

Fresh expressions of Church in Lichfield Diocese

This research looks at fresh expressions of Church (fxC) in the Diocese of Lichfield from 1992 to 2015. 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 January 2017 all of the 209 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 kind of fxC, because their essential dynamics are the same. Also historically, that was the view taken by the seminal report *Mission-shaped Church*. 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: 3100 people

Growth ratios

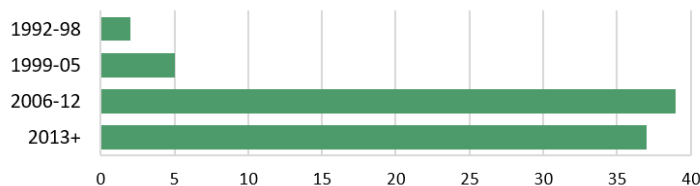
Across the Lichfield set of 83 fxC, 826 people have been involved in beginning an fxC and the resultant attending figure is 3100. Of these, 27 were residual people, as can occur with grafts and transplants. This is an overall net growth ratio of 2.7, meaning 2.7 new people for every one person sent out. This is encouraging, and just above the average of 2.6.

However, a significant proportion of this growth was new children, at a net growth ratio of 8.2 with the new adults alone at 1.6. 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 2 fxC were begun between 1992 and 1998. 5 began between 1999 and 2005. By contrast 39 fxC began between 2006 and 2012, and 35 started between the shorter period of 2013 to 2015. If the latter rate were continued that would be about 82 in the period from 2016 to 2019. We recorded another 2 begun in 2016, but comment that the data was taken only halfway through that year, and will be incomplete, hence titling the report 1992-2015.

When were fxC started?



This is a clear story of an increase of fxC beginning in each successive period. The figures also suggest that Lichfield, like other dioceses, is seeing growth in fxC greatly expand since *Mission-shaped Church* was published in 2004. Examining which fxC began in which year, from 2004 to 2009 there are between 1-4 examples started, it is in 2010 and 2011 that the number goes up to 7 per year, and from 2012 it is a dozen or more. 2015 then dips to 8 but might be incomplete.

Some characteristics of Lichfield diocese

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

- The population density is 1230 people per square mile. Lichfield is mid-range for English dioceses, reflecting its mixed rural and urban area
- During 2006-2015 its population increased by 6.5%, but its Average Weekly Attendance (AWA) decreased by 15.9%.
- 1.52% of the population attends a C of E church. This figure occurs within a range of 1.07% to 3.00%.
- From this, the diocese appears to be declining in influence, yet in this report there are signs of encouraging news too.



What variety of types of fxC are there?

We listed 20 different types of fxC to select from; 19 were represented. Unusually, there were no new traditional services. Because fxC often multiple classify themselves the figures can be misleading. Some headlines are as follows:

- 55% identify with Messy Church, compared with a 33% average.
- In addition, 12% were all age worship, 11% special interest groups and 10% café church.
- Of all other types there are only a handful or even a pair.
- The Messy Churches will have some bearing on the high child net growth ratio.
- The traditional church plant proportion of 5% is low and only 4 dioceses have a lower figure. It can be compared with a 12% national average, which is boosted by much higher figures in London and Southwark dioceses.
- 84% of all examples are deliberately for all ages and for families, not mainly for children.
- 13% are intended to draw only adults. The set of 'special interest group' fxC range widely in focus: for addicts, for young adults (4), for those with mental health issues, for asylum seekers and a forest church. Some of these may not to be suitable for young children.
- 2% focus on children alone (plus leaders)

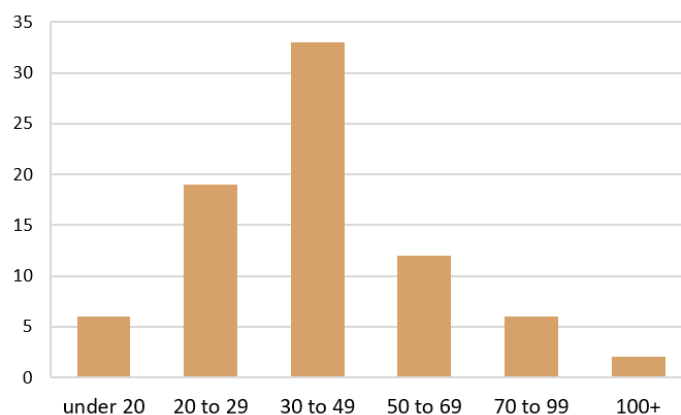
Once more data from this diocese shows that fxC are not narrowly niche-based but usually contain a variety of ages.

Patterns across the fxC

A few things stand out from the attendance log:

- The fxC are varied in size. The mean size of the fxC is 40.8, which is less than the mean of 56.8 for the other Lichfield diocesan churches. The median figure is 36. The most common size is 30-49 people. As elsewhere, the fxC are varied in size but overall smaller.
- The national average size for fxC thus far has been 50, so this overall figure is somewhat smaller than elsewhere.
- The range of sizes of the 78 fxC, still active and in the Church of England as of 2016, is from 110 to 9 people and across these 78 as follows: 2 are over 100, 6 are 70 to 99, 12 are 50 to 69, 33 are 30 to 49, 19 are 20 to 29, and 6 under 20.

Size of fxC



In regard to attendance over time, with 10 fxC we cannot comment, having less than three years' worth of attendance figures. Of the others, summed to 100%, 20.5% continue to grow in size, another 31.5% quickly plateaued and 16.4% grew but then plateaued. For 13.7% the numbers fluctuate, and 17.8% 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 (17.8%) 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
31.2%	21.3%	47.6%

If their impressions are close to reality then the Christians present are nearly one third of the attenders, the de-churched are about 1/5th of the overall number and the non-churched are on the way to half. This last figure is the 2nd highest we have seen and the proportion for Christians the 2nd lowest. Both are causes for missional encouragement.

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

- aiming low in respect of attracting Christians yet drawing towards four times as many than they aimed for, though the result is still a third minority of the whole picture and this figure includes the team members.
- attracting a few more de-churched than they tried for.
- a quarter less non-churched than they hoped for.

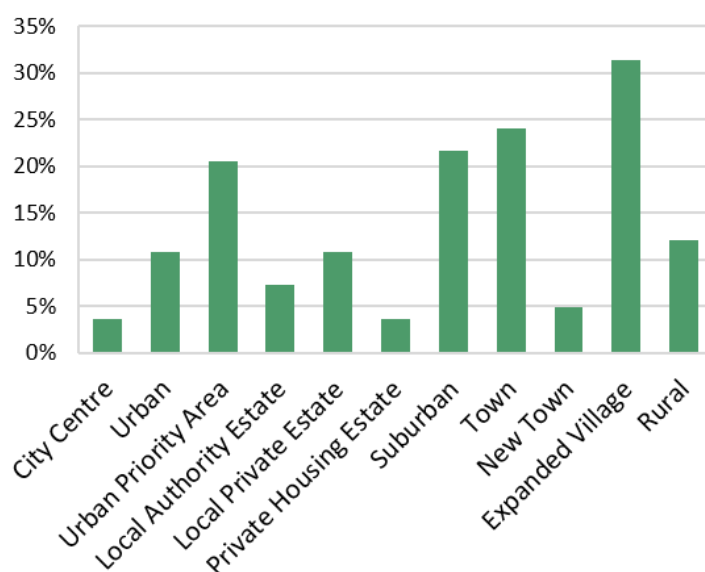
The difference between aim and result regarding the de-churched is commendably low compared to what we have seen elsewhere.

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/geographic 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 four larger proportions that across them may be typical of the diocese taken as a whole. 31% were in expanded villages, 24% in towns, 22% in the suburbs and 20% in urban priority areas. 12% designated themselves as rural, 11% as mixed local authority and private estate and another 11% as urban. Four serve new towns, and only three examples were deemed city centre. Only the diocese will know if this spread represents what is on the ground. However, the spread across the diocese confirms that the fxC can put down roots in all its contexts and are not shy of being in, and for, areas of poverty. Looking across the years, the proportion serving expanded villages continues to grow. It was 41% of the group of fxC from 2013 onwards.

Geographic areas of the fxC



We also asked how typical those who came were of the area or context served. Leaders thought 86% of attenders were either mainly or totally typical, which is higher than the usual 80% overall. 4% attracted people from a wide diversity of ethnic backgrounds, 49% had a few ethnic backgrounds represented and 47% attracted people from one ethnic background. The responses may reflect the diversity of settings within the diocese. One background 2011 census figure is that Lichfield diocese is 85.1% 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 Lichfield's fxC started life from a sending parish, and 88% had their resultant meeting place within the parish. 90% were deemed 'runners', meaning there is active and ongoing mission support from the parish and normally no other parish is involved. 6 examples (7%) are 'seeds', in which it is diagnostic that the founders move house and/or area to begin the work. 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. 43% of the cases *intended* that no one would come from wider networks, but that turned out to be true in only 31% of cases. Where another 31% expected network to play only a minor role, they were accurate as 29% found that it did. But 20% expected it to be the major factor and 33% found that it was. 5% expected it to be the only or overriding feature and yet 7% found it was. Thus overall where network dynamics were strongly expected, that was exceeded, and where it was not expected, in practice the effect of networks was larger than anticipated.

Overall, network as the dominant or major factor was true in 40% of cases, very close to the 21 dioceses average of 39%. It is all part of steady evidence that network has a minor but significant part to play. It is evidence that affirms both neighbourhood and network matter in the mission of a diocese. Reliance on geographical parish alone is a mistake.

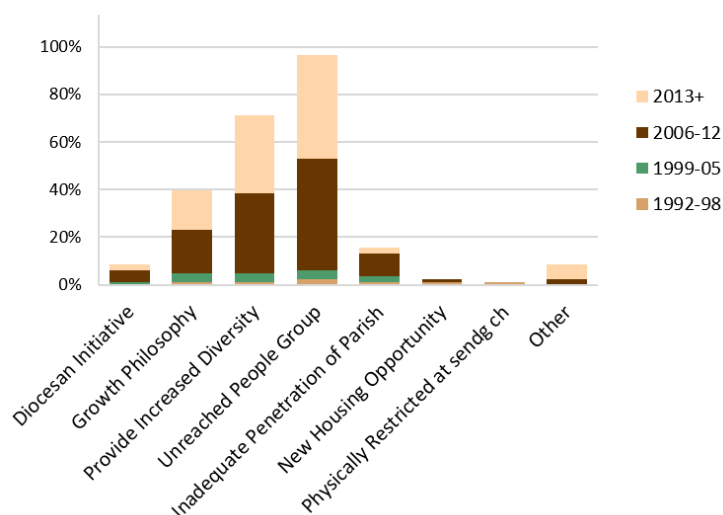
FxC meeting beyond the parish boundary

This section should be read with the one above. Although the meeting place of 88% of the fxC stayed within the parish starting them, one further case fell within the benefice; 5% were contained within the deanery, and 5% within the diocese. One reached beyond the diocesan boundary. Depending on which way the benefice figure is counted, either 12% or 10% 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.

Motives for beginning fxC

Eight options were offered and combinations allowed. What is clear across the country, and here in Lichfield, is that it is less common now for initiatives to be a response to church buildings being full, or new housing areas being created, or finding an *area* of a parish without easy access to a church. It is more likely to be due to *cultural* factors such as identifying a distinct people group as unreached.

Motives for beginning fxC



We can comment on the Lichfield proportions of the motives and also on trends over time. Across the period 1992-2016 unreached people group is the highest motive at 96%, and it has remained the leading motive throughout the entire period. Here it is followed by the desire to provide increased diversity of ways of being church at 71%. Growth philosophy comes in overall at 40%. Spotting an unreached area of the parish was true in 16% of cases. Only 1% of cases were a response to an already full church, and another 2% a response to new housing. Thus the cultural considerations – providing diversity and spotting an unreached people group – are dominant. The initiative from the diocese at 8% is limited to cases needing to cross a parish boundary or operate in areas of new housing.



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, 59%, felt they were entirely in a pioneering context. We suspect this then is linked to the high figure for non-churched attenders. This may relate to the dominance of the unreached people group and diversity motives. 78% of cases thought that what they embarked upon was at least mainly pioneering. However, 22% were at least mainly building upon existing presence or strength. It is good for the Church of England to be able to do both.

What support did they have?

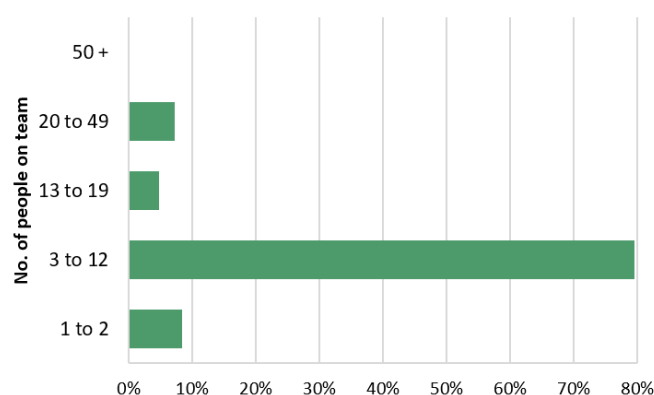
90% of cases were 'runners', meaning that support came from the sending parish, which links to the percentage of cases whose meeting place was still within its boundaries or that of the benefice. However, in 6 cases (7%) the leaders had relocated, moving house to some distance away and thus starting from scratch – the so-called 'seed' dynamic. Lichfield is similar to most other dioceses surveyed in there being only a few grafts and transplants. Here it has been one of each.

Team sizes

As elsewhere the majority of teams were small: taking 3-12 members was true in 80% of cases, which is rather above the 68% norm. 8% were 1 or 2 people, a bit below the 12% norm. Another 5% were of 13-19 size. 7% 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 the large team sent out from a larger church in order to begin a transplant, barely applies.

The Messy Church effect in Lichfield

Lichfield has an unusually high percentage of Messy Churches (55% compared to the 32% average). All but one of these are fully Messy Church; this one example just draws on some of its instincts. It is a good question how they affect the overall results. A statistical study of Messy Church (MES) as a type compared with other types is to be found within *The Day of Small Things* chapter 6. Here we post a few figures to show how they affect the other statistics given.

The presence of under 16s whom we assume will be mainly children

The overall percentage of under 16s in the Lichfield fxC is 42%; without the Messy Churches it is 32%. The under 16s' net growth ratio overall is 8.2, but without the MES it is 4.7. Both act to show the MES are doing a major work in attracting under 16s.

Growth and motive patterns

The fxC taken together show a 'continue to grow' figure of 20.5%; without the MES it is 12%. Across the whole set of fxC, 18% have grown and then shrunk; without the MES it is 30%. Clearly the MES are at this stage more vigorous. The MES are also more likely to start because of the motive to provide diversity of ways of being church. And they are more likely to remain within the parish.

Frequency of meeting

	Monthly	Fortnightly	Weekly
The whole fxC set	64%	11%	25%
Without the MES	32%	18%	50%

The overwhelming tendency for MES to meet monthly clearly affects the overall picture.

Who comes to the fxC

The MES attract more non-churched people; the other types of fxC attract more de-churched, but also have more Christians.

	Christian	De-Churched	Non-Churched
The whole fxC set	31%	21%	48%
Without the MES	35%	28%	42%

The scores for typicality and for ethnicity vary little between the two sets of data. But the MES are a bit more represented in the expanded villages and less so in the tougher urban areas and estates.

Some ecclesial patterns

Over Bible reading, the statistics reinforce that MES favour the creative approaches. Over discipleship, they are less likely to have small groups or run courses, but score high on 1-1 meeting. Equally their sacramental practice is less developed and with lower frequency figures. However, their three-self scores are only a few percentage points behind the rest. As to the spread of traditions, the other types of fxC are more favoured by those identifying as either evangelical or charismatic. The ecumenical feature is barely affected.

Leadership patterns

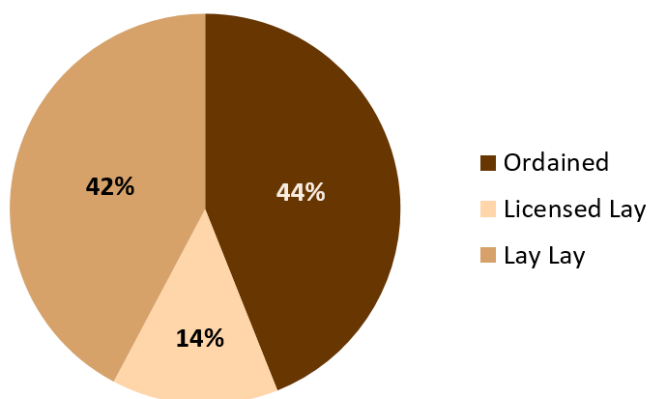
The MES have fewer full time stipendiaries and more spare time voluntary leaders. They reverse the prior gender balance with having more females, and more leaders are lay.

Ecclesial factors

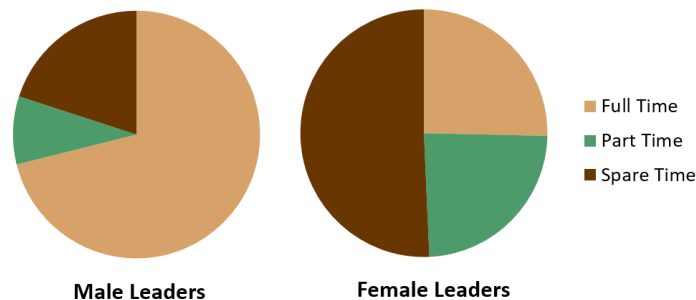
Leaders at fresh expressions of Church

Because the leadership has changed over time, 116 people have led. 56% of them are lay and 44% ordained. The former includes 2 Readers, 1 Church Army Evangelist and 7 authorised or licensed lay workers. 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 42%, whom we have dubbed 'lay-lay', meaning without any ecclesial badge or often training. Lichfield has the 6th highest figure for these and is to be compared to the 36% average. Of the ordained, 25 are incumbents or priests-in-charge and 26 are various designations of assistant clergy, including 4 Ordained Pioneer Ministers (over the average figure) and 3 Ordained Local Ministers.

Ecclesial status of the leader



39% of the leaders are males; 61% are females. This contrasts with the 21 dioceses' average in which 50.5% were male-led and 49.5% by females. 43% are full time (not necessarily with all their time devoted to the fxC which is true of only a few), 18% are part time and 39% lead in their spare time. These figures show less full-timers, much the same part-timers and more spare-timers, than the averages. 40% are stipendiary, 16% locally paid and 44% operating in a voluntary capacity. These are within 5 percentage points of the averages. 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. Lichfield fits this pattern.



Training taken

We asked how many leaders had been through any fxC training. 7% had been on the *mission shaped ministry* course, 5% had studied planting and 21% had forms of training such as for Messy Church. 13% had received consultancy which is one of the higher rates across the dioceses, and 21% brought previous planting experience. 37% had no training whatever, and with another 9% it was not known. Wider data we now possess suggests that taking some forms of training are a bit 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. 11 of the 83 (13%) of cases did none of these, significantly lower than the 20% average elsewhere.

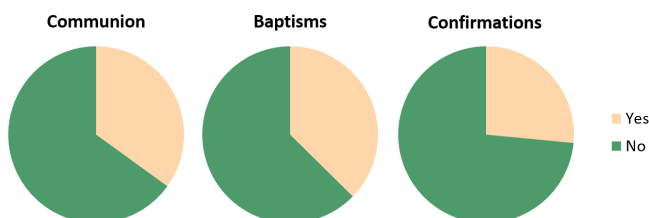
	Small groups	1 to 1	Running courses	Serving in teams
Lichfield	33.7%	62.7%	24.1%	38.6%
Average (21 dioceses)	48.0%	51.4%	34.6%	38.8%

It can be seen that the Lichfield fxC vary from the averages of three of these measures. Low figures for course and small groups, and high for 1-1 is, we suspect, related to the large proportion of Messy Churches engaging with families with young children, but this should not become an excuse. Yet we do add that 50 of the extant 76 cases are at most 4 years old at the point of research. Here are some indicators that fresh expressions of Church in Lichfield 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. 34.9% of the 83 cases have had communion services, below the 42.8% average. Of these 14%, held communion weekly, 24% monthly, 17% quarterly and 28% annually, with another 17% even less often.

37.3% have held baptisms within the fxC, reflecting the 37% average elsewhere. 26.5% held confirmations, very close to 27% nationally. It may be that these results again reflect the high proportion of children at the fxC of this diocese.



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 78% of the Lichfield fxC not yet celebrating communion, 81% of those not yet holding baptisms and 82% of those not yet seeing confirmations. The score of 19% for 'see no need' about communion and 15% baptisms is a little higher than elsewhere. The latter may indicate that widespread infant baptism is still operating in the diocese.

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 Lichfield and the averages.

	Lichfield	Average (10 dioceses)
Sermon or talk	80%	79%
Passages read in public	41%	56%
Study in groups	23%	38%
Devotional reading	18%	33%
Memory verses	27%	18%
Storytelling	71%	61%
Creative activity/resource	88%	68%

Some scores are similar. In both, about 4/5^{ths} of the fxC have some form of talk. It is never the case that the Bible is not engaged with in some way. Approaching half of the cases have passages read in public. In all dioceses that have many Messy Churches, the proportion encouraging personal devotional reading, or study in groups is low, while the use of storytelling and creative activity is high. Here memory verses seem more popular than usual.

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 Lichfield diocese.

	Lichfield	Average (10 dioceses)
Enquirers' course	21%	35%
Building relationships with others	83%	74%
Members share their stories	28%	44%
Invite to worship	77%	73%
Invite to events	43%	66%
Acts of service	30%	38%
Other	13%	11%
Not at this stage yet	4%	4%



As in all dioceses, the routes most used are building relationships, and invitations to worship and 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 Lichfield, there are few church plants but unusually these score low for providing enquirers' courses anyway. Conversely, it is fairly healthy that scores are so high for building relationships and invitations to worship, and that so few cases describe themselves as not as this stage.

Venues

55.4% of cases used an existing church, 21.8% used a church hall and 22.8% a secular venue. This could be interpreted in two ways: the significant majority of fxC meet on church-owned premises, but equally 45% 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.

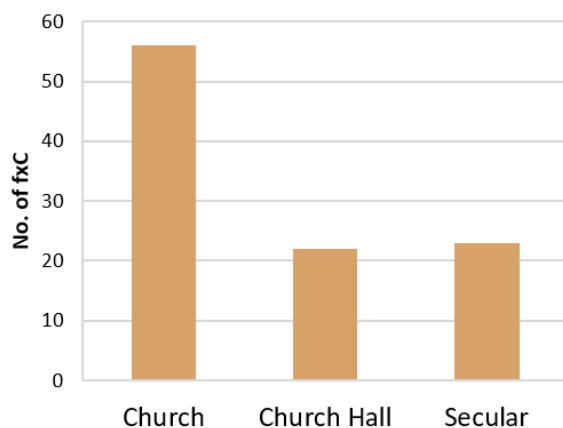
Three-self identity (financing, governing and reproducing)

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 Lichfield diocese 81% have taken steps towards financial responsibility and 92% towards responsibility for governance decisions. 70% 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 Lichfield is the first 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.

Venues used by fxC



Wider considerations

The fxC contribution to the diocese

Our ten indicators towards what is a genuine fresh expression of Church excluded 60.3% (126) of the cases examined, but 39.7% (or 83 examples) were included, of which 76 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 32,200, then the 3100 attendance at fxC is 9.6% of the diocesan attenders. This is around the average across the 21 prior dioceses surveyed thus far. The first set of 11 dioceses averaged 9.3% and the first set 10.2%.
- In 2015 the diocese had 567 churches. If the 83 fxC are included in the number of churches (from the national returns this is uncertain) then the fxC are 14.6% of them. If only those fxC still extant are included this drops to 13.4%. In other words, between 1/7th and 1/8th of the ecclesial bodies in the diocesan family are current, or recent, fresh expressions of Church, which is only a little below the 15% average from the 21 dioceses.
- Another measure is that if the 3100 people attending were not included in the returns, this offsets over half of the decline in Lichfield's 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 Lichfield diocese.

When and how often do they meet?

The examples are spread across the week and a number meet on multiple days, with a midweek preference for Wednesdays and Thursdays, but 41 meet on a Sunday. 51% could be classified as in the week, including the 11 on Saturday, close to 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.

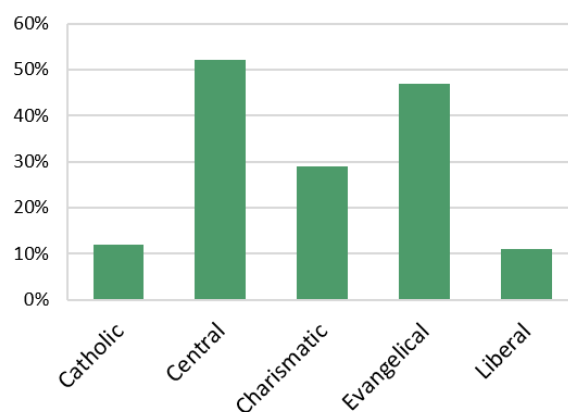
On the other hand, onerous work schedules and travelling may mitigate against the usefulness of starting midweek churches.

Only 25.3% of the fxC meet weekly. This is far lower than the average for 21 dioceses at 46%. It is linked to the high number (46) of Messy Churches. These tend to meet monthly. The monthly figure is 63.9%. 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. Meeting fortnightly is the least frequent choice at 10.8%, as elsewhere. This might prove wise, as evidence from research figures put out in 2016 suggests fortnightly may be the most vulnerable frequency.

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. Lichfield varies in part from the averages, scoring higher for central and lower for evangelical.

Traditions fxC identify 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

10 examples, or 12%, were undertaken in informal ecumenical co-operation, with two as part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP). 86% were Church of England only initiatives, marginally higher 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 Archbishop's missionary.

FxC mortality

5 out of the set of 83 have come to an end. In all cases their data has been included except for current attendance, unless they stopped in 2016. The average death rate elsewhere has been 12.1%, so this diocese at 6% is half that. The causes mainly seem to cluster around two factors. In 3 out of 5 cases there was lack of leadership resource, either when the founder moved on or the existing team tired. The other 2 were more about the context. In one there ceased being children of the target age in the village, and in the other the level of deprivation and pastoral need proved unsustainable for the team involved.

Two other cases moved out of primary involvement within the Church of England.

A few factors and variations by episcopal area

It would take much more work to analyse the three episcopal areas as fully as been done for the whole diocese. However, there are a few factors that were fairly easily accessible.

		Shrewsbury	Stafford	Wolverhampton
	Number of alleged fxC	63	63	81
Excluded	Arch (a step towards being an fxC)	6 (4 MES)	14 (8 MES)	15 (7 MES)
	Infrequent (meeting less than monthly)	9	1	3
	Duplicate record	2	4	5
	Not an fxC	16 (3 MES)	21 (13 MES)	28 (15 MES)
	Proportion of alleged fxC that were excluded	52%	64%	63%
Included	Number of 'genuine' fxC (according to indicators)	26	21	29
	Proportion of alleged fxC that were included	41.3%	33.3%	35.8%
	Proportion of fxC that were Messy Churches	46%	66%	65.5%

Interpretation

Each of the three areas had around 15 examples (see the 2nd and 3rd rows) which are worth encouraging for their future development. The working list supplied to the mission team identifies which these are.

For some reason the proportion of Messy Churches is least dominant in the Shrewsbury area. It also has the lowest percentage of exclusions.

For this table to have a meaningful context the diocese might wish to add three further rows or factors, if they are known: firstly, the population numbers living in these three episcopal areas; secondly, the number of parishes; and thirdly the AWA in the three areas – all of which together would then give some further indication of whether the fxC are occurring proportionally to population and perhaps need.

Overall

Ways in which the Lichfield fxC are fairly typical

- The 2.7 net growth ratio
- 14.6% of diocesan churches are fxC and these account for 9.6% of AWA (not adjusted for frequency)
- 84% of fxC serve all ages
- 86% of the fxC leaders felt the newcomers were broadly characteristic of the context
- The fxC are on average smaller than the diocesan average of parish congregations
- Network and neighbourhood both have parts to play
- The vast majority of fxC remain within the sending parish/benefice
- The proportion choosing to meet in the church is 55%
- All examples make use of Scripture and only a few do not engage with evangelism
- Most common team size is 3-12 people
- Few grafts and transplants

Ways in which Lichfield and its fxC are unusual

- The high proportion (55%) of Messy Churches
- The low numbers of church plants
- Smaller than average fxC size (40.8) compared with 50.1 as the average number of people
- The relatively low evangelical proportion (47%) compared with the average (64%), and high central figure (52%) compared with the average (39%)

Encouragements in the Lichfield set of fxC

- The range of areas, rich and poor, served by fxC that reflect the variety in the diocese
- The contribution to diocesan attendance from 3100 fxC attenders, which should be set against the recent diocesan AWA decline (2006-15)
- A clear story of many more fxC starting, notably since 2010
- The high proportion (48%) of non-church attenders, in the leaders' opinion – linked in part to the high proportion of Messy Churches
- The prevalence of the cultural motives to begin an fxC – revealing an awareness beyond past parochial/territorial assumptions

- A high proportion risking the dynamics of pioneering
- High scores for taking responsibility when measured using the three-self categories
- The low % of fxC that have not taken at least one step to promote discipleship
- A higher than average (36.6%) proportion of 'lay-lay' leaders (42.2%)
- The low mortality rate (6%) of the fxC as a whole compared to the average (11%)

Signs of vulnerability in the Lichfield set of fxC

- 62% are on some kind of plateau – the average elsewhere is 48%
- A lower percentage (20.5%) than average (28.2%) that continue to grow
- A low take-up for communion (35%) compared with an average of 43% elsewhere; the baptism and confirmation take-up is on a par with elsewhere
- 60% of cases excluded reveals a depth of confusion around the term fresh expression of Church; this hinders clarity, expectations and sustainability
- The mortality cases in which leadership succession was an issue

One way to interpret this page is that Lichfield diocese can now recognise it has 76 young churches in its family. They now need praising for what has been achieved and nurturing to address existing frailties and vulnerabilities.

Comments, method and future work

What was excluded and why

126 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	36	Steps towards, or onwards from, an fxC but not an fxC in itself
[I] Infrequent	13	Meeting less than monthly, but otherwise meeting the indicators
[N] Not fxC	66	This category contained a variety of other factors (see below)
[2] Duplicate	11	Double entries in the data set
[NY] Not Yet	0	Examples known to be planned, but not yet started
[X] eXcluded	0	Began prior to 1992

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 caused by 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. 6 were re-badged existing services, groups or events. 43 were outreach projects to bring newcomers to that local church. 7 turned out to be new events for Christians, 5 were infrequent events and 3 did not last at least two years. None were never Church of England, and 1 either never started or no information could be found about it.

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 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 99.5% 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 22 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.

Canon Dr George Lings
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Church Army's Research Unit

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We are a research team based at the Wilson Carlile Centre whose role is to discover, develop and communicate our findings in evangelism and mission to Church Army and the wider Church.

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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.