

GROWING LEADERS ON URBAN ESTATES

Church Army's Research Unit

February 2023



In partnership with the dioceses of Birmingham, Blackburn, London and York

How can the Church of England identify, resource, and enable people who live on urban estates to be relationally effective in leadership, mission, and evangelism? Various urban leadership formation and development schemes have been piloted in four Church of England dioceses since 2017. This report draws together the key learning from Church Army's Research Unit's evaluation of these schemes alongside insights from Church Army's own approach to resourcing and enabling evangelism on urban estates.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- The Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway (Diocese of Birmingham)
- Become (previously known as the London Estates Course)
- M:Power (Diocese of Blackburn)
- Stepping Up (Mustard Seed, Diocese of York)
- Church Army Initial Training

We would particularly like to thank all the course participants, estate leaders and others who shared their experiences with us.

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Andy Wier and John Tomlinson
Church Army's Research Unit

FOREWORD

The stories gathered here by Church Army's Research Unit are very powerful; they deserve to be seen and heard, and I am delighted that this report facilitates that. But they only begin to hint at what is possible. When the Church is willing to take off the structural blinkers and to invest resources into our estates, we begin to see more clearly what the Lord is already doing in the renewal of lay and ordained leadership within those communities (c.f. Isaiah 43:18-19). And when we see it, we can help to build the confidence, skills, and sustainable spiritual habits necessary to enable those ministries to flourish. For those of us who come from urban estates, the process towards recognised public ministry can feel very alien; it has often required leaving some key identity markers behind – frequently related to class, ethnicity, and culture – to take up cultural habits and behaviours that are more typically (middle class) 'church leader shaped.' What this report shows is that there is no 'typical shape' for Christian leadership other than that of Christ himself, and he is at work in a whole host of places amongst a wide variety of people from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. The descriptions of the schemes to identify, recognise, resource, and enable leaders from, and for, urban estates show us that things needn't stay as they have been; we can learn to keep in step with the Holy Spirit – to change – and we give thanks for those who are already leading us there as we learn how to go with them.

Opening our eyes to the folk whom the Spirit is nudging and enabling pathways to leadership that are accessible, relevant, rich in Bible and theology, confident, and joyful is essential to building up the whole Church into maturity in Christ; may there be many more stories to tell in the future like the ones recorded here!



The Revd Canon Dr Michael Leyden
Dean of Emmanuel Theological College

SETTING THE SCENE

The Church of England's Estates Evangelism Task Group (EETG) was formed with the purpose of helping renew the Church for proclamation and service on urban estates. As Bishop Philip North stated in a General Synod report on the EETG's remit:

Our broad vision is a very simple one. To have a loving, worshipping, serving Christian community on every significant social housing estate in England. Our conviction is that, if our approaches to mission accidentally or deliberately exclude the poor, we will never see the renewal for which we pray. Every significant renewal movement in Christian history has begun on the margins, and it is our firm belief that the same can happen in our own day.¹

The Estates Evangelism Task Group seeks to:

- encourage and resource evangelism in estates parishes
- foster new forms of church life in such areas
- support the raising up of new leaders, lay and ordained, from and for the urban church

Due in part to the impetus and energy for urban evangelism galvanised by the EETG, four dioceses have established schemes seeking to identify, recognise, resource, and enable leaders from, and for, urban estates and other “places where life is tough”.² The schemes in Blackburn and York have received national church funding via the Strategic Development Fund whereas the pilots in Birmingham and London (and this summary report) were funded by a grant from the Benefact Trust given to the National Estate Churches Network (NECN) charity.

NECN supports people active in Christian ministry on social housing estates in England and Wales via a network of local groups plus conferences, estate-specific resources, helpful emails and social media, strategic representation and much more. NECN's membership includes church and community leaders and workers, clergy, residents and others who live, work and serve God on housing estates across England and Wales.

Church Army's Research Unit (CARU) have been appointed as external evaluators for four such schemes. This report draws together key learning so far from these schemes along with insights from Church Army's own work resourcing and enabling evangelism on urban estates.

¹North, P. (2019) Estates Evangelism Task Group: Paper for the General Synod. www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/GS%202122.pdf

²This phrase originates from the Diocese of York's Mustard Seed Programme. www.mseed.org/vision

³In profiling these five examples of training, we acknowledge that these are not the only initiatives seeking to resource and enable leaders from urban estates. Indeed, organisations like NECN, the Urban Theology Unit and Unlock have been working in this area for many years.

Five training initiatives are featured in this report:³

- M:Power (Diocese of Blackburn) - pages 12-15
- Stepping Up (Diocese of York) - pages 16-19
- Become (previously known as the London Estates Course) – pages 20-23
- Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway (Diocese of Birmingham) – pages 24-27
- Church Army Initial Training - pages 28-31

Providing a 'like for like' comparison of these schemes is not possible because they differ in many ways, reflecting the different diocesan contexts (both in geography, but also strategy for growing and deploying leaders). Each scheme, for example, has been running for a different length of time and has a different target 'audience' and set of aims. But accompanying these schemes over the past few years has enabled CARU to identify some striking similarities and differences.



A VARIETY OF APPROACHES

As the case studies later in this report demonstrate, the five schemes featured differ in various respects. Each has been tailored to specific organisational and local geographic contexts and their differences should be celebrated. Taken together, they provide others interested in doing something similar elsewhere with a menu of different models and approaches to consider.

Tailored to context

Three of the five schemes featured in this report were developed by Church of England dioceses (Birmingham, Blackburn, and York). Become is supported by the Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication and grew out of conversations about developing an Estates Strategy for London diocese. Church Army works across the British Isles and Ireland, training Evangelists for commissioned ministry within four Anglican Provinces.⁴

Though all five courses train Christians who live on urban estates, they express this in different ways. Some courses are explicitly aimed at “people from urban communities” (M:Power) and “inner or outer urban estates” (Birmingham), or “those living on social housing estates and similar areas” (Become). Stepping Up, in contrast, uses the York diocese Mustard Seed Programme’s vocabulary of “growing disciples in places where life is tough”.⁵ Church Army training is not focused solely on urban estate ministry. However, many Church Army Evangelists do come from urban estate backgrounds or are ministering in such contexts, for example within Church Army Centres of Mission.

Informal and formal recognition

Some of the schemes are focused primarily on preparing people for church leadership roles, while others have a stronger emphasis on equipping in mission and evangelism. But a further key difference concerns whether participants receive formal or informal recognition from the wider Church. In this regard:

- Some schemes have been set up to prepare people for formally licensed ministry (Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway and Church Army Initial Training).
- Other schemes (M:Power, Become and Stepping Up) are more focused on preparing individuals for more informal, locally recognised ministry, though there is sometimes also the possibility of local commissioning and/or exploring a call to licensed ministry.⁶

Informal versus formal recognition is a key distinction that also informs different approaches to assessment (the schemes that involve formal recognition and authorisation by the wider Church tend to have a more rigorous or systematic approach to assessment than the less formal, unaccredited, schemes where any assessment is often voluntary).

⁴ The Church of England, Scottish Episcopal Church, Church in Wales, and Church of Ireland.

⁵ This encompasses people living in areas with ‘multiple deprivations’ in towns, cities, and coastal communities, as well as smaller areas scattered across the diocese.

⁶ For more on these terms, see www.churchofengland.org/life-events/vocations/exploring-lay-ministry

Different delivery models

As the table below shows, the schemes that prepare people for locally recognised ministry (M:Power, Stepping Up and Become) run for a 9-18-month period, while the schemes that involve preparation for licensed ministry (Birmingham and Church Army) both run for three years.

	Date launched	Length of course	Session frequency	Formal assessment?
M:Power (Blackburn)	2018	9 months	Weekly sessions	None
Stepping Up (York)	2020	1 year	Weekly sessions	None
London Estates Course / Become	2020 / 2022	18 months	Monthly sessions	Optional
Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway	2019	3 years	Monthly sessions	Yes
Church Army Initial Training	1882	3 years	6 teaching weekends per year	Yes

The schemes also differ in their approach to replication. Some have been designed to be run in multiple locations concurrently, while other longer programmes cannot be replicated so easily.

- M:Power and Stepping Up have both been run in-person on multiple occasions in different locations across their respective dioceses. Both courses last a year or less and have established a format that lends itself well to delivery in multiple settings.
- The recently launched 18-month Become course has also been designed for delivery in different locations but involves a different delivery model. Unlike the other courses, Become combines pre-recorded teaching videos from guest speakers with live learning activities in locally facilitated hubs.
- The Birmingham and Church Army pathways are longer term formational programmes preparing people for specific forms of licensed ministry.⁷ These cannot be so easily replicated in other contexts.

⁷ The Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway trains lay and ordained 'focal ministers' for the Diocese of Birmingham. Church Army Initial Training prepares people for the Office of Evangelist in the Church of England.

COMMON DELIVERY CHARACTERISTICS

Despite their differences, these five schemes have a lot in common. Through accompanying them over recent years, we have identified the following common characteristics.

Adaptation

Some of these schemes began as pilot projects and all have had to adapt and evolve in response to unfolding experience and unexpected events (not least a global pandemic). Though some flexibility is needed in any form of ministry, there seems to be something about the need to respond to the unpredictable and ‘messy’ nature of life on many urban estates that makes adaptability particularly necessary when growing leaders in estate contexts.

Authenticity

All these schemes are run by leaders with significant experience of urban estates ministry – women and men with first-hand knowledge about the joys, challenges and everyday realities of life and ministry in these contexts. These schemes seek to grow a culture of authenticity by creating learning environments in which everyone (both participants and tutors) can be open, honest and real with one another.

Confidence

The case studies that follow suggest that a lot of the focus of these schemes is about building confidence - having confidence in people and giving them confidence in themselves: who they are, what they believe and who they can be. For many participants, an increase in confidence has been the area of greatest growth.⁸ This includes:



A growth in personal confidence and self-esteem – “being more confident within myself”

Confidence to try new things and have a go – “being prepared to take on new challenges”

Confidence around listening to God and believing that God can use them – “trusting the nudges of the Holy Spirit”

Creating the right kind of learning and nurturing environment is vital here. Though teaching content and curriculum are obviously important, it is often the peer support and mentoring provided within learning communities that participants appreciate the most.



⁸ For example, 10 out of 18 written responses from Stepping Up participants to the statement ‘The area in which I have grown the most is...’ used the word ‘confidence’ directly.

Flexible assessment and learning activities

Not all these courses involve formal assessment, and most are not academically accredited.⁹ But all have sought to find creative and contextually appropriate ways to help participants document and demonstrate their learning. Examples include:

- Journalling and 'take home' activities
- In-session reflective exercises
- Choice of written work, recorded conversations or creative exercises

In Church of England contexts where a culture of academic elitism sometimes persists, this kind of approach may be accused by some of 'dumbing down'. But Canon Andy Delmege from the Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway refutes such suggestions, saying:

This is not a second-best way of training; rather it is one that forms the people that God is calling from these contexts to minister effectively and missionally within them.

Involving the local church

Though these schemes all focus primarily on training identified individuals, course leaders have also come to recognise the need to communicate well with sending parishes. This includes liaising with them about future ministry opportunities for those completing a course. People often change significantly through these schemes – they may experience a major change in outlook or vocation. It is important to help parishes, and incumbents especially, be prepared for this generally positive outcome.



⁹The only exception is Church Army Initial Training where some students complete a Certificate of Higher Education in Theology, Ministry and Mission (accredited by Durham University Common Awards), and others work towards a Church Army award (non-accredited).

SO WHAT?

Lessons for the wider Church

There's no 'one size fits all' model

The experience of these five schemes appears to confirm the more widely recognised principle that 'off the shelf' models rarely work in urban estate ministry.¹⁰ As each scheme has been tailored to specific organisational and local contexts, they cannot (or at least should not!) be replicated elsewhere uncritically. Nevertheless, the case studies that follow provide anyone interested in doing something similar with a range of examples and potential models to consider.

It's costly, but it's worth it

A lot of time and energy goes into developing and running schemes like these. And this in turn requires money. Appendix 1 outlines the main costs associated with each scheme and how these have been funded to date. These schemes are not low cost to deliver because they place a strong emphasis on recognising and developing the unique gifts and strengths of each learner. Growing confidence in people and creating safe and supportive learning communities is a significant investment. However, the case studies that follow suggest it is worth it.

The ongoing challenge of measurement

The five schemes featured in this report differ in many respects, so making quantifiable comparisons between them is very hard. As Appendix 2 indicates, each has had different monitoring and evaluation approaches, reflecting different aims and funder requirements. In view of these differences, much of CARU's work has been primarily qualitative in scope.¹¹ Though the case studies that follow detail the numbers of people who have completed these schemes, it has not been possible to:

- Report on the socio-economic backgrounds of participants (for example with relation to previous educational experience or government deprivation indices) because data was not captured
- Compare the longer-term impact of the five schemes on participants through a consistent methodology

Whilst affirming the value of the rich qualitative feedback gathered, it is acknowledged that the longer term 'mainstreaming' of initiatives like these into the wider life of the Church may also require further work on contextually appropriate measurement systems.

¹⁰ See Wier, A. (2015) *Creative Tension in Urban Mission: Reflections on Missional Practice and Theory*. Cambridge: Grove.

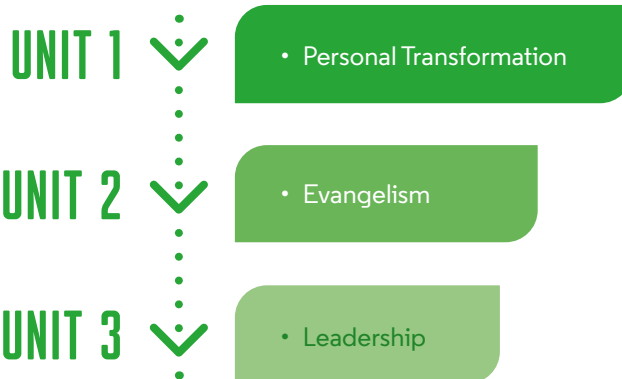
¹¹ During the pandemic, CARU's approach to evaluating these schemes had to adapt and evolve. Within a rapidly changing context, obtaining reliable quantitative data became particularly difficult.



M:POWER (THE DIOCESE OF BLACKBURN)

M:Power is a leadership training and formation programme for people from urban communities. It forms one part of the Diocese of Blackburn's Outer Estates Leadership Programme, which has been funded through a grant from the Strategic Development Fund (SDF) of The Church Commissioners.

- This is a 9-month training programme focused on lay leaders and aspiring lay leaders from urban contexts
- M:Power takes place one evening or daytime per week in locations across the diocese
- Most of the sessions are informal and discussion-based and delivered in the main by lay urban evangelists (providing credibility and lived experience)
- There are three units, with a different focus each term



- There are no formal entry requirements. There is also no formal assessment, although course leaders are aware of the progress of those taking part and participants can elect to undertake optional activities of which maintaining a spiritual journal is strongly encouraged
- All participants are expected to complete M:Power with a strengthened desire to make new disciples and a renewed confidence in the ministry to which they are called, which for many is formally recognised by the diocese through its Authorised Lay Ministry (ALM) scheme.
- Each participant is allocated a mentor who helps them reflect on their learning through M:Power.
- For some, M:Power is part of a process leading to ordination. M:Power has strong links with Emmanuel Theological College (North West dioceses' non-residential TEI) which provides opportunities for further training.

M:Power has been running since September 2018 and CARU have been accompanying it as external evaluators since early 2020. At the time of writing (late 2022):

- There have been 6 M:Power courses in different locations across the diocese, with a further 4 hubs launched in the autumn of 2022
- 70 people have completed M:Power with a further 34 signed up for 2022-23

THE IMPACT OF M:POWER

PERSONAL CONFIDENCE

"M:Power is about getting grounded in your faith and having the confidence to share it"

"It gave me chance to meet people like me, not middle class, people in similar situations"

LEADERSHIP

"I grew in confidence to be a leader – to talk to people, to pray with people"

"In the leadership session we learnt how anyone can be a leader – there are so many different types – I could begin to see myself as a leader in some way"

MINISTRY IN CHURCH

"M:Power gave me a profile in my church – it opened up new opportunities"

"I am now on the leadership team"

MISSION

"I realised that I was already doing mission in my community – it didn't mean travelling somewhere else"

"M:Power has helped me share Jesus in everyday language"

Rosie's Story¹²



When I was first asked to sign up for M:Power, my initial answer was a straight up definitely not. I remember saying to my priest that she would never get me doing that course and she should ask somebody else... This course has honestly changed my life. Before M:Power I couldn't even stand up in church and do a Bible reading without my heart feeling like it was coming out of my chest. Now, I can lead a worship service and speak to people openly. Yes, I still get nervous, but my way of thinking has changed. I know that God is with me through the words I speak.

¹² Read the full story at: mpowertraininghub.wixsite.com/mysite/post/comfort-zones-are-a-thing-of-the-past

LEARNING FROM M:POWER

Rev'd Rebecca Roberts (M:Power Project Leader) identifies the following learning points from M:Power:

1. "M:Power is reliant on strong relationships between tutors and participants, and between participants"

Community is at the heart of M:Power and forming community takes time. Rebecca reflects that "time investment from tutors and mentors is greater on a course like this than a traditional lay training route."

2. "The beauty of the local"

When the original funding bid was written, it was imagined that M:Power would be delivered from one of the locations in which M:Power's two Urban Evangelists are based on separate south Blackburn estates. But the course team soon realised that travelling long distances was difficult for many potential attendees and it was better to "take M:Power to where people are". This has necessitated running M:Power in multiple locations, often with smaller cohorts which enable the establishment of deeper relationships. An additional 0.5 FTE tutor resource was recruited in 2020 to support the wider geographic reach.

3. "The time of day matters"

M:Power was originally conceived as an evening course. But a lot of estate people have more time in the day (maybe due to different work patterns) or might not want to come out at night. So the team now offer daytime as well as evening options.

4. "Clergy are important gate-keepers"

Over time, the team have discovered that sharing the M:Power vision clearly with clergy is vital. Unlike many courses, M:Power are often willing to "take a risk" with people who face significant life challenges or might not complete the nine months. As the "gate-keepers" who often direct potential participants to M:Power, clergy need to understand how M:Power works.

5. "Getting the language right"

Rebecca reflects that in a diocese-wide course like M:Power, it's important to ensure you have a wide representation of church traditions. "Getting the language right" here is very important.



RESEARCH TEAM REFLECTIONS

1. Flexibility and responsiveness

Since its launch, M:Power has been through some significant changes and challenges which were not anticipated at the outset. There have been both internal changes (e.g. changes in project leadership at the end of the second year) and external changes (e.g. the impact of the pandemic). In this context, the team have needed to be flexible and responsive, whilst trying to stay true to the original vision. M:Power participants we interviewed spoke very clearly about how the crisis of the pandemic provided opportunities for missional innovation and enhanced pastoral ministry. Though some found Zoom sessions more difficult, others noted that remote sessions had helped them grow and become more confident.

2. The challenge of measurement

The original SDF funding bid for M:Power anticipated that each M:Power participant would bring two or three people to Christ post training (leading to around 180 new disciples by 2023). Measuring progress towards targets like this is difficult because Christians of different traditions will have different understandings of what constitutes a 'new disciple' or 'bringing a person to Christ'. Assessing this also requires taking a long-term view because it relates to what happens some time after people have completed M:Power. As such, progress towards this target has not been systematically recorded. Encouragingly though, many of the former M:Power participants we interviewed were able to give evidence of bringing at least two or three people to Christ.

3. Maintaining distinctiveness whilst scaling up

M:Power is now delivered in multiple locations across the Diocese of Blackburn. The team has also partnered with and accepted applicants from other dioceses (e.g. Manchester and Leeds) to enable more people to access M:Power. Having more hubs and participants is a sign of M:Power's popularity and profile in the diocese and beyond. But this also raises important questions about how wide it is possible to expand without compromising M:Power's distinctive culture. The M:Power team are aware of these challenges and the risk of 'drift'. They are keen to further develop their recruitment processes to ensure M:Power does not just accept applications from 'anyone and everyone' but remains focused on training people from urban communities.

STEPPING UP (THE DIOCESE OF YORK)

The parable of the Mustard Seed helps us to understand how God is at work. People and parishes in our poorest communities often feel small and insignificant and yet are full of potential to grow, like a Mustard Seed.

Stepping Up is part of the Diocese of York's Mustard Seed Programme, which has a vision of 'growing disciples in places where life is tough'. The programme is focused on working with people in the poorest parishes, which are found at the edge of the diocese, particularly in Middlesborough, Hull and coastal communities. This work has been supported by the Benefact Trust and Strategic Development Funding from the Church of England.

- Stepping Up is the first step for a parish to be involved with the Mustard Seed Programme. It provides an opportunity for lay people to come together once a week with people from other parishes in their deanery to grow together as disciples of Jesus, and to explore how to develop mission in their local community.
- Stepping Up is a year-long learning community, with a different focus for each term:

TERM 1



- Listening – to God, to others and to ourselves

TERM 2



- Being with – a commitment to be with the people and the community where God has called us to serve

TERM 3



- Sharing faith – joining in with God's mission in our local communities, sharing God's love in action, words and prayer.

- There are no formal assessments, but each participant has a journal, where they record their learning and development. Each week participants are asked to complete 'take home activities', which are recorded as a written reflection or using art, photography, film or audio recordings.
- Each participant has a mentor who accompanies them for the year, meeting regularly to reflect on their Stepping Up journey, and supporting them to discern how they will 'Step Up' in mission at the end of the year.
- At the end of Stepping Up, participants are commissioned as Community Ministers within their parishes, to develop new or existing mission within the local community. This includes a small number who Step Up into part-time paid roles to continue developing their ministry. Everyone is invited into the Mustard Seed mission community, gathering each term to continue to learn and grow together and to follow a rhythm of life.
- Stepping Up was launched in 2020 with six groups running each year. A total of 35 people have completed Stepping Up to date.
- CARU and the Mustard Seed Team are working together on a collaborative five-year (2021-2026) project to evidence the qualitative impact of Stepping Up and reflect on where God may be at work.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY

At the end of Stepping Up, participants are invited to complete six short statements about what they have learned. Here are some examples from a selection of participants who completed Stepping Up in April 2022.

The thing from Stepping Up I most want to hold on to is...

Listen, not only to God, self, but others too. To ask questions. To not be afraid to try new challenges.

The thing from Stepping Up I most want to share with my church is...

That church is more than what happens within its walls. That we have to break down those walls and look outside the box. We need to be integrated within our communities alongside our neighbours.

The thing I have most appreciated about Stepping Up is...

The encouragement of others. Time to reflect, and a space to grow and discern the way forward.

Stepping Up has enabled me to...

Gain more confidence speaking in front of others. To apply for a care worker job. To take the opportunity to run a toddler group. To listen to people better. To understand the needs of others better.

The area in which I have grown the most is...

...in confidence and learning to understand myself better. What I mean by this is I needed to learn to love myself and know my self-worth so I could give 100% commitment in my Stepping Up.

The most difficult or challenging part of Stepping Up has been...

Confronting any fears, e.g. "Am I good enough?"

When I heard about Mustard Seed and prayed on it, I knew it was right for me to grow in my spiritual life and learn more. I am a shy person, but faith has given me strength and hope in all my challenging times. My faith has been a comfort in my grief, and given me hope through health worries. I want to share my faith with others and give them the gift that I received when I first came to church, a sense of peace, hope and a church family.

Tracy – Holy Trinity North Ormesby
www.mseed.org/tracy

LEARNING FROM STEPPING UP

Heather Black (Programme Leader) identifies the following learning points from Stepping Up's experience so far:

1. Spotting potential

"I've learned to believe in the potential of the smallest seed"

'Treasure seeking' is a big part of Stepping Up - looking for the potential within churches, communities and individuals, and helping others to see that potential too.

2. Providing the right kinds of support

"What we're trying to do is provide a supportive, nurturing environment and framework for those ready to grow"

This requires recognising that "the growth will be varied" – not expecting every 'tree' to conform to the same height, attending to the individual needs and circumstances of each participant, and asking: "What do we need to do for each person to help them grow and flourish?"

3. The power of learning communities

When conducting research on Stepping Up for her MA dissertation, Heather found that "everyone talked about the quality of the learning community". Stepping Up typically involves groups of 6-8 people learning together. Small, well-facilitated groups provide a safe space where deep, mutually supportive relationships can develop, and participants can learn and grow.

4. Communicating with clergy

The Mustard Seed team have learned a lot about communicating with the incumbents of sending parishes and the importance of helping them appreciate the journey that someone is on with Stepping Up. Course leaders catch up with incumbents once a term and this helps prepare the ground for subsequent further conversations about what 'Stepping Up' in mission at the end of the year might involve for each participant. Within conversations about future ministry, the Mustard Seed team are keen to recognise the unique gifts and experience of each participant, rather than just simply expecting them to fill a gap in church. Some clergy seem to embrace this more readily than others, so good communication is vital.



At the time of writing, CARU and the Mustard Seed team are less than one-year into a five-year collaborative research partnership helping to evaluate Stepping Up. Our work is focused on enabling the Mustard Seed Team to gather, reflect on, and make use of qualitative data about the impact of Stepping Up and stories of where God may be at work. Over the past year, we have worked with the Mustard Seed team to develop creative, visual, tools that enable participants to reflect on and share their experience of Stepping Up. For example, at the end of their first term, each participant is given a large sheet of paper with a blank tree picture and invited to visualise their journey of Stepping Up. The completed examples pictured here show how different Stepping Up participants have approached this exercise. Though it is still early days, we are discovering that tools like this provide a powerful way of enabling Stepping Up participants to be actively involved in telling their own stories and bearing witness to what has grown and developed during their time on Stepping Up.



BECOME (PREVIOUSLY THE LONDON ESTATES COURSE)

The main aim is to inspire self-confidence, encourage you in the gifts God has given you, and to help participants become all God has made them to be.

The London Estates Course was one of two learning pathway pilots supported with a grant from Allchurches Trust (now Benefact Trust) accessed by NECN. It aimed to:

- Identify and recruit small groups of existing and emerging local leaders from London Diocese estates churches
- Equip and empower them in leadership and evangelism, with a view to them being commissioned and deployed either in their estates church or to assist/lead with the specific aim of planting new worshipping communities on estates

An 18-month pilot of the London Estates course ran in 2020/21. Learning from the pilot informed the design of the Become course, with an adapted version delivered in partnership with Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication.¹³ Become was launched in autumn 2022 with 16 participants meeting in two local hubs in different parts of London. Key features of Become include:

- Monthly teaching sessions over an 18-month period, with input on teaching others, evangelism/mission, loving and leading, being sent out, and leading in the Spirit
- Teaching delivered by pre-recorded videos from guest speakers
- Live discussions and activities in local hubs – including a thought for the week, creative prayer, reflection questions, and a shared lunch (facilitated by a hub leader)
- There is no formal assessment, but each learner has the chance to give a presentation at the end of the scheme
- Each learner has a learning mentor to help them contextualise their learning
- Everyone who attends all sessions receives a certificate of completion; other outcomes are determined on a case-by-case basis and may include local commissioning or further training



RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC

Most of our guys don't do Zoom because often they don't have laptops or tablets or the data needed for a full online [session]. But the short WhatsApp videos could be downloaded with free wifi from outside the community centre or at the shops and watched at any time.

Rev'd Helen Shannon, Course Leader

21 students (from seven London churches) began the original 'in person' pilot of the London Estates Course in January 2020. But the first national Covid lockdown in March 2020 necessitated a major rethink. The course organisers considered hosting live sessions on Zoom but felt that this would not work for many of the participants who did not have reliable internet connections, sufficient data or capable devices, lived in overcrowded households, or were not used to video conferencing. They opted instead for an approach of sharing pre-recorded videos via WhatsApp and other platforms. Each monthly session consisted of a series of short videos, based around the core elements of the face-to-face course (welcome, thought for the day, worship, teaching, creative prayer, reflection questions). These could be downloaded with free wifi in community settings and watched at a time that suited participants.

Though the team worked hard to ensure that the course resources were available in an accessible format, they reflect that during the pandemic many participants did not have the "head space or physical space" necessary to fully engage with the online materials. And although the course WhatsApp group enabled some degree of staying in touch, everything was much harder without in-person face-to-face support. Consequently, only two of the original cohort were able to complete the end-of-year learning activity and formally 'graduate'. Others, however, still engaged with the material to varying degrees and the whole experience of piloting the course during the pandemic enabled the team to identify two major areas of learning:

1. "Face-to-face is best" - For the kinds of emerging local leaders that the London Estates Course sought to support, some element of face-to-face interaction in a course is essential.
2. "The pandemic stirred up great creativity" - Having to film everything during the lockdown was a real learning curve, but it helped the team realise that many of the teaching resources and videos developed could be re-used.

This learning has helped to inform the design of Become, which seeks to achieve "the best of both worlds" by combining teaching delivered through pre-recorded videos with live discussions and activities in local hubs.

LEARNING FROM THE LONDON ESTATES COURSE AND BECOME

Reflecting on this course and her wider experience of estate ministry, Rev'd Helen Shannon (Course Leader and Diocesan Estates Enabler) identifies the following further learning points:

- **Giving confidence and experience** – Developing leaders from estate leaders is not just about giving “head knowledge”. It is also about giving confidence and experience, “letting people give things a go and try things out”.
- **“You have to be realistic about what people can add to their lives”** – Asking people to attend a course one morning a month might not sound like a lot, but for people with precarious lives or unpredictable shift patterns it can be. As the pandemic showed, people in these situations often “only need one more thing to go wrong before they can’t engage”.
- **Be flexible and keep the door open** – Helen reflects that “none of our guys, even the more together ones, have a diary”. They live “hand to mouth, moment to moment” and may need to be reminded when the next session is coming up. Things may come up that mean they are not able to engage with the course for a while. But when this happens the team’s approach is to “keep the door open for them to engage as much as possible”. For example, some of the original pilot group who were not able to fully engage with the London Estates Course during the pandemic have now started the Become course as “seasoned participants”.

“Doing the course gave me confidence I never had before and I liked being able to put what I learned into practice. When I was asked to lead Thought of the Week for the first time I was nervous, but the leaders encouraged me to keep it simple - that’s the best way - and everyone was so positive. We all came from different backgrounds and churches; everyone was really encouraging. Now I want to continue to invest in my community. I often meet people in cafés or in the market - it’s a way of listening and reaching out to others with the love of Christ which has been shown to me.”

Pilot course graduate



RESEARCH TEAM REFLECTIONS

1. Locally recognised lay leaders

Some of the other courses featured in this report prepare people for licensed or authorised ministry, but this course focuses on growing the confidence of ‘locally recognised’ lay leaders.¹⁴ Though it was originally imagined (when the pilot was designed) that the London Estates Course would “culminate with participants being commissioned by their local bishop or another denominational overseer”, this is no longer the primary outcome envisaged. Instead, the Become team are keen to ensure that, for each participant, there are “conversations with their local church leader [towards the end of the course] about the next thing they’re moving on to”.

2. Living with uncertainty

As Helen’s reflections on the pandemic show, this course has needed to recognise, accept and work with the unpredictability and precariousness of the lives of many course participants. This requires considerable flexibility and sensitivity to the needs and capabilities of individual learners.

3. The impact of the pandemic

Though the pandemic impacted all the courses featured in this report, it came at a really bad time for the London Estates Course. Moving this course online proved particularly challenging, but learning from the pandemic has helped to shape the new look Become course which seeks to combine “the best of both worlds”.

4. Watch this space!

As the new Become course has only just launched, it is too early to judge its impact and effectiveness. CARU have been appointed to conduct further evaluation work around this, with a final report due in July 2024. We look forward to working with Become and will be interested to see how the new hybrid model (combining pre-recorded videos with learning activities in local hubs) works with estate leaders from different contexts across London and potentially beyond the capital.



¹⁴ www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/ministry/developing-lay-ministries

BIRMINGHAM LOCAL MINISTRY PATHWAY

- The Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway was the other learning pathway pilot supported with a grant from Allchurches Trust (now Benefact Trust) accessed by NECN.
- It was designed to help identify and form ordained or lay leaders (“focal leaders”) within churches where there were opportunities for new patterns of ministry.
- The Pathway has a strong emphasis on:
 - Cultural sensitivity and flexible, person-centred learning tailored to the needs of people from inner or outer urban estates
 - Experiential learning based on the teaching methods of Jesus
 - Learning in and through community, including extensive use of group discussions
 - There is no academic accreditation, but participants need to demonstrate their learning through assessments (with the option of written work or assessed conversations)



- Between 2019 and 2022, the pathway was piloted with an initial cohort of 17 people from inner urban or outer estate contexts. All participants were either already playing a significant leadership role in their local church at the start of the pilot, were moving into this position, or had clear potential to do so. Of the original cohort:
 - 5 have been ordained – Local Minister (Ordained)
 - 2 have been licensed as local lay ministers – Local Minister (Lay)
 - 2 completed the training and are going through further discernment as to where God is calling them
 - 2 completed the training but did not pursue authorised or licensed ministry
 - Against the backdrop of the pandemic, 6 were unable to complete the training due to personal issues
- Following the grant-funded pilot, the Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway is now funded by the Diocese of Birmingham. At the time of writing (late 2022), a new group of learners is being recruited through parish community discernment exercises, with a view to their Foundation Year beginning in early 2023.

	Participant feedback	Feedback from the oversight or supporting ministers
Community and support	“When I started, I didn’t know if I could cope, but now I feel so supported” “What was most valuable was being with other people”	“The dynamism of the group is crucial” “There is a strong affinity between them”
Recognition and confidence	“I wasn’t recognised before for the work I was doing, but now I am” “I’ve learned that people believe in me, that I am capable”	“Since ordination, which was such an affirmation, the confidence has grown”
Relevant training	“I expected it to be ‘top-down’ learning, but it wasn’t – I could see how it fitted my situation” “It would have been so good for me had I done this years ago”	[Participants] “have now more theological confidence – they can find their way around the Bible and handle the basics of Christian belief”
Preparation for mission and ministry	“I feel I can now contribute to the work in my church – I have got a voice” “It helped me focus on mission – and helped me use the gifts I have to talk to people”	“They are much more equipped now” “It equips them, and it releases them”



“The course was delivered very well, and I remember the willingness to share and to help one another. Most of all, you are not on your own. I suppose one of my issues could have been my education, but that didn’t matter. The course is a brilliant way of learning, and I have grown so much in confidence. It enabled me to follow God’s call. To anyone who is interested in such a course, I would say ‘go for it – and see where God leads you!’”

Ann Knight

“The course was a real blessing from God. It helped me realise that I have something to offer, and people believe in me. I feel like I now have got a voice, and a real contribution to make. And I met some wonderful people on the journey.”

Dot Pooler



LEARNING FROM FROM THE BIRMINGHAM LOCAL MINISTRY PATHWAY

Rev Canon Andy Delmege (Course Leader and Canon Missioner at Birmingham Cathedral) and Rev Dr Sam Gibson (Co-Leader) identify the following learning points from the Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway:

- **Local people from estates can be leaders in their churches if trained and supported well.** “The people on the Pathway have been really impressive. There are lots of stories of people in churches which were struggling and which, though still vulnerable, are now flourishing.”
- **Much of this work is about confidence** – “having confidence in people and giving them confidence in themselves – who they are and who they can be”. People from estates need examples of others in leadership “who look and sound like them”.
- **Community discernment** – “The community discernment process has been very powerful - looking at the needs of a church and discerning with them who might be the leaders there.” This is a very different model to the traditional discernment route which begins with an individual who puts themselves forward. The community discernment process can help identify/ draw out current/potential leaders who might not initially seem themselves as leaders, and be very affirming for the people involved.
- **Prioritising relationships early on** – “Forming the cohort and mutual support and learning was really important... Building trust and mutual respect.”
- **Recognising and responding to people’s strengths, circumstances and needs** – the importance of “working out where people are (what they know and do already) and building on that. Being responsive and designing input around where people are at.”
- **Learning how to do appropriate assessment** – “giving a range of options and opportunities to demonstrate learning” e.g. written exercises, recorded conversations.
- **Linking with other diocesan initiatives** – “For longevity, it needs to be integrated closely with diocesan strategy.”



RESEARCH TEAM REFLECTIONS

1. An adaptable curriculum

As researchers, we were struck by the Pathway's flexibility and responsiveness to the needs and experiences of its participants. Though there is a curriculum, Andy Delmege and other tutors appear to be particularly adept at adapting and tailoring content as the course progresses. This is clearly one of the key strengths of the Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway, though this also makes it quite dependent on one or two key people and harder to reproduce in other contexts.

2. Integration within the diocese

The Birmingham Local Ministry Strategy is well-aligned with the Diocese of Birmingham's 'People and Places'¹⁵ Framework and vocational pathways in the diocese. This has aided its sustainability, with the diocese willing to finance it beyond the initial grant-funded pilot. As it becomes even more integrated into the life of the diocese, it will be important to ensure that the Pathway's distinctive focus on urban estates ministry is retained.

3. Ministry on the cheap?

In a context of stretched church finances, the Pathway's emphasis on identifying, training and then ordaining or licensing existing local leaders as focal ministers, could be interpreted by some as an attempt at 'ministry on the cheap'. In order for such suggestions to be refuted, it will be important to demonstrate that this model is not about 'plugging the gaps' or expecting unpaid leaders to do everything a stipendiary minister would do. As noted earlier in this report, the course leaders refute such suggestions, arguing:

This is not a second-best way of training; rather it is one that forms the people that God is calling from these contexts to minister effectively and missionally within them.

¹⁵ www.cofebirmingham.com/about-us/what-we-do/people-places

CHURCH ARMY INITIAL TRAINING

Church Army has been training Evangelists since 1882, when Wilson Carlile, a Church of England curate began equipping ex-soldiers, and working men and women, to serve as Evangelists among the Westminster slums. 140 years on, this legacy continues.

- Church Army Initial Training is part of the process for becoming a commissioned Church Army Evangelist, recognised for ministry by the Church of England and other Anglican Provinces.
- Currently, there are 37 Evangelists in Training (EiTs) from across England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Around 50% of EiTs serve on urban estates, including a significant number within Church Army Centres of Mission.¹⁶
- This is a part-time, three-year training programme focused on formational learning and evangelism based in a pioneering missional context. Alongside the formal training, EiTs commit to serving an agreed number of hours a week doing evangelism. Some serve as volunteers, while others are employed by Church Army or partner organisations on a part-time or full-time basis.
- The programme has been designed help EiTs grow in three areas set out in Church Army’s Evangelist Learning Framework:
 - Personal Faith Development
 - Understanding Vocation
 - Pioneer Evangelism
- Much of the input comes on training weekends (normally six a year) in Sheffield. Each weekend includes prayer and worship, teaching sessions, group time, other formational activities, and lots of good food.
- Most EiTs study for a Certificate of Higher Education in Theology, Ministry and Mission accredited by Durham University. Others work for a Church Army award.
- Sessions focus on the learning needs of the EiTs, equipping them to make as many connections as possible with their mission context and to reflect together on their practice of evangelism. Assessments are designed to enable EiTs to reflect on their experience and to prepare theologically and practically for their commissioned ministry.
- EiTs are supported by a personal tutor, Local Mentor and Church Army Evangelist Reflector.



¹⁶churcharmy.org/our-work/centres-of-mission

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY

Many new Evangelists in Training had difficult experiences of school. For some, this can make entering training daunting and potentially overwhelming. But as the following quotes from current and recent EiTs show, positive experiences of training can also be healing and liberating.

"Being able to listen to and understand different theological opinions to mine helps in disagreeing well."

"They [the training team] are not just tutors; they're our brothers and sisters."

"The training weekend is an awesome blessing all the time. It feels like a retreat for me, the fellowship, the prayer times, the learning together and rubbing and sharpening minds and the care from admin, cleaning and kitchen staff."

"They [the training team] believed in us and saw things in us that others didn't see."

"I went into this [training] weekend crippled by anxiety. I came away a different person, renewed, revitalised, confident, and having remembered who I am."

"The training community is an amazing safe space to learn, reflect and simply be."



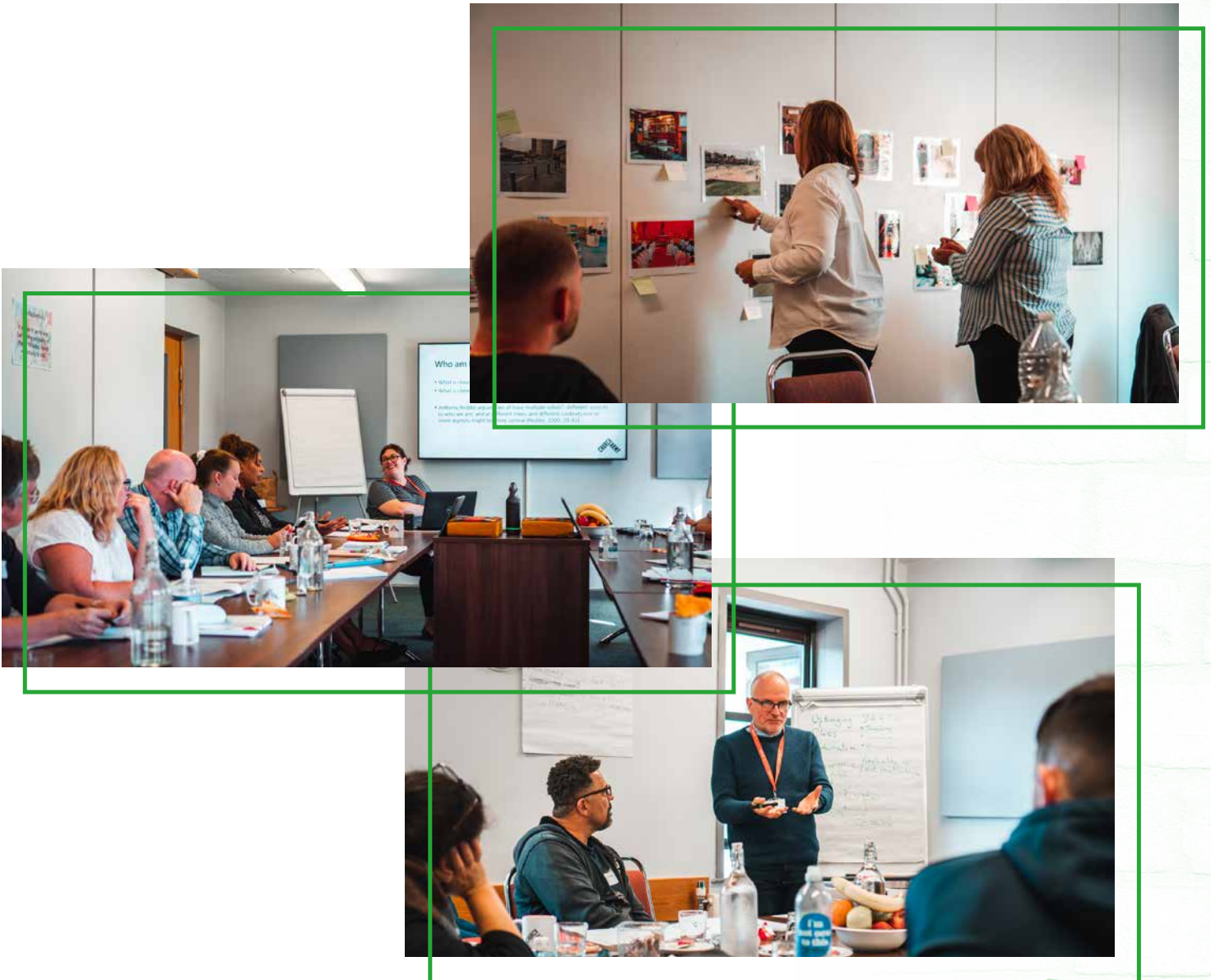
LEARNING FROM CHURCH ARMY INITIAL TRAINING

Dr Gary Wilton (Dean of Formation) offers the following reflections on Church Army Initial Training:

“As well as drawing upon Church Army’s rich training heritage, today’s training team draws upon three key sources of inspiration.

- The first is Jesus who was identified as a Rabbi who called 12 people to be disciples.
- The second is Paulo Freire, a South American educationalist, whose 1972 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* recognised that adult education needs to be communal and involves continuing reflection on experience.
- The third is Andragogy – the art and science of Adult Learning as summarised by Malcolm Knowles¹⁷. Andragogy acknowledges that adults come to new learning with significant prior learning, and a range of motivations and needs that should be valued if an educational process is to facilitate real new learning and human flourishing.

Together our sources of inspiration powerfully shift our focus away from teaching and the needs of teachers to learning and the needs of learners. This can be particularly important for those from urban estates whose compulsory education may have failed them.”



¹⁷ See Knowles, M. et al (2020) *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*. Abingdon: Routledge

LEARNING FROM CHURCH ARMY INITIAL TRAINING

Although we have not done any formal research on Church Army Training, Church Army's Research Unit have worked closely with our training colleagues for many years. From this vantage point, we offer the following observations and reflections:

1. A communal experience

Like the other schemes featured in this report, Church Army Training is very much a communal and supportive experience. This can be particularly important for those working on urban estates.

"I am a work in progress on a new exciting learning journey; I do not travel alone, for God has placed me amidst a wonderfully caring and nurturing community of fellow travellers, who are only too willing to help and support me as I make my way... I feel enabled."

2. Preparation for a life of ministry

As one of the longer term (three-year) formational programmes featured here, Church Army Initial Training has a strong focus on preparing EiTs for lifelong public ministry. Church Army Evangelists often serve in some of the toughest places, and in this context it is important to support and equip them to flourish, not just survive. In view of this, each academic year includes a formational term where Durham University modules are put to one side so that EiTs can focus exclusively on their formational learning.

3. Connecting with other training and resources

The Initial Training programme described here is just one strand of Church Army's wider DARE strategy for Doing, Advocating, Resourcing and Enabling evangelism. Within Initial Training, strong links and connections are formed with other strands of Church Army work that provide further opportunities for learning and development. These include:

- LEAD – leadership development programme and resources
- Faith Resources – a suite of resources to help churches and Christians develop in mission and evangelism
- Envoy – an evangelism coaching community

For more details, visit: www.churcharmy.org/growing-faith

4. A major investment

Church Army has a passion to recruit from and deploy Evangelists in marginal places, and Initial Training has been designed to reflect this. This model of training requires major investment – on behalf of Church Army and each EiT.

APPENDIX 1 - STAFFING AND FUNDING

Scheme	Staffing	Other costs	Funded how?
M:Power (Blackburn)	Project Leader – parish priest 1.0 FTE Urban Evangelist (2 x 0.25 + 1 x 0.5) 0.5 FTE admin Volunteer mentors and tutors	Resources, venue hire, travel and expenses, annual networking event (£11.5K p.a.)	Church of England Strategic Development Funding (SDF) until June 2024
Stepping Up (York)	Programme Leader 2 FTE Associate Leaders 0.4 FTE Admin	Venue costs/ travel and childcare costs if needed (£15K p.a.)	Church of England Strategic Development Funding (SDF) until 2026 and grant from Benefact Trust
London Estates Course / Become ¹	0.4 FTE Project Lead 0.2 Estates Coordinator	Student resources (£6-7K p.a.)	Benefact Trust grant to NECN, extended until April 2024
Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway	The two main leaders run the pathway alongside other parish / cathedral roles (with a notional 0.1 FTE allocated for each) 0.1 FTE admin support	Travel, venue hire, participants expenses (£1.5K p.a.)	Benefact Trust grant to NECN for first 3 years. Funded by the Diocese of Birmingham since autumn 2022
Church Army Initial Training	Head of Initial Training – 1FTE Formation Lead 1 FTE Regional Development Lead (Tutor) – 0.5 FTE 3 x 0.5 Tutors 2 x 0.5 Administrators 1 x 0.5 Librarian	Venue hire, catering and travel from across the British Isles and Ireland (£24K p.a.)	Church Army

¹ Figures based on the experience of running the London Estates course.

APPENDIX 2 - EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT

In view of their different sources of funding and other contextual differences, each of these schemes has different approaches to evaluation and measurement.

M:Power (Blackburn)

M:Power is working to targets linked to Church of England Strategic Development Funding (SDF):

- At least 72 (12 per year) formally acknowledged 'urban estate lay leaders' created over six years. (Four years in, 70 people have completed M:Power, though not all are necessarily 'formally acknowledged')
- 180 new disciples by 2023, based on each participant bringing 2 or 3 people to Christ. (Progress towards this is not systematically recorded, though many participants say they have helped bring at least 2 or 3 people to Christ)

Church Army's Research Unit also conduct qualitative interviews with M:Power participants (past and present) as part of a wider evaluation of the Diocese of Blackburn's Outer Estates Leadership Programme.

Stepping Up (York)

Stepping Up has the following numerical targets linked to SDF funding:

- 137 people completing Stepping Up by 2026. (Two years in, 35 people have completed Stepping Up)
- 785 new disciples by 2026, based on growth in new and existing worship communities. (Two years in, there are over 250 new people attending worship, including at least 50 adult baptisms/confirmations)

Church Army's Research Unit and the Mustard Seed team are also working together on a collaborative research project seeking to help the Diocese of York develop its understanding of the qualitative impact of Stepping Up and stories about 'God at work'.

Become / London Estates Course

Due to the original pilot of the London Estates Course being significantly disrupted by the pandemic, CARU's approach to evaluating this scheme has had to significantly change and evolve. Our work to date has been primarily qualitative in scope, focused on drawing out key learning from the pilot experience. Further evaluation work with the Become course (launched in autumn 2022 with 16 participants) is due for completion in summer 2024.

Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway

In view of this scheme's intensive formational focus, the relatively small number of participants (an initial cohort of 17) and the absence of external targets (like those linked to SDF funding), CARU's evaluation work has been primarily qualitative in scope. This has included interviews with participants and their oversight or supporting ministers, culminating in the production of a final report for NECN and the Diocese of Birmingham in May 2022.

Church Army Initial Training

Church Army Initial Training forms one strand of Church Army's wider DARE strategy for Doing, Advocating, Resourcing and Enabling evangelism. The number of Evangelists in Training (currently 37) is a key quantitative measure here and has significantly increased over recent years. Alongside such headline measures, students are invited to complete anonymous evaluation questionnaires after each training weekend. This feedback is then discussed within 10 days by the training team, who respond to the students in a 'you said, we did' framework to show how any concerns are being met. This is also fed into periodic reports for the Yorkshire Theological Education Partnership, through which Church Army delivers Durham University Common Awards modules.

AFTERWORD

This report set out to answer the question: How can the Church of England identify, resource, and enable people who live on urban estates to be relationally effective in leadership, mission, and evangelism?

It is a timely question for the Church of England as its Archbishops' Council continues in its deliberations about Resourcing Ministerial Formation, a topic that historically has rarely strayed beyond the mainstream in relation to the funding of ministry – almost exclusively focused on the ordained.

And yet, as Bishop Philip North reminds us in his report to General Synod on the Estate Evangelism Task Group: “Every significant renewal movement in Christian history has begun on the margins...”

This report encourages us to pay attention to those margins. In paying attention, we have gained an understanding of how growing leaders is possible and a sense of what the ‘Lord is already doing’. I suggest that we should be humble and humbled by the reality that as we take time to look, time to be truly present, that we see faithful service and signs of God’s grace all around.

I love the way the report describes the National Churches Estates Network: ‘church and community leaders and workers, clergy, residents and others who live, work and serve God...’ This report highlights that clergy are significant and authentically present. They play an important role and the Church needs to continue to invest in their ministry such that is both sustained and celebrated.

Yet, as the list of those that make up the Network highlights, they are also part of a whole, including delightfully, ‘others who live, work and serve’ – whom we know from this, and other reports are so often God’s blessing for the Church.

The Church of England can and does grow leaders from urban estates, ‘others who live, work and serve’. The work on the margins will continue. We have an opportunity, as we deliberate on the allocation of resources, to act on this knowledge and to join in more intentionally.



Dr Tim Ling

Director of Learning and Development at Church Army

TO FIND OUT MORE

M:Power (The Diocese of Blackburn)

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Stepping Up (The Diocese of York)

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Become (previously the London Estates Course)

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Birmingham Local Ministry Pathway

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Church Army Initial Training

churcharmy.org/growing-faith/be-an-evangelist

Head of Initial Training: Elli Wort

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National Estate Churches Network

www.estatechurches.org

Email: info@estatechurches.org

Church Army's Research Unit

For the past 25 years, Church's Army's Research Unit have been working with the Church to discern how God is active in mission, and to understand how churches' participation in that mission can falter or flourish.

We explore these questions through innovative, excellent research and consultancy that equips and informs the Church, our funding partners, and our colleagues at Church Army. Our bespoke, wide-ranging work includes customised survey design, focus group facilitation, quantitative data analysis, project evaluations, strategic reviews, and participatory action research.

We warmly welcome opportunities to carry out new research that serves the people of God. Find out more at churcharmy.org/research or email Andy Wier (Research Team Leader) at andy.wier@churcharmy.org

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