

Starting Something New

New Worshipping Communities
Good Practice Guide





Introduction

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We live in rapidly changing times which some have described not just as an “era of change” but a “change of era”. Some are more caught up in such changes than others, depending on circumstances. Not only so but the influences shaping people in our culture vary massively – for instance some in our society such as myself grew up without the internet while those born since 1997 are what you might call “digital natives”. Such observations underline the massive diversity of personal histories, lived experience, and self-understandings we find across the communities in which we seek to minister. All of this is to emphasise that while the Church of England is called to “proclaim the gospel afresh to every generation”, the variety we find in every generation means that there will need to be a diversity of approaches sensitive to the differences we find in our communities and conscious that some ways of proclaiming and the vehicles used for such proclamation will be more accessible and fruitful than others.

Hence the need for different ways of doing and being Church to ensure as wide a spectrum of people have access to the Good News and the Gospel as possible in ways which are reachable for them.

Blessedly New Worshipping Communities (NWCs) are a Spirit-led response to this need and with over 1450 NWCs generated in 2025 across the country we are seeing some really imaginative and effective ways of

reaching those otherwise unreached by the Gospel. The innovation, creativity and vibrancy in these NWCs is a cause for celebration and thanks to God, as is the encouraging responsiveness to them, whether it be Bubble Church, Forest Church, Toast Church or all manner of different expressions.

But what are NWCs? They have as their purpose the worship of Jesus Christ and the aim of helping people grow in their faith, especially those with no previous engagement. Its practices include some of prayer, scripture, praise, sacrament, and acts of service. NWCs meet regularly, sometimes but not necessarily in a church building and they are connected with the wider Church through the parish church, deanery, or diocese.

You will find a rich variety of NWCs in this guide, and hopefully this will catalyse your own prayerful reflection on how it is that God might be calling you and your Christian community to generate a NWC. Crucially this involves important questions of discernment. In particular questions such as “what is God up to in our community?”; “who is God sending us?” ;“Who are we being sent to?”; “How are we being equipped?” and “How then shall we respond and join in with God’s work?”

God is on the move in our Christian communities and it’s clear to me that NWCs are part of God’s move – let’s join in!

Good News Stories

We’ve got some stories here from churches that may not be all too dissimilar to yours. We hope you’re encouraged by these examples where people have stepped out in starting something new and have seen new life and flourishing as a result.



1

Bubble Church (*Ascension Balham*)

When we launched *Bubble Church* in Balham, it was really an experiment — born in the middle of the pandemic out of a longing to connect with families who weren't part of church life. We knew there were so many young families nearby, most of whom had never set foot inside a church, and we wondered whether we could offer something joyful, interactive, and full of life. From the start, it was about creating a short, puppet-packed, Jesus-centred Sunday experience that felt both fun and profound.

Our vision was simple: a space where adults and children could worship together, experience genuine hospitality, and discover the good news of Jesus in a language they understood. The circular “bubble” carpet became our community's heartbeat — families sitting together, laughing, singing, praying, and growing in

faith. Over time, parents started joining the serving team, kids became puppeteers, and discipleship began to take root in unexpected ways.

We've learned a lot along the way — about the value of preparation, the power of repetition for children, and the importance of quality and welcome. It's been amazing to see families who once saw church as “not for them” now calling it home. Every week, we invite people to “Pray, Help, Give,” and it's transforming lives — not just theirs, but ours too. I'll never forget one mum who told us, “I'd go so far as to say Bubble Church saved me.” We started with none; now more than a hundred people gather each Sunday. It's humbling, joyful, and all to God's glory.

THREADS – BE WILLING TO FAIL

Trying something new doesn't always result in success. Don't let this put you off trying again and again. It's amazing how the pressure can be taken off just by saying at the outset that something is an experiment. Be willing to stop regroup and try something else. It doesn't mean you're a failure or there's any shame if something doesn't work; learn what you can from the experience and keep trying.



2

Pub Missional Community (St Peter's, Oadby)

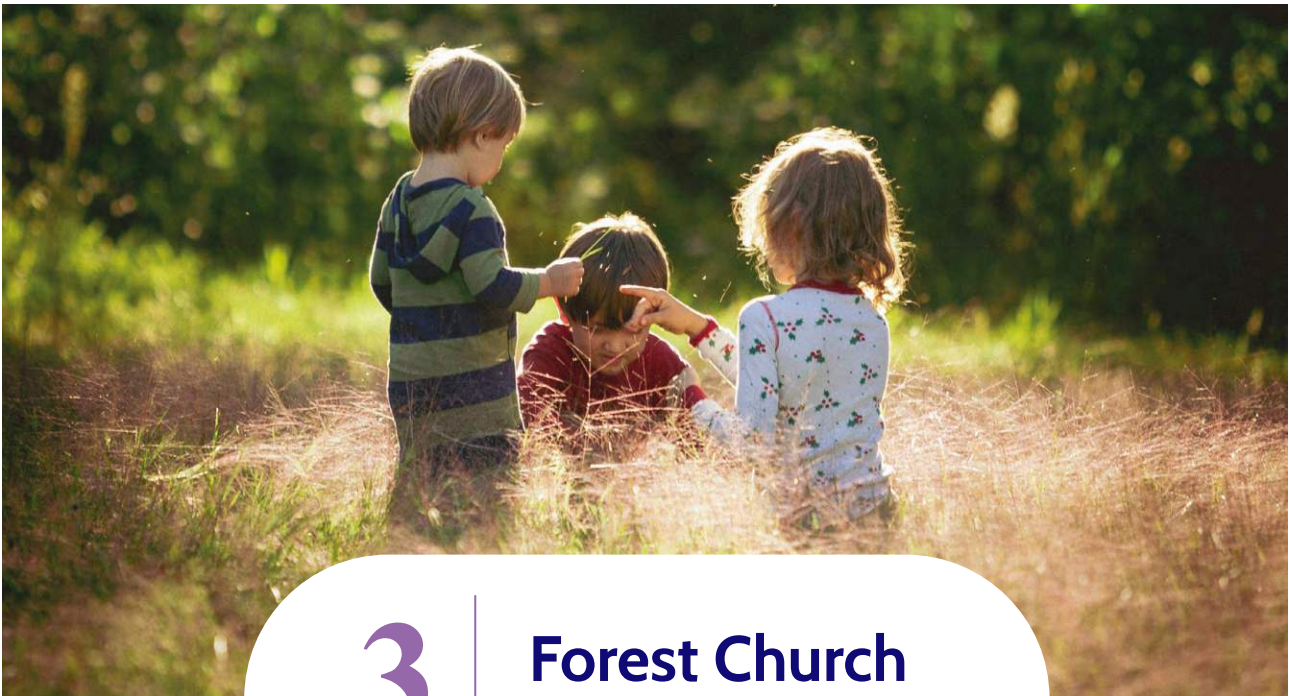
Honestly, there was no grand plan. It all began when a mum and daughter — Emma and Ella — turned up at Christmas and decided to stick around. I ran an Alpha course with them, and they both came to faith in Jesus. When they invited friends from their local pub to their baptism, I realised something was happening. So I asked Emma if the landlord might let us host Alpha in the pub — and he said yes!

Soon, we had a mix of pub regulars, newcomers, and a few church folks gathering weekly to talk about life, faith, and Jesus over a pint. The atmosphere was relaxed, authentic, and surprisingly sacred. When Alpha finished, no one wanted to stop, so we kept meeting — using Bible studies and *The Chosen* — and people kept coming. Some were baptised and confirmed; others just came with honest questions.

What's amazed me most is how God uses ordinary relationships to open hearts. Discipleship didn't end at baptism — it spread naturally through friendship circles. My biggest lesson has been to make space — space to listen, to follow the Spirit's lead, and to let mission grow organically. Sometimes clergy life feels full of demands and services, but here, mission just unfolded in front of us. The pub group has become a place of salvation, healing, leadership, and laughter — pizza and prayer all mixed together. It turns out, when Jesus shows up in a pub, people listen.

THREADS – WHAT IS GOD UP TO IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

You may be feeling motivated to start something new, but aren't sure what it is you should do. One of the common threads that the churches we've heard from here have in common is that they spent time prayerfully looking at their local community to see what God was already up to amongst them. Have a look around your wider community, try praying and asking God to show you what it is He is already doing. It may well be that God has already started something for you to pick up and join him in doing.



3

Forest Church (St Margaret's, Topsham)

Forest Church began simply by listening — really listening — to the families around us. We realised that many felt out of place in traditional church settings. Some had children with additional needs; others found Sunday mornings too full of sports or simply too formal. So we started imagining what worship could look like outdoors, around a campfire, surrounded by trees and laughter.

Using ideas from *Godly Play*, *Messy Church*, and *Open the Book*, we shaped a space for families to explore Bible stories through creativity, reflection, and nature. There's no pressure, no jargon — just warmth, wonder, and curiosity. We meet in the forest school section of the local primary, where everyone is known by name. Over time, word spread — through parents' networks, WhatsApp groups, and playground chatter. Before long, a football team turned up, then their friends.

We've learned that people are drawn not by polished programmes but by genuine kindness and joy. We plan carefully — with safeguarding, clear communication, and a strong team — but what matters most is that people feel seen and safe. Early on, there were just three families. We loved them dearly, even if that was all it ever became. But three years later, we're welcoming around 85 people a month. The key is simple: listen well, stay joyful, and just be normal. Don't script it. Don't force it. Let God grow it.

THREADS – SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding needs to be a key consideration from the outset when starting something new. One of the threads we see running through churches that have thriving children's ministries is that they take safeguarding seriously and communicate that to parents/carers. It's important to ensure you have the appropriate safeguarding measures in place for what it is that you're looking to start. A drop-in prayer café, for example, will have different requirements to a Forest Church or to a Bishop's Mission Order (BMO). Have a chat with your Parish Safeguarding Lead, or if that isn't possible reach out to your Diocesan Safeguarding Team for some guidance. You can find templates and resources on the Church of England website here: <https://www.churchofengland.org/safeguarding/policy-practice-guidance/templates-and-resources>



4 | Seeds of Hope (St Mary Stoke, Ipswich)

Seeds of Hope grew out of our church's food pantry. As people waited for the doors to open each week, we saw an opportunity — not to “preach at” anyone, but to create a space for conversation, prayer, and community. So we gathered a small team, set out some tables, and began offering a short 30-minute time of sharing, reflection, and encouragement. It's simple: tea, welcome, Scripture, and questions that matter.

We wanted everyone to feel equal and at ease — sitting around a table, not rows. Volunteers invite people personally, and we make sure there's always room for honest questions. The conversations often flow from the Bible readings into life — grief, hope, purpose, and joy. Many who've joined have since come to Sunday services, been baptised or confirmed, and found deeper faith through Seeds of Hope.

The lessons? Show up, even if no one else does. Keep the invitation open. Be prayerful, consistent, and patient — because God is always at work, even unseen. We've also learned that discipleship flourishes when people realise they're already known by God. We speak as though that's true — because it is. Over time, volunteers have grown in confidence and faith too; it's transformed us as much as those we serve. We measure success not by numbers but by faithfulness. Week by week, we keep sowing seeds — and trusting God for the harvest.

THREADS – WHAT'S ALREADY IN YOUR HANDS?

Sometimes we may think that to start something new we'll need to get hold of new resources, equipment or find funding. Many new worshipping communities come about out of what people already have available to them. Consider what it is that is already in your hands and available to you that you might be able to utilise in starting something new.



5

Sinfin Moor New Housing Estate (Derby - Greenhouse)

When I first moved onto the new housing estate in Sinfin Moor, I was one of only a handful of residents — the beginnings of a development that will eventually welcome 4,500 new families. My commission from the parish was simple but stretching: build community. With so many people arriving from so many places, most with no prior church connection, it felt both daunting and full of possibility.

My first instinct was simply to knock on doors. With only five houses occupied, it didn't take long to meet the "peacemakers and gatekeepers" — the neighbours who helped set the tone for the whole area. A simple suggestion to meet for coffee quickly grew into a weekly "Meet the Neighbours" morning, which is still going two years later. What I discovered was that people were hungry for connection after the isolating years of Covid. Small gestures — welcome cards, sunflower seeds, even secretly delivering daffodils at Easter — opened unexpected doors (even if a doorbell camera did give me away on Facebook!).

As more families moved in, the estate blossomed into a richly multicultural community. That changed my ministry in beautiful ways: joining in Diwali celebrations, listening deeply, and trusting the Holy Spirit to guide me into unfamiliar spaces. My approach became a kind of joyful improvisation — no fixed plan, just showing up as a neighbour and noticing where God was already at work.

Out of this listening came all sorts of moments: a street party of 40 people, a buzzing WhatsApp group, and a Halloween "Garage of Light" where 70 children collected "Bags of Hope." These gatherings sparked natural conversations about faith in ways that felt gentle, invitational, and real.

Over time, a small group of Christians from the estate began forming a new worshipping community we now call Food & Faith. Using TableTalk cards, shared meals, and communion, it's slowly becoming a place of belonging and discipleship. For those completely new to faith, a simple Walk & Talk group offers a gentler pathway at their own pace.

One of the greatest joys has been watching lay people join in the ministry. I'm mindful that my curacy will soon come to an end, so enabling others to lead is essential. Greenhouse Gatherings have been a lifeline in this — a place to reflect, learn, and be encouraged alongside others figuring things out as they go.

If I've learned anything, it's that new housing estates are unique mission fields. You don't need to arrive with a grand pioneering strategy — just a willingness to be present early, build relationships, and love your neighbours. That's where everything begins. And honestly, that's where the miracles happen.

THREADS – TEAMS

So many churches report that the key to any flourishing new worshipping community is the team. A great way to get started is to eat, pray and read the Scriptures together, for instance, through *Lectio Divina* or *Dwelling in the Word*. This is where the inspiration and ideas can often arise. Getting equipped together as a team makes a difference, too, through a training community like Greenhouse, or one of the partners mentioned in the Resources section.



6

Don Urdu Fellowship (St James Church, Doncaster)

Our new fellowship launched in December 2023 due to a missional and pastoral need. There were people—especially from South Asian and other cultural backgrounds—who felt spiritually disconnected due to language, culture, or unfamiliar church expressions. We decided to create a new space where people could encounter Christ that felt accessible, relational, and culturally understood. We started with 5-10 people, a mix of Urdu-speaking families and local English-speaking members linked through St James Church and wider community ties. It grew organically through prayer gatherings, shared meals, and pastoral connections.

What started as a single fellowship has now grown into a vision for shared worship across languages and mutual learning between cultures as a visible expression of the kingdom’s diversity. As our number grew and the English congregation was struggling to keep the church

running, we met together. To fulfil their needs and keep the church alive, we merged in May 2025. Since we have one PCC, the Sunday morning service is in English and Farsi. On the 2nd and 4th Sundays of the month, the Urdu congregation meets at 2.30pm. We are now one church with two congregations.

A key learning has been not doing ministry to people, but with people. A member of our church said for the first time, “I can both pray in my own language and feel at home”. Another said, “this church feels like family, not just a service.” An intercultural church is built on trust, hospitality, and presence, not just programmes. Empowering people from different backgrounds is essential for authenticity and sustainability. We see this every week. It all began with starting small and relationally, listening deeply to the community and being willing to be patient as trust takes time.

THREADS – BUILD PATIENTLY

Patience is vital when beginning a new worshipping community, and this is true for an intentionally intercultural church. Structure and programmes are helpful, but friendships and sincere consistent connections are the foundation of new churches. Praying for the spiritual work is key, not just strategy alone. This puts us in a position of trust for God to work.

Step by step

Most new worshipping communities will go through similar stages of preparation and development; here are 4 steps that might help to guide you through:

1

Paying Attention

Starting something new often begins with curiosity and a prayerful listening journey; what is God already up to in your community?

2

People

Don't start this alone, team is crucial. Gather with others to eat, pray and read the Scriptures as you reflect on where to start. Who is God sending to you?

3

Purpose

Try to plan in from the start what discipleship and sustainable leadership/ministry will look like. What is the purpose of the work? Who are you being sent to?

4

Partners

Support is vital, make the most of available resources, initiatives and training. Have a look at the directory at the end of this guide to see some examples that might be able to help you.

Resources

Here are a selection of different options that might inspire and enable you in starting something.

Starting Point	Options
Children and families	<p>Bubble Church – a short creative service with puppets for children and families/carers. (www.bubblechurch.org)</p> <p>Messy Church – an all-age expression of church that gathers families to make, to eat and to celebrate God. (www.messychurch.brf.org.uk)</p> <p>Choir Church - a model for new worshipping communities, built around children’s choirs in schools, led in partnership with local churches. (www.choirchurch.com)</p> <p>RSCM – The Royal School for Church Music enables the flourishing of church music through guidance and resources. (www.rscm.org.uk)</p>
Schools and young people	<p>Flourish – a new worshipping community embedded in the life of a school, with young people leading, in partnership with a local parish. (www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/new-network-worshipping-communities-schools-and-colleges-launches-pilot-phase)</p> <p>Missional Youth Church Network (MYCN) – new worshipping communities in third spaces, such as after school clubs, often working in low-income areas. (https://www.mycn.org.uk)</p>
Starting on an estate	<p>CCX Estates Mission (Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication) – support, resources and courses to help launch new communities on estates. (https://ccx.org.uk/estates/)</p> <p>Proximity – a hub to support urban mission. (https://proximityhub.org)</p> <p>Centre for Theology and Community – asset-based community development and mission, working in the sacramental tradition (https://www.ctcuk.org)</p>
Starting in homes or with a lay team	<p>Myriad – training and mentoring for launching a lay-led new worshipping community (https://myriad.church)</p>
Planting a new church or revitalising a parish	<p>CCX (Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication) – support, resources and courses for church planting (https://ccx.org.uk/)</p> <p>New Wine – support for planting in the New Wine network (https://new-wine.org/pioneeringandplanting/)</p>

Starting Point	Options
<p>Connecting with a new group and developing something new</p>	<p>FX – Resources for new communities in brave spaces, including ideas, coaching and the mission shaped podcast. (https://freshexpressions.org.uk/get-connected/the-mission-shaped-podcast/)</p> <p>Greenhouse – coaching and support groups for starting a new community through a listening process (https://www.churchofengland.org/greenhouse-support)</p> <p>Godsend – a practical toolkit to help you form new Christian communities with people who were not previously attending church (https://godsend.cloud)</p> <p>CMS – training and support for pioneers and support for parishes in pioneering mission (https://churchmissionsociety.org/)</p>
<p>Building on an existing social or service initiative</p>	<p>Soul Space - for groups that host outreach activities and who want to gently introduce a spiritual element into these spaces (cofe.io/soulspace)</p>
<p>All cultures together, or a specific cultural focus</p>	<p>Intercultural Church – supported by the Anglican Network for Intercultural Churches (https://anic.org.uk)</p>
<p>With older people</p>	<p>Hymns we love – an evangelistic series using hymns (https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/series/hymns-we-love/)</p> <p>Anna Chaplaincy – a network for developing chaplaincy for later life (https://www.brf.org.uk/what-we-do/anna-chaplaincy/)</p>
<p>Outdoors / Sports / Active</p>	<p>Forest Church (https://www.facebook.com/groups/forestchurch)</p> <p>Messy Church Goes Wild (https://www.messychurch.brf.org.uk/latest/projects/messy-church-goes-wild/)</p> <p>Football Church (https://churchsupporthub.org/all-resources/how-to-start-a-football-outreach-project-and-why-it-works/)</p> <p>Sweaty Church (https://sweatychurch.org.uk)</p> <p>Bridge the Gap – Helping churches to run football groups (https://bridgethegapfootball.org/)</p> <p>Mountain Pilgrims (https://www.mountainpilgrims.org.uk)</p> <p>Hazelnut Community Farm - Helping churches to create eco communities on their land. (https://hazelnutcommunityfarm.com)</p>

Starting Point	Options
<p>Digital</p>	<p>The Way – digital content for youth https://www.instagram.com/thewayuk/?hl=en</p> <p>Emmaus Gaming – Evangelism in the online space https://www.emmaus.gg/</p>
<p>Safeguarding</p>	<p>thirtyone:eight - cover many aspects of safeguarding from DBS checks and training, to advice, guidance and support. https://thirtyoneeight.org/</p>

Training

<p>For work with Young People</p>	<p>Youthscape Launchpad – Training for clergy who currently have no children or young people in their church. https://www.youthscape.co.uk/launchpad</p> <p>Youthscape Essentials – Training for anyone working with young people. https://www.youthscape.co.uk/yse/home</p>
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Produced in collaboration with **Faith In The North**



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