicative of the rural context the diocese serves.
- The very high proportion of fxC that quickly plateau in size (44%).
- The very low proportion of de-churched people (16.5%) attending fxC.
- A third of all fxC meet in rural areas and 22% meet in expanded villages. Bath and Wells is among the most rural dioceses we have encountered.
- Over 70% of fxC meet monthly, with only 25% meeting weekly.

Encouragements in the Bath and Wells set of fxC

- The high proportion (38%) of children attending fxC in the diocese. This is particularly encouraging given the low proportion (14%) of under 17s attending inherited churches in the diocese.
- The high proportion of non-churched people attending fxC in Bath and Wells (41% compared to a national average of 33%).
- 89% of fxC see attenders that are either totally or mainly typical of the context served (compared to 80% nationally).
- By a number of measures of engagement with Scripture, Bath and Wells fxC are above national average.
- A higher proportion of fxC engage with the three selfs than elsewhere (though this may in part be down to a rephrasing of the question in our questionnaire).

Signs of vulnerability in the Bath and Wells set of fxC

- The below average growth ratio of team sent to attendance at fxC now.
- The relatively low proportion (15%) of fxC that continue to grow over time. Though on the other hand, the proportion that grow then shrink is also lower than the national average.
- Half of all fxC leaders had received no training, and none had received consultancy from senior fxC figures.
- The Bath and Wells fxC are somewhat below the national average by 3 of the 4 measures of discipleship our team identifies.
- Fewer Bath and Wells fxC offer Holy Communion (29% compared to a national average of 43%) and baptism (24% to 37%) than the average elsewhere.
- Slightly more fxC have died than the national average.

Comments, method and future work

What was excluded and why

73 examples, with the agreement of the respondents, were not included. This was based on our pre-existing ten indicators for assessing all cases. These results underline that a significant lack of clarity exists in this diocese around what counts as a fresh expression of Church.

As elsewhere, those **excluded** are divided further into six categories.

[A] Arch 13	Steps towards, or onwards from, an fxC but not an fxC in itself
[I] Infrequent 3	Meeting less than monthly, but otherwise meeting the indicators
[N] Not fxC 52	This category contained a variety of other factors (see below)
[2] Duplicate 3	Double entries in the data set
[NY] Not Yet 0	Examples known to be planned, but not yet started
[X] eXcluded 1	Began prior to 1999

The 'arches' and those only meeting infrequently are well worth watching to see how they develop. Those we classified as [I] indicate limitations, not of ambition or vision, but of slender resources. These too merit support. Double entries can occur as initiatives change name over time or are composed of more than one element.

The [N] group is a catch-all for a mixture of categories. 11 were re-badged existing services, groups or events. 26 were outreach projects to bring newcomers to that local church. 3 turned out to be new events for Christians, 2 were infrequent events and 5 did not last at least two years. None were never Church of England.

The rebadging we are not much impressed by. The outreach projects are good in themselves and deserve praise for that, but they lack ecclesial identity and so cannot be called fresh expressions of Church. New events for Christians are legitimate, but they lack being missional and so do not qualify here.

Further comments

The data took five months to collect, three days to analyse, and the report a further three days to write. The time taken to gather data, averaging 40 minutes per interview, with a 100% response rate, leads us to assert that the data has an acceptable level of integrity. Limitations include the accuracy of perception of the leaders interviewed and only work with the attenders can test this. The simple scoring also brings in modesty about figures derived.

Church Army's Research Unit has completed this exercise now for 23 dioceses, using the same indicators of inclusion, process in collection and analysis. Hence substantive similarities and differences between a number of variables, including dioceses, have appeared. The report on 21 dioceses, *The Day of Small Things*, was made public in November 2016.

The hope is that now that fresh expressions of Church, including church plants, are being discovered and analysed, the Church of England will be able for the first time to have a more fully informed indication of the nature of their contribution to overall diocesan growth and decline and the part they play within the mission of God served by the mixed economy.

John Vivian
25th September 2017
Church Army's Research Unit

Produced by Church Army's Research Unit

tel: 0114 252 7279
e-mail: ask@churcharmy.org

Church Army is a Registered Charity Nos: 226226 and SC040457
Registered Office: Wilson Carlile Centre, 50 Cavendish St, Sheffield S3 7RZ

websites:
www.churcharmy.org/ResearchUnit
www.churcharmy.org/fxCresearch

Appendix

What is an Anglican fresh expression of Church? - Ten Criteria

The Church of England's research and statistics department use the following definition. A fresh expression is any venture that works mainly with non-churchgoers and aims to become church. A fresh expression is ...

1. Missional – it intends to work with non-churchgoers
2. Contextual – it seeks to fit the context
3. Formational – it aims to form disciples
4. Ecclesial – it intends to become church

Church Army's Research Unit have taken this further:

- 1 Is this a **new and further group**, which is **Christian and communal**, rather than an existing group modified, adapted or changed?
- 2 Has the starting group tried to **engage with non-church goers**? There was intention to create a fresh expression of Church (fxC), not to do an outreach project from an existing church. The aim was to help the Christians sent out to start the fxC to understand a culture and context and adapt to fit it, not make the local/indigenous people change and adapt to fit into an existing church context.
- 3 Does the community meet **at least once a month**?
- 4 Does it have a **name** that helps give it an identity? An active search, not yet yielding a name, is allowed.
- 5 Is there **intention to be Church**? This could be the intention from the start, or by a discovery on the way. This admits the embryonic fxD (fx of Developing community) and cases of fxE (fx of Evangelism) and even some fxW (fx of Worship). The key is that it is *not* seen as a bridge back to 'real church', but as Church in its own right.
- 6 Is it **Anglican** or an Ecumenical project which includes an **Anglican partner**? 'Anglican' here means the Bishop welcomes it as part of the diocesan family¹, not whether it only uses centrally authorised worship texts, or has a legal territory (parish).
- 7 Is there some form of **leadership** recognised by those within the community and also by those outside of it²?
- 8 Do at least the majority of members (who are part of the public gathering) see it as **their major expression** of being church?
- 9 Are there **aspirations for the four creedal 'marks' of church, or ecclesial relationships**: 'up/holy, in/one, out/apostolic, of/catholic'? We see the two dominical sacraments (communion and baptism) as a given consequence of the life of a missional community which follows Jesus, but not the sole or even best measure of being church.
- 10 Is there the **intention to become '3-self'** (self-financing, self-governing and self-reproducing)? These factors may look different in each local context, but are some marks of advancing ecclesial maturity. They are not to be interpreted as indicators of congregationalist independency, or breakaway tendencies, but of taking responsibility.

Application of the criteria:

Examples that do not meet criteria 1-7 are deemed to not be Anglican fresh expressions of Church. Factors in criteria 8-10 may be more like 'health' or developmental issues; their absence may indicate the need for further maturing, present weaknesses and/or dangers, but not necessarily exclusion. The presence of these factors is healthy and indicates maturing.

Variables in the criteria:

- We still consider examples that have since died, but lasted at least two years of life.
- Contextualisation of all criteria; thus no. 5 does not require public use of the word 'Church' where it was unhelpful in the context, but it does need an understanding that this is what is forming.

Church Army's Research Unit

¹ This instinct is early: cf Ignatius, 'but whatever he (the Bishop) approve, this is also pleasing to God'. Smyrna. VIII

² Jay argues from pre 3rd century texts that 'the possession of an ordered and recognised ministry is integral to the nature of the Church'. Eric G. Jay, *The Church its Changing Image through 20 Centuries*, Vol. 1 (London: SPCK, 1977), p. 49.