# Resourcing Churches: A Theological and Strategic Conversation with Josh Cockayne and Mark Powley

## Dr Nick Shepherd, Head of Insights and Engagement, Vision and Strategy Team

**T**his article draws on a conversation between the Revd Dr Josh Cockayne and the Revd Canon Dr Mark Powley at the end of their Resourcing the Church webinar held in November 2025. Their dialogue offers a rich reflection on the relationship between strategy and theology in the Church of England's current approaches to mission, particularly through resource churches, planting, and revitalisation.

Too often strategy and theology are framed as opposites — as if one is practical and managerial while the other is reflective and spiritual. Yet, as Cockayne and Powley explore, strategic choices are always theological choices, and theological convictions shape strategic decisions. Understanding this interconnectedness helps bridge unnecessary divides in how we think about mission and encourages deeper reflection on what "success" might look like when planting or revitalising churches. If mission is grounded in God's nature — a God who sends — how should this theological fact shape strategies around resourcing churches?

## Defining Resource Churches: Naming, sending, and success

The Resourcing the Church report attempts to bring much needed clarity to a term that has become elastic within the Church of England: What exactly is a resource church? Many churches support others in varied ways, but the report identifies a specific pattern of ministry that has emerged in recent years. A resource church is defined as:

A church called to repeated parish revitalisation through sending leaders and teams to plant or graft into other localities.

Cockayne and Powley begin their conversation on the question of definitions:

**Josh Cockayne**: One of the refreshing things about the report is that it's very honest. It sees the immense value resource structures have brought to the wider church, but it's not afraid to name tensions and difficulties. I wonder if we could start with the definition.

**Mark Powley:** It's been fascinating — and sometimes fun — thinking about how we define what's happening. Different dioceses have developed different visionary approaches, which come with different naming systems and different strategic postures. I don't think anyone wants uniformity, but clarity matters. If there's a pattern of ministry emerging, we need to name it — because naming helps us talk honestly about its gifts and its costs.

This act of naming is not a neutral exercise. Naming a pattern of ministry shapes expectations and reveals theological commitments. It acknowledges that certain churches have been intentionally structured around sending. Cockayne notes that this can also help address misunderstandings:

**Josh Cockayne:** One of the prevailing narratives on the ground is, 'Well, if they're a resource church, they've never resourced me.' But when a definition focuses on the specifics of sending, planting, revitalising, it pulls away from that assumption. Do you think this distinctive of a resource church being by definition about planting, revitalising, sending is crucial?

Powley links this immediately to theological definitions:

**Mark Powley:** Well, it describes what we've seen so far — but theologically it's a recovery of the life of sending in the Trinity, that God is a God who sends. That dynamic of sending is a powerful thing to see — that's what we are seeing emerging — that's how the resourcing happens!

Sending, then, is not simply a strategic mechanism but a participation in the Trinity's life. This reframes resource churches not just as organisational devices, but as expressions of God's sending in mission. But, if sending is rooted in the life of God, does this model belong to one theological tradition? Cockayne raises a concern sometimes heard in the wider church:

**Josh Cockayne:** If resource churches draw on free church ecclesiology, is it harder for Catholic traditions to work within this model?

Powley resists the idea that this is 'simply' an evangelical charismatic construct:

**Mark Powley:** We wrestled with that. Yes, the model has roots in evangelical charismatic practice, but it also draws on deep Christian tradition. Cathedrals and minsters were doing this centuries ago. The question is: how do networks and sending look in those contexts? It will differ, but the principle — being part of a movement that gathers and sends — can exist widely.

Cockayne presses this further:

**Josh Cockayne:** So, the model won't look the same everywhere?

**Mark Powley:** Exactly. Bishop Philip North once said, 'For me, church planting looks like celebrating the Mass in lots of places.' That's not what an evangelical would say — but it's a valid expression. We need clarity without rigidity, so we don't miss creative developments in other traditions.

The implication is clear: sending is not the property of one tradition. Anglican ecclesiology, with its breadth of expression, offers multiple ways of embodying the same fundamental movement.

## Theological questions of success: Growth and flourishing

With this theological grounding, the discussion moves naturally to success. Cockayne asks:

**Josh Cockayne:** How do we define success?

Powley reframes success away from scale or numbers alone:

**Mark Powley:** Clarity of purpose is key. Success isn't about big churches — it's about revitalising parish life across a wide area. And not just numbers: flourishing communities, deep discipleship, mutuality across the body of Christ. Every number is a symbol of a reality — and it's the reality God cares about...Ultimately, success means recovering a lost charism — the ability to send and start new things. That's vital for the church's future.

This theological perspective recognises that mission is communal. A flourishing church is one that contributes to the flourishing of others.

Yet strategy must still operate within constraints. Dioceses cannot resource everywhere at once. Cockayne raises a criticism sometimes levelled against resource churches:

**Josh Cockayne:** Critics say resource churches are inherently middleclass and urban. Is that fair?

**Mark Powley:** There's a danger of that. Strategically, some dioceses start where capacity is easiest to build — often urban centres — then plant outwards. That can be wise, but we must discern carefully...We can't resource every postcode, so choices shape the church we'll be in 10 years. Do we prioritize quick growth or communities most in need? That's a theological question as much as a strategic one. As Jesus said in the parables, 'If you have ears, hear.' These are questions of discernment.

**The central point here is vital:** strategic prioritisation is not just practical; it is theological. Decisions about where to plant reveal convictions about calling, justice and mission.

## Anglican identity, networks and ecclesial interdependence

The conversation then turns to Anglican identity and the relationship between dioceses and networks. For some, the growth of networked churches raises concerns about independence and the weakening of traditional oversight structures.

Powley offers this ecclesiological framework:

**Mark Powley:** Historically, the church has always had both modal structures (parishes, dioceses) and sodal movements (mission orders, networks). Theologically, the church is a matrix — vertical and horizontal connections...The risk is if networks overshadow Anglican identity. Resource churches are a gambit: using strength for sending, but it only works if partnership with dioceses is deep and mutual. Otherwise, it's just a bold ecclesial experiment without the benefits of shared life.

This is a critical insight. **The Anglican ecosystem thrives when modal and sodal expressions work together.** Resource churches cannot flourish — or contribute to wider flourishing — in ecclesial isolation. Dioceses and networks are important and new networks to support different traditions might also be needed, as Cockayne and Powley also highlight.

**Josh Cockayne:** Do you think there's a need for more resourcing in areas of the church that don't have those built in networks? Should we proactively support traditions outside the broadly evangelical one to do this well?

**Mark Powley:** My personal feeling is, yes, absolutely. We should be investing in the network infrastructure — the models for sending, gathering, belonging — that could allow this to happen in other traditions...If we genuinely believe what many people involved in this say — that this is a recovery of the missional sending life of the church from the beginning — then it must be shared more widely.

## A broader ecology: Revitalisation, tradition and creativity

The conversation also touches on what happens on the ground. Some fear that planting or grafting leads to a monoculture, thinning the diversity of Anglican tradition. Cockayne, however, notes a more complex reality:

4

**Josh Cockayne:** One of the things, anecdotally, that's happened through revitalisation is a shift — a minister arrives with the church growth playbook, but in context they see that traditional occasional offices have the biggest missional potential. In some places, I've seen a recovery of a more traditional Anglican ecclesiology through revitalisation, which is fascinating.

Powley agrees that planting does not necessarily produce uniformity:

**Mark Powley:** You need centres of strength and vitality and worship. But when you replant from there, it would be naive to expect it to look exactly like it did in the centre...There is real creativity as people go to second and third generation planting. It's a more complicated ecology — a centre of powerful practice sending into other places, but those second and third iterations can be more missionally created and connected. That might be good for dioceses to bear in mind in their planning.

Revitalisations can then lead to renewed Anglican identity. They offer ways of diversifying and intermingling aspects of tradition and missional preferences through contextualisation.

## Assessing the impact: Beyond numbers to theology and ecclesiology

Assessing revitalisation is not only about tracking numbers, though growth and sustainability metrics matter. Strategic evaluation should include theological and ecclesiological reflection:

- What forms of Christian life are being renewed?
- How are Anglican practices being rediscovered or reinterpreted?
- What patterns of belonging and interdependence are emerging?
- How is a sending charism being embedded?

Doing so aligns evaluation and planning with the theological convictions underpinning resource church strategy in the first place.

**CHURCH SUPPORT HUB**

THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

# Key takeaways

- Sending reflects the Trinity: Mission is grounded in God's nature. Planting and revitalisation reflect the sending pattern between Father, Son, and Spirit.

- Revitalisation is communal: Success is health across the whole body of Christ, not simply growth in isolated churches.

- Ecclesiology matters: Anglican identity — broad, historic, diverse — must shape strategy, offering multiple legitimate expressions of sending.

- Networks and dioceses must coexist not compete: The modal and sodal dimensions of church life have always been in creative tension. Holding them together is essential.

- Discernment is crucial: Strategic priorities are deeply theological. Attention, prayer, and wisdom are needed to decide where and how to resource.