

Summary report

# **What can be expected of parish revitalisations?**

Eido Research

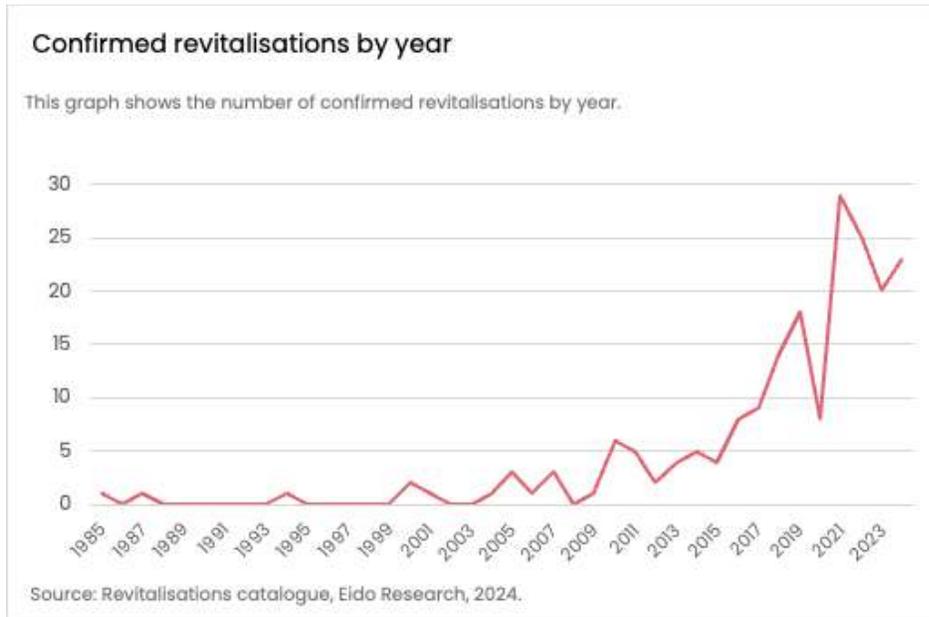
# Five key findings from this report

1. There have been at least **221 church revitalisations** through planting in the Church of England: more than half have been planted since 2020
2. After a revitalisation, median weekly attendance increases for the first three years (from about 50 to about 115), then plateaus thereafter. However, some larger revitalisations continue to grow past this point
3. Median child weekly attendance increases steadily: while revitalisations had 12 under 16-year-olds in attendance the year they were planted, this increases to 23 by year five. Nearly half of revitalisations (48 percent) will have a ministry to all ages (defined as 25 or more young people in attendance) by the fifth year after planting
4. **Analysis of Church of England attendance data does not support the theory that church revitalisations are reducing the attendance of nearby Anglican churches.** This is not to say that transfer growth that does not exist: merely that in the long run there is limited evidence of transfer growth reducing the attendance of neighbouring churches
5. Further research would be beneficial to better understand how revitalisations influence the dynamics of attendance in local areas as they are instigated and develop. Such research should include the experiences of church members and leaders beyond revitalisation leaders.

# Executive summary

## State of revitalisations

### General



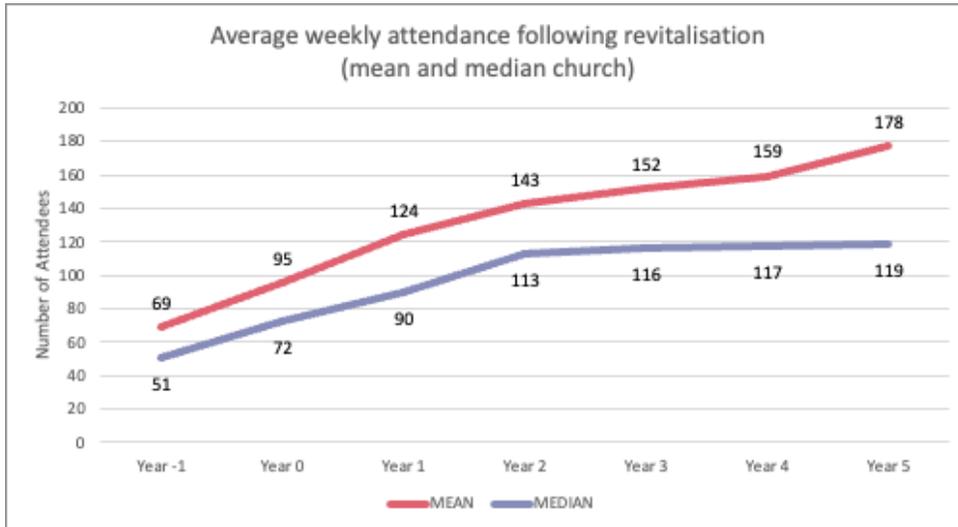
- More than 26,000 people currently attend church revitalisations: while revitalisations make up 1.5 percent of churches in the Church of England, they represent over 4 percent of the Church of England’s average weekly attendance
- London has over three times as many revitalisations as the diocese with the next highest number
- Half of revitalisations belong to the HTB network; HTB (the church) has individually planted 16 percent of revitalisations
- Revitalisation leaders are highly likely to be white men: 92 percent are white, and 82 percent are male
- 32 percent of revitalisations had received funding from the National Church Institutions; 72 percent were founded by a resource church

### Church tradition

- Sending churches tend to be evangelical and charismatic
- Receiving churches are more varied, although they are most commonly described as traditional, liturgical, and middle-of-the-road
- Churches which result from revitalisations tend to resemble the sending church in being evangelical and charismatic – although they are also more likely than sending churches to be described as liturgical and traditional

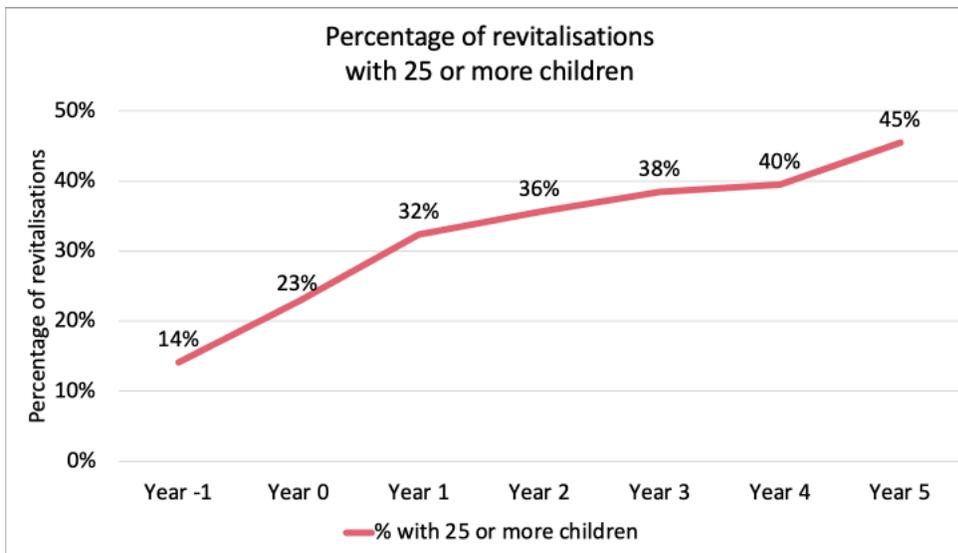
# What can be expected of a new revitalisation?

## General



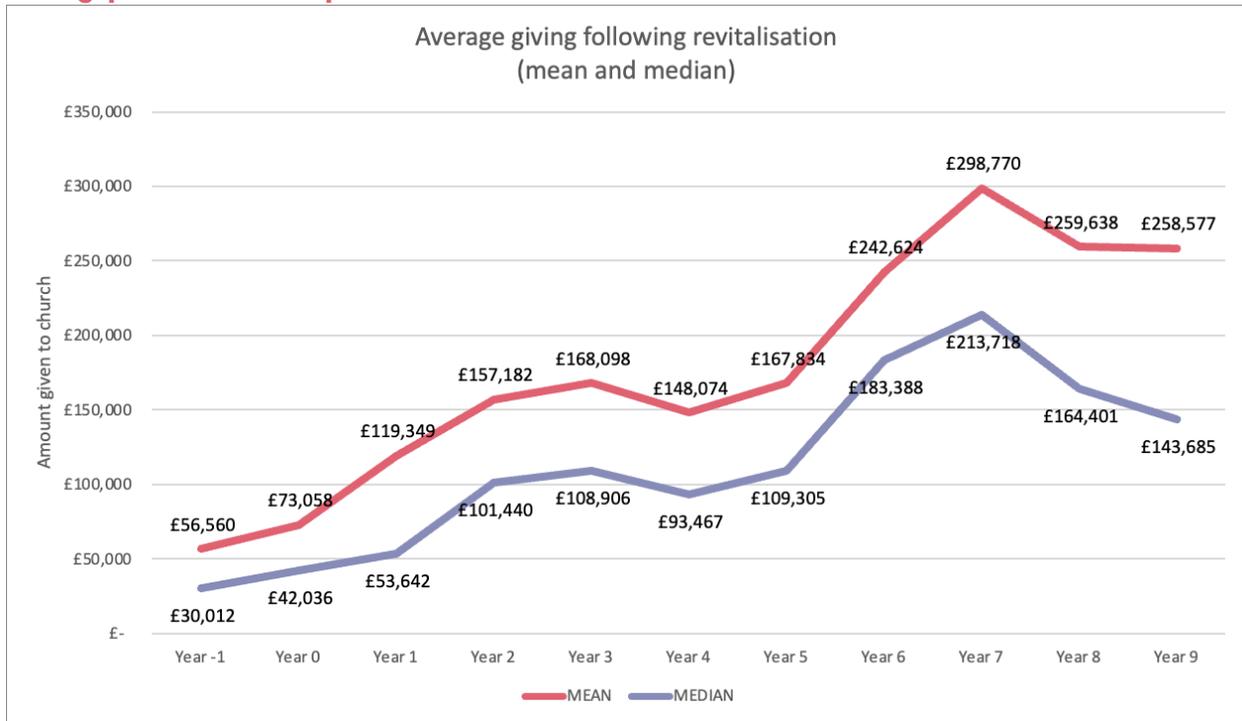
- Median weekly attendance increases for the first three years (from about 50 to about 115), then plateaus thereafter. However, some larger revitalisations continue to grow past this point

## U-16 attendance



- Median child weekly attendance also increases considerably: while revitalisations had a median of 6 under-16-year-olds the year before they were planted, this increases to 23 by year five
- Nearly half of revitalisations (45 percent) will have a ministry to all ages (defined as 25 or more young people in attendance) by the fifth year after planting

## Giving, parish share, expenditure



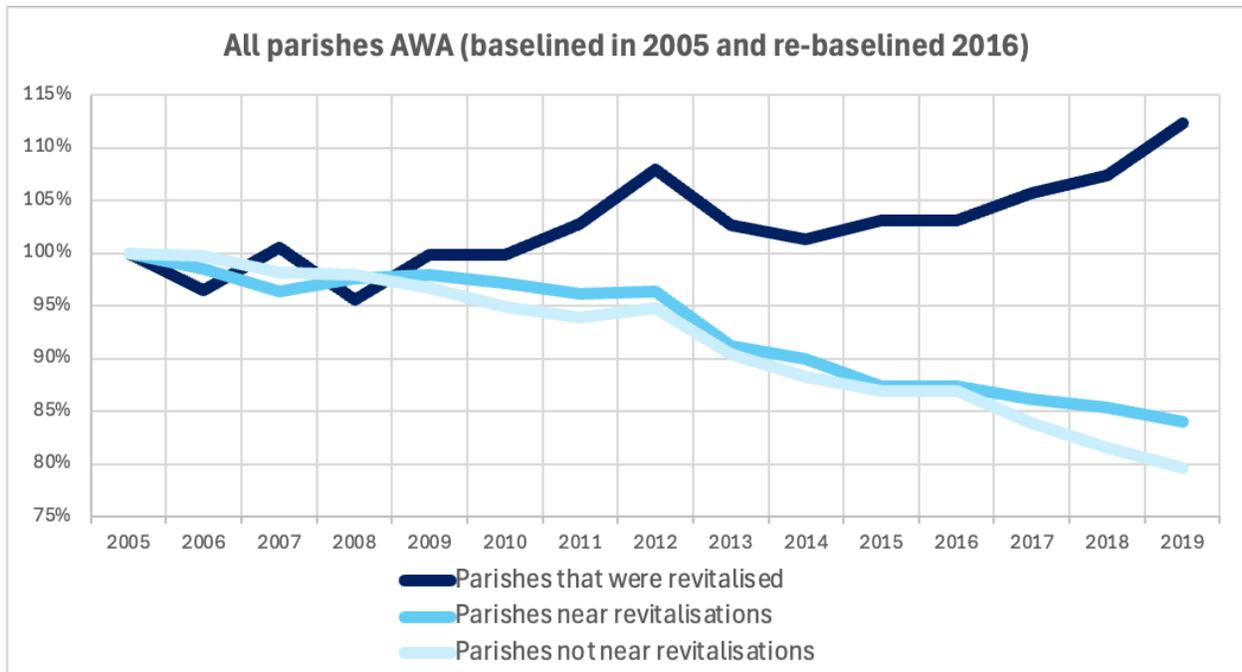
- Revitalisations' median giving increases to around £210k by the seventh year after they are planted (from a starting point of £30k) – then decreases
- Median parish share increases steadily, from over £26k before the revitalisation is founded, to nearly £79k by year nine. Wealthier revitalisations do not seem to pay additional parish share
- Median expenditure also increases sharply: from around £78k the year revitalisations are planted, to £340k by year seven. This may partly explain the financial pressure experienced by revitalisation leaders: each year, **most revitalisations spend about twice of what they receive through giving**

## Re-planting

- **38 percent** of revitalisations which have been in existence at least five years have planted another revitalisation

### Transfer growth and effect on neighbouring churches

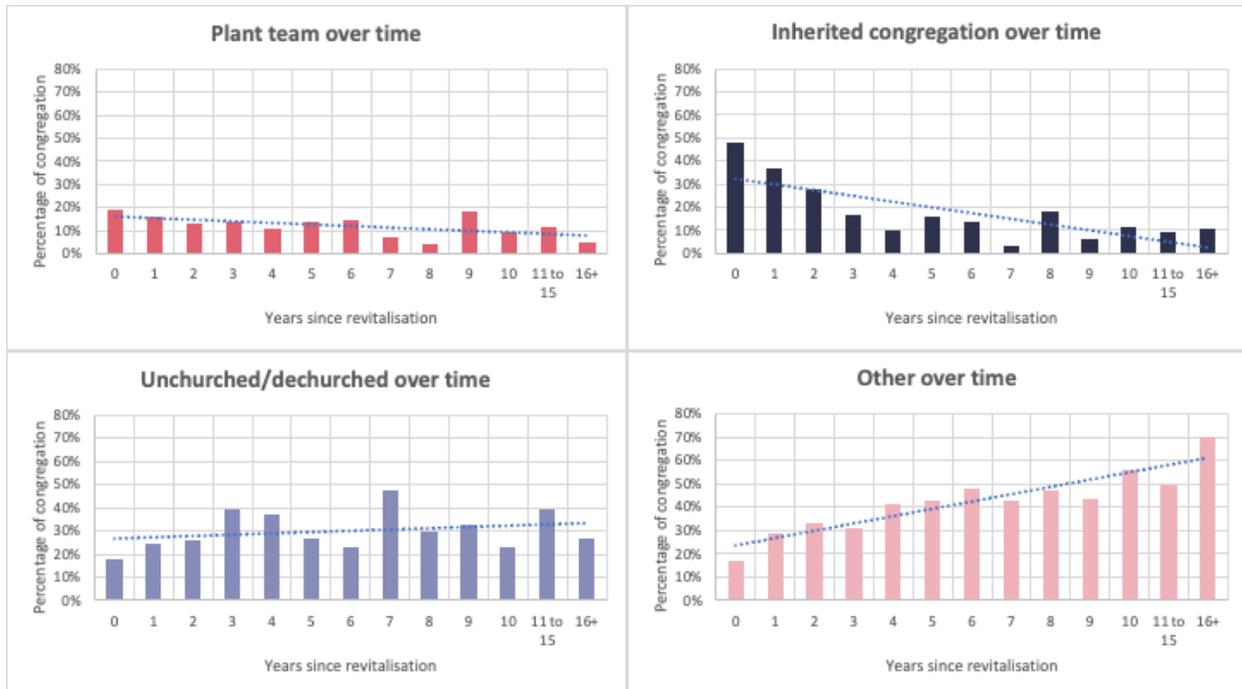
- **Analysis of Church of England attendance data does not support the theory that church revitalisations are reducing the attendance of nearby Anglican parishes**
- The following graph depicts changes in attendance for parishes since 2005:
  - Parishes which were or became revitalisations grew
  - Parishes which were not near revitalisations declined
  - **Parishes near revitalisations declined less**, retaining more of their 2005 attendance



- Overall, the fact that small churches near revitalisations declined less more balanced out the fact that large churches near revitalisations declined slightly more
- To further validate these findings, we built a multiple regression model which showed that there was evidence of a statistically significant effect on church attendance for being a revitalisation, being in an urban area, and a negative relationship for initial church size – **but not for being near a revitalisation**
- Leaders estimate that their congregations are composed of the following groups:

Plant team	Inherited congregation	Unchurched / Dechurched	Other
13%	20%	29% <sup>1</sup>	38%

<sup>1</sup> This proportion should be regarded as an upper limit given incentives for church leaders to overreport the number of formerly dechurched and unchurched people in their congregations.



- As a proportion of the wider congregation:
  - The plant team decreases gradually over time
  - The inherited congregation also decreases, but **much** more steeply than the plant team
  - Unchurched/dechurched people remain relatively constant, with significant variability
  - “Other” increases dramatically: from 17 percent the year revitalisations are founded to 70 percent for the oldest revitalisations
- It is unclear what is causing some of these changes:
  - Inherited congregations may be leaving or dying – or leaders may simply be better at remembering who was in their plant team than who was in their inherited congregation
  - The increase in “other” is something of a mystery. Is it transfer growth (even if this transfer growth isn’t reducing the attendance of nearby churches)? New people moving to areas near revitalised churches?

# How are revitalisations experienced qualitatively?

## Success

- Leaders attributed success in revitalisations to prioritising mission (especially evangelism), children's and families work, good relationships with the receiving church and the wider community, equipping laypeople to lead and serve, and prayer

**"Through outreach initiatives, missional communities, Alpha, [and] schools links... we have made lots of community connections, increased the church's visibility and seen growth and people coming to faith."**

## Barriers

- Leaders also discussed the following barriers to revitalisations:
  - A lack of funds
  - Tension with the receiving congregation
  - Issues with the building
  - A lack of lay leadership
  - Burnout

**"I spent a number of Sundays covering services in the receiving church. This was important in building rapport and relationship with both churches. I identified and talked through areas of disagreement with the receiving church as well as areas where my approach was different to that of my curacy church with the graft team - transparency here was vital."**

## Advice for leaders

- Interviewees advised revitalisation leaders to focus on listening and learning, avoid rushing, ensure that they have the right team, identify and build up leaders from the congregation, and to grow in self-knowledge and a recognition of their own weaknesses

**"There could be a reason things have happened for 20 years in church without changing and that the people worshipping there before you arrived appreciated that way of doing things."**

## Advice for churches considering receiving a revitalisation

- Interviewees advised receiving churches to be ready for a high degree of change, approach the revitalisation with humility, and consider the decision of whether to receive a revitalisation carefully

**"Know what you're getting into. Understand the intentions [of the planting team] and think 'is this really what you want?'"**

## Further research needed

Eido would suggest that further research be undertaken on:

1. **Transfer growth:** Eido would recommend that further research be commissioned on transfer growth **as reported by congregation members**. Much of the data reported here relies on national attendance data and church leaders' estimates – but what do congregation members say about their own church attendance patterns before joining the revitalisation? Are these patterns in line with what is reported here?
2. **How to work effectively with receiving churches:** This was one of the primary barriers to revitalisations' success. How might leaders and plant teams work more effectively with these congregations?
3. **How are revitalisations experienced by other groups?** Nearly all the qualitative research conducted for this report has focused on the perspectives of revitalisation leaders. Additional qualitative research could examine how revitalisations are experienced by:
  - The receiving congregation
  - The plant team
  - New people joining the revitalisation
  - Leaders and members of neighbouring churches