

## **Executive summary from *The Day of Small Things***

Between January 2012 and May 2016 over 2700 cases, supplied from 21 dioceses, were examined. Records were taken of 1109 examples, started between 1992 and 2014, that met the indicators set for what counts as a fresh expression of Church (fxC). The data came from interviewing the leaders. The dioceses were chosen to reflect variety in relation to context, to geographical spread and different stances towards the fresh expressions of Church phenomenon. Covering half of the Church of England, including the capital, infers they are reasonably representative.

### **Their impact upon diocesan and national Church life**

- On average the 1109 fxC studied make up 15% of a diocese's church communities.
- Over 50,600 are attending, or 9.8% of overall diocese AWA figures, but this should be reduced to 6% to adjust for lesser frequency of meeting. See sections 5.1 and 5.2.
- This attendance of 50,600 is the equivalent to the numbers in two average sized dioceses.
- Their average size, at about 50, is usually smaller than the average for parish church congregations. Hence the percentage of churches figure is higher than that for attendance.
- Today four times as many per year are being started as compared to 2004 and the report *Mission-shaped Church*. Three quarters of them have begun in the last ten years.
- Evidence suggests that for every one person sent out to be part of beginning a fresh expression of Church, now there are more than two-and-a-half more people.
- Nothing else, as a whole, in the Church of England has this level of missional impact and the adding of further ecclesial communities, thereby fuelling ecclesial re-imagination.
- Over ¾ of the fxC remain within the parish that started them. Some types of fxC are designed to go further afield. Within this transplants and grafts are valid, but even together then only make up 6.4% of the overall picture.
- 84% are from the Church of England only and very few are formal LEPs.

### **The leaders' opinions of who comes**

- Setting aside flawed figures from the first report of 2013, more accurate figures from the second round of dioceses give the leaders' views that the fxC are made up of 40% Christians, 27% de-churched and 33% non-churched.
- These figures were partly lowered because the 2<sup>nd</sup> tranche contained more church plants, which attract less non-churched people and have a higher percentage of Christians.
- Our further report *Who's There?* surveying the complex reality of the attenders' backgrounds, yields far more modest figures: 20% for the de-churched and 21% for the non-churched.
- In 39% of cases networks were the major or total factor in how people came, not because it was their parish or local church, yet 80% were totally or mainly typical of the background area or context.
- The fxC do twice as well as parish churches (38% to less than 19%) in attracting under 16s, which is promising for the future, yet the majority of fxC attenders (62%) are adults.

### **Those who lead them**

- This report confirms the finding of 2013 that the so-called lay-lay make up over 36% of all leaders of fxC and three times the number of other lay leaders.
- Chapter 10 shows that on most counts, the lay-lay leaders do as well as the rest.
- The proportions of ordained and lay leaders are about equal, varying considerably by type of fxC, which also affects which gender predominates for some types of fxC.
- The fxC are nearly as likely to be led by women as men. The most common stereotypes are ordained men, working full time and paid, and lay women, in their spare time, voluntarily.
- The contribution of the ordained pioneer ministers is only 2.7% of the picture. This is a lower than expected proportion of their overall numbers. Section 10.3 explores this.

## **This is a world of young, varied and small church communities**

- There are at least 20 different recognisable types of fxC. The 14 more common types are analysed and characterised in Chapter 6.
- The four most common types (in order) are: Messy Church, café church, child-focused church and church plants.
- Most types are relatively small, of around 35-55 in size, with three larger congregational fxC types with 70-100+ people.
- The classic team size sent to begin them is 3-12 adults. Large teams make up less than 11% of the overall picture, a figure inflated by London diocese having 41% of these.
- In this, and other ways, London and its fxC are shown (section 5.8) to be more atypical than characteristic. Care should be taken not to uncritically import what works for them.
- 16 of the 20 types of fxC occur in all 10 kinds of social context examined.
- The fxC are proportionally more on needy estates than the overall distribution of parishes, but less prevalent in areas of traditional Anglican strength such as town and rural contexts. See section 7.2.
- The fxC are begun by all traditions in the Church of England, but in varying proportions and with preferences for certain types of fxC. See section 6.19
- The fxC meet in all manner of venues, across a wide variety of days, and also with different frequencies. 46% meet monthly and Messy Churches characteristically so.

## **The data from leaders indicates both some depth and some frailty**

- 80.4% are taking some steps to grow disciples, not just attract attenders, leaving 19.6% failing, as yet, to take steps down this path.
- While 43% have held a communion service, in some fxC this is very occasional and undoubtedly the likelihood of communion goes down with reduction of frequency of meeting.
- 37% of the fxC have had baptisms, which is also affected by frequency.
- 56% are taking some steps towards responsibility for their finances and 70% for how they are led, but only 39% have some element of self-reproducing.
- Very few fxC have any legal status within the Church of England, which is one source of vulnerability.
- 28% continue to grow numerically and a further 55% broadly maintain the growth gained.
- The latter group can also be called a plateau and questions around fxC having a natural unit size or range may help discern ways forward.
- 17% did grow but are now shrinking and in half of the cases that died, this was a prelude to it.
- 11% have died – those meeting fortnightly, and more often those not taking steps towards maturity being the more vulnerable.
- The data reveals that growth patterns vary according to a wide combination of factors: the kind of fxC, the social area served, and the frequency of meeting. See chapters 6 to 8.

Six dioceses, as of October 2016, have articulated an intention to start many more fxC or church plants: Blackburn, Ely, Guildford Leicester, London, Southwell and Nottingham. (See section 15.1.4) This research covered the existing fxC in five of them. It is hoped that this overall report, and the suite of three others accompanying it, may prove to be the best guide the Church of England, and its dioceses, has of the characteristics and performance of its younger churches, known generically as fxC, for the next decade.

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