

# SDF Learning Summary - New Resource Churches

March 2021

Resource churches are having impact in growing new disciples (particularly among young people), developing spiritual growth, and social action. They are helping renew the Church through planting, financial giving, leadership development, and changing diocesan culture. For resource churches to succeed, diocesan leadership needs to be disruptive; the resource churches need opportunities to serve the wider church; and resource churches need to reconfigure themselves to break into a second phase of growth.

## Definitions:

A Resource Church is a church which:

- Is designated by the bishop
- Works strategically across a city or town
- Plants and revitalises, and is resourced to do so
- Develops leaders for mission, particularly vocations
- Develops resources for the wider church

Different kinds of resource churches include:

- **New city centre resource church** – a freshly started church for an urban area
- **Large church to resource church** – an existing church is resourced to plant
- **Rural resource church** – a hub from which new congregations can be formed
- **Market town resource church** – focuses mission, including in surrounding villages
- **Mission areas resource church** – given a specific group of parishes to resource

The learning in this note focuses on the first of these groups, though brings in relevant information from the rest.

## Relevant SDF projects:

<b>2016</b> // Derby: Resourcing Derby City	<b>2018</b> // Lincoln: Urban Centre renewal
<b>2017</b> // Southwell & Nottingham: Resource Churches	<b>2018</b> // Portsmouth: Resource Churches
<b>2017</b> // Bristol: St Nicholas Bristol	<b>2018</b> // Sheffield: Resourcing Churches
<b>2017</b> // Winchester: Mission Action – Invest for Growth	<b>2019</b> // Exeter: Mission in the City of Exeter
<b>2018</b> // Bristol: Swindon Resource Church	<b>2019</b> // Lichfield: Telford New Minster
<b>2018</b> // Newcastle: Revitalising Ministry	<b>2020</b> // Birmingham: People and Places Church Planting in Shirley & Pype Hayes
<b>2018</b> // Worcester: Resourcing Churches	<b>2020</b> // Liverpool: Missing Generation
<b>2018</b> // Blackburn: Preston City Centre	<b>2020</b> // Manchester: Revitalising Manchester diocese
<b>2018</b> // Leeds: Leeds & Bradford	<b>2020</b> // Winchester: Mission Action Phase 2

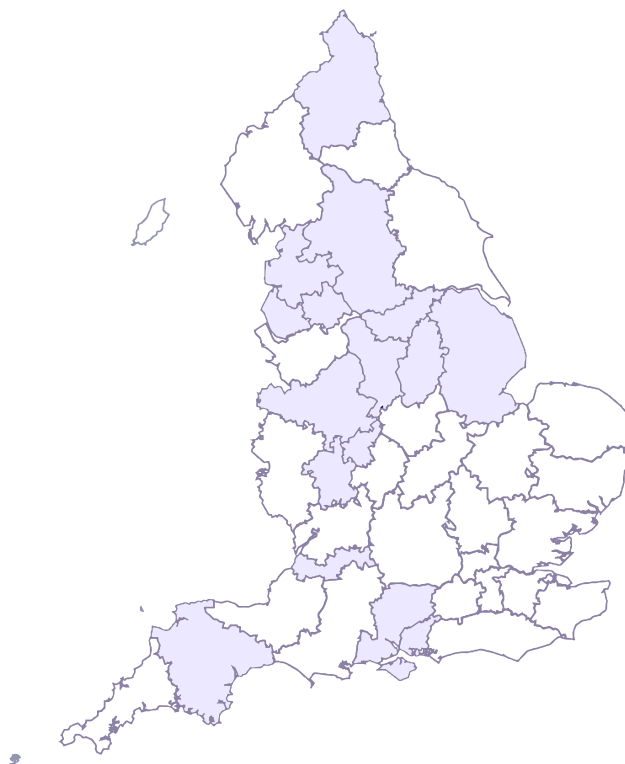
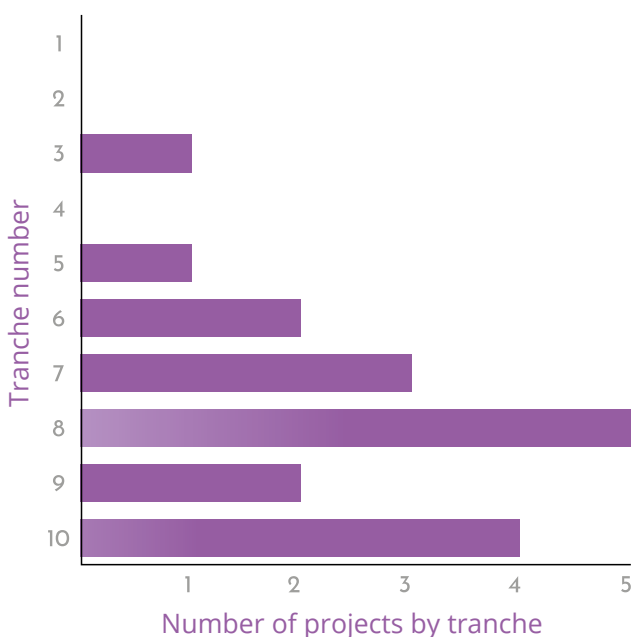
The learning in this note also draws on a 2014–16 funding stream which funded resource churches in Birmingham, Lincoln, Bournemouth, Salford, Gateshead, Plymouth and Coventry.

**NUMBER OF SDF PROJECTS: 18**

**WHICH DIOCESES HAVE THESE PROJECTS?**

**TOTAL AMOUNT OF SDF FUNDING: £32.3M**

**DISTRIBUTION BETWEEN SDF TRANCHES:**



# Outcomes and Impact - what do these projects achieve?

## QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE OF IMPACT AND OUTCOMES:

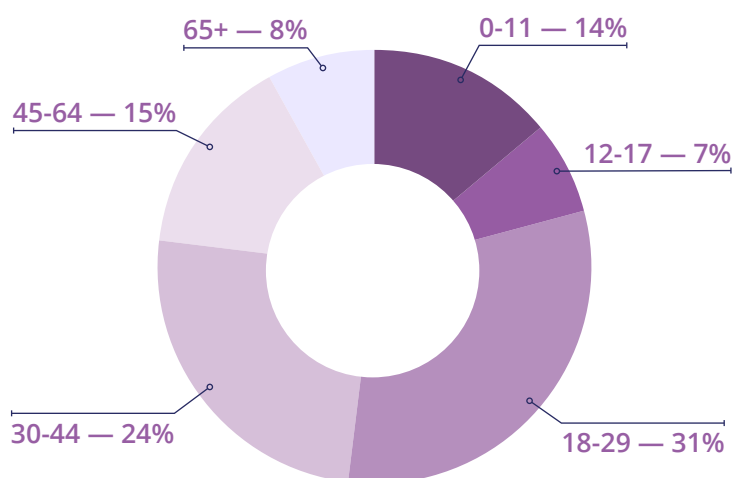
Resource churches have been surveyed to provide some evidence of their impact, and this monitoring is ongoing, as with all SDF funded projects.

### CHURCH ATTENDANCE GROWTH

Resource churches have increased attendance by an average of **400** after three years. There is no evidence of an aggregate negative impact on bordering parishes, on average, though there are individual examples and care should be taken in consulting locally. Overall, the area increases in attendance.

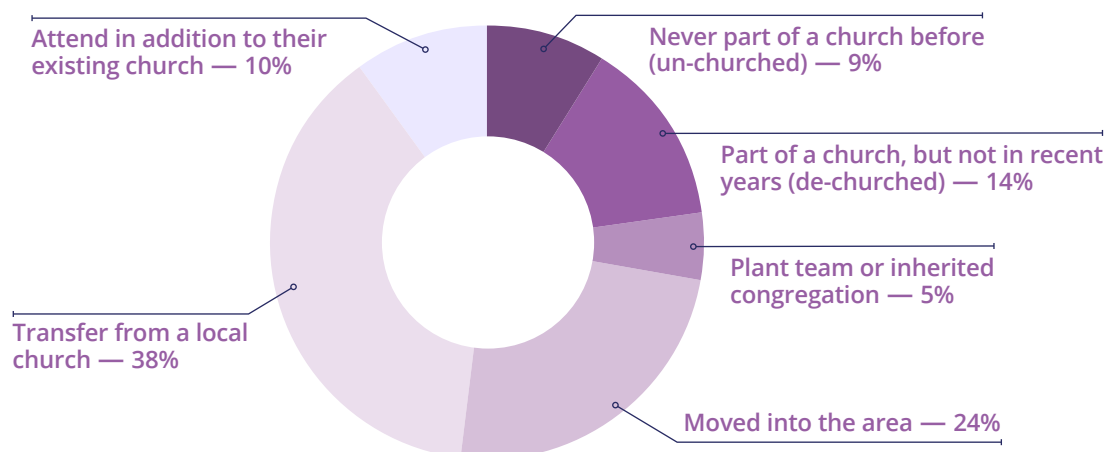
### AGE PROFILE OF RESOURCE CHURCHES

The age profile of these growing attendees is much younger than the church in general including a high level of children and young people. A majority of resource church attendees are under 30; a majority of Church of England attendees are over 55.



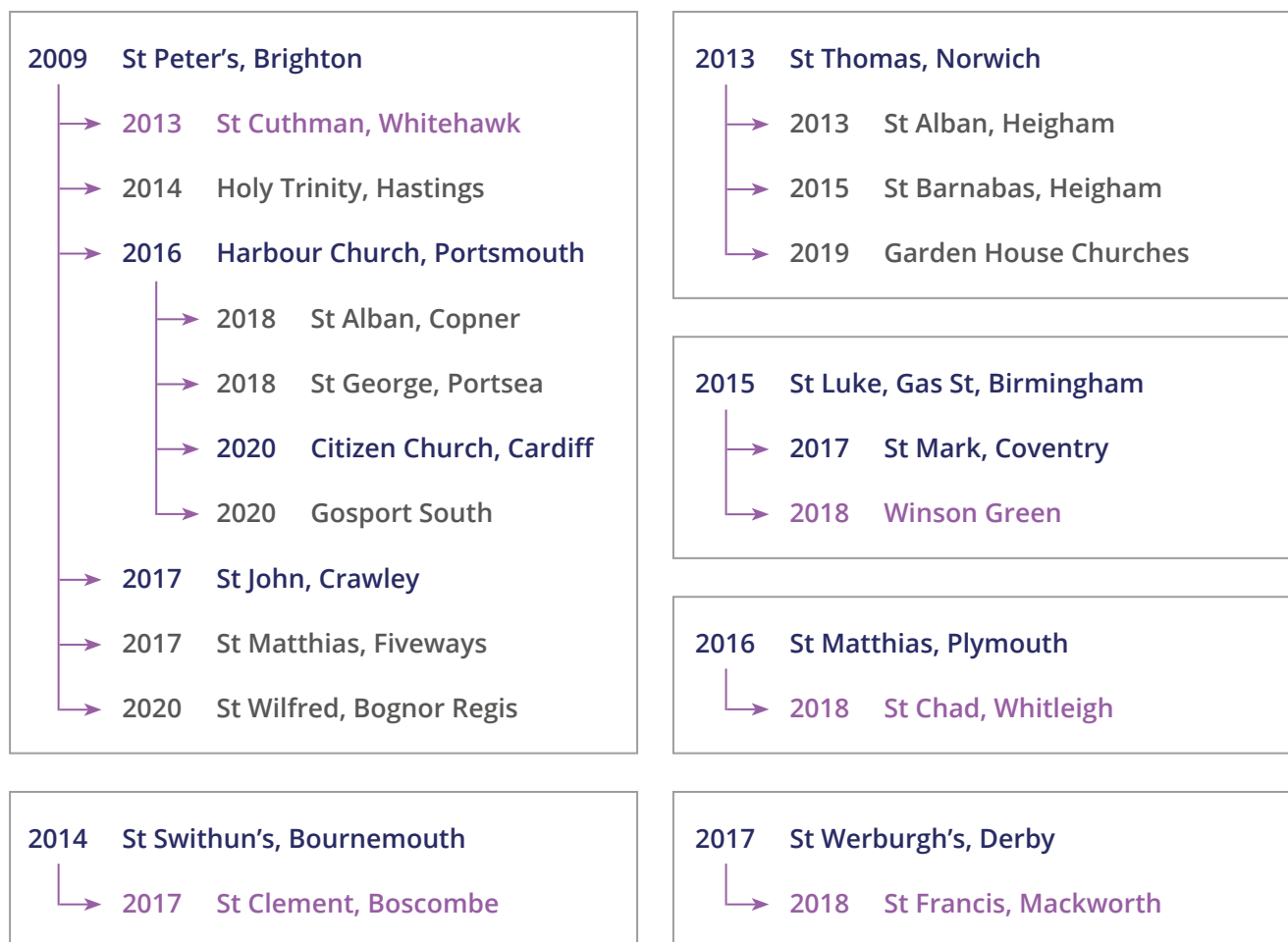
### BACKGROUND OF CHURCH ATTENDEES

The church background of attendees at resource churches is shown in the below chart. There are some people who moved from other churches in the area, but a majority of attendees weren't going to another local church before, and a quarter are un- or de- churching. Some of those who have moved into the area might not have otherwise gone to a church in that town – for example students where research indicates that typically there is a drop-off in churchgoing when they go to university.



## CHURCH PLANTING

A key objective of resource churches is church planting. On average resource churches plant twice every three years. Most church plants are in deprived areas including estates, or resource churches in other towns and cities.



■ Resource Church ■ Church plant in a deprived area ■ Other church plants

## SOCIAL IMPACT PRE-COVID

Some counts of annual social action work in some resource churches are shown below, with stories of this impact later in the paper.

Over 2500 homeless shelter nights	Over 200 prison visits
Over 80 on recovery courses	Over 100 baskets of basics for new mothers
Over 8200 meals provided to the homeless	Over 140 ex-offenders mentored
Events for over 270 women in vulnerable situations	Over 6000 Foodbank meals provided
Over 800 items of clothing distributed from clothes banks	

## VOCATIONS TO ORDAINED MINISTRY

Resource churches are also contributing towards additional vocations to ordained ministry – across 25 surveyed resource churches:

- 97 people are in initial discussions about a vocation to ordained ministry
- 58 people are in contact with a DDO
- 80 have been accepted at a BAP (in the last 5 years)
- 49 ordinands have been trained
- 2 planted resource churches host a theological college (St Mellitus South West and East Midlands)

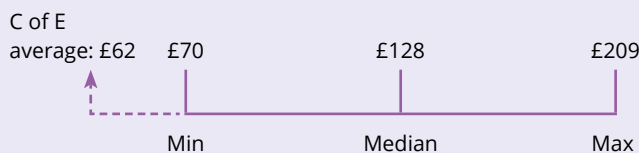
## FINANCIAL GIVING

Resource churches have levels of financial giving which are greater than a typical parish church, and increase the overall amount of giving in an area without impacting neighbouring parishes.

The median resource church has £200,000 p.a. additional giving by year three, with no evidence of a negative impact on bordering parishes.

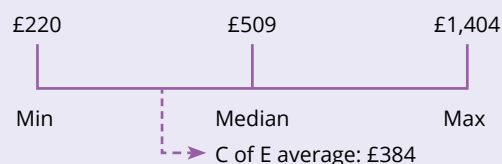
### Regular giving per giver per month

*Based on 23 resource churches (planted and existing churches)*



### Total giving per churchgoer per year

*Based on 20 resource churches (planted and existing churches)*



## Qualitative examples of impact

### SOCIAL IMPACT OF RESOURCE CHURCHES

Some resource churches have been able to lead in social action in their towns because of their scale and town-wide focus. They have brought together other churches and partners to enable significant church-led social action initiatives.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, many resource churches were involved in the Love Thy Neighbour programme, a national, city-focused and locally tailored response of churches and other civil society partners to social challenges emerging from lockdown.

Preston Minster is one example of these, having started in September 2019. The leaders and congregation of the Minster have been delivering 500 meals a week. Its building has been transformed into a depot to serve the poor. The police are now directly referring all needs to the Minster as they recognise the church is able to respond and have a food parcel delivered anywhere in the city within 90 minutes. They are also helping local pharmacies deliver medicines to isolated and vulnerable people who cannot access them for themselves; phoning isolated people in need; working with a variety of local advice and training organisations to help unemployed young people, troubled families, those facing debt and other financial problems. To facilitate this work, they are seeking local financial support and sponsorship from businesses.

Someone who is part of the church team gave this update: "Yesterday I called John (*name changed*), a 49-year-old man with severe disabilities who hasn't left his home in five years. When the lockdown started, demand for online deliveries meant that he couldn't order food. Once the food in his house was used up, he relied on water and sucking on used teabags. Every time he rang a number for help, he was given the number of someone else to call. In the end he called the police and they called us. Due to his very specific dietary requirements they didn't know if we could help. Every single item he asked for, no matter how random, we had something in our church. The only thing he didn't mention was fresh milk. 'Would you like me to get you 4 pints of milk?' I asked. He began to cry. 'I thought I had been forgotten and that I was going to die alone. I would love some milk.'"

This is one example of how resource churches have been serving their communities. Other resource churches have been involved in serving their communities in other ways through Covid-19, e.g. in Andover organising phone calls to patients referred by GP services, or in Portsmouth offering delivery of food and other supplies, with details of wider support, with delivery within 24 hours.

Other resource churches were undertaking social action before the pandemic, with the expectation of their young congregations being that this sort of action is a natural outworking of authentic discipleship. As well as the examples shown above, some others include; St Thomas Norwich who are taking a lead on fighting modern slavery through the STN trust, including support for local individuals affected by slavery and work bringing partners in Norfolk and church networks to advocate structural changes. St George's Gateshead has worked with the local council, police and schools to address problems relating to holiday hunger and learning loss, as well as providing after-school clubs and boxes of essential supplies to new mothers.

The strengths of resource churches in social action are town-wide focus and scale. This needs to be complemented by smaller scale initiatives, responsive to local needs. To some extent, in enabling church planting (e.g. on estates) resource churches are also supporting this work.

## **RESOURCE CHURCHES ARE DEEPENING DISCIPLESHIP IN THEIR CONGREGATIONS**

Half of the worshipping communities (48%) of newly planted resource churches are in small groups for midweek discipleship. Because of the scale of resource churches, they are able to devote more resources to programmatic forms of discipleship. Similarly, because they are new start-ups and planting churches, there are more opportunities for the congregation to be involved in leadership compared to more stable congregations.

At St Matthias Plymouth, a course was created called 'join the adventure' for new members which introduces the vision of the church, allows members to meet church leaders and make friends, and invited attendees to undertake a personality and gifting assessment to help each individual on their personal discipleship journey, and to use their gifts in the service of the church.

KXC, planted in London, have created and used Pattern. Pattern is a tool to equip groups of 3 or 4 people to meet up regularly and contend for the kinds of patterns in their lives that will help one another be with Jesus, become like him and do the things he did. It draws on historic practice of the church in meditation, reflection, and prayer.

Resource churches have enabled congregations of a wide range of traditions. At St John's Crawley, the traditional sung eucharist has grown at the same time as newer services with contemporary worship.

## **RESOURCE CHURCHES ARE TRANSFORMATIVE FOR THE WIDER DIOCESE**

Dioceses reflect that resource churches are having wider impact on their work beyond the outcomes they generate directly. Many have reflected that the process of the diocesan team agreeing the start of the resource church have changed conversations about mission in the senior team, creating more conversations about investing in mission.

The skills required of a diocesan team to start a resource church are increasing the impact of other parts of their work. Other churches in the diocese are seeking to plant and the missional energy across the diocese has increased. Church revitalisation has become an additional option which can be discussed alongside closure or merger in parishes at a low ebb, including in deprived areas.

In the city of Leeds, the Bishop of Kirkstall meets regularly with five resource churches to discuss where the needs for church plants are. The Bishop and churches work together to decide who is best placed to serve the communities in each of the locations where a plant might take place. The diocese is hosting the Plant course in its first location outside of London.

## **ANONYMISED QUOTES FROM SIX BISHOPS ON HOW RESOURCE CHURCHES ARE HAVING IMPACT ACROSS THEIR DIOCESES**

*These quotes are snippets from longer conversations in 'Resource Churches' by Ric Thorpe.*

"We are still to see the fruit of those revitalised urban areas of our diocese, but the planning and intentionality of purpose of our resource churches, the big vision that seeks to see a kingdom difference and the challenge of being held accountable for the delivery of what it is they say they intend to do is beginning to have an impact on many other areas of our diocesan life together."

"The sheer energy and imagination that the team brings is role-modelling the confident, outward looking and entrepreneurial ministry that we would love to see across the Diocese."

"[Our] churches are in a time of rapid and unsettling change. [The resource church], along with our network of what we are calling 'resourcing churches' are a welcome part of this new ecology. [The resource church] has already planted a new congregation among those struggling with challenges such as addiction. There are exciting possibilities now for revitalisation and further planting more widely in [this area]. We are grateful and hopeful."

“Over the last two years, we have seen the benefit of monthly prayer gatherings sustaining our intention. Usually over lunch, they have provided opportunity for sharing, learning and support across plants. We are setting up a diocesan learning community for both planters and pioneers across the spectrum of new worshipping communities and social enterprise to enhance learning, share insights and nurture growth.”

“One significant encouragement is the way some smaller churches have enthusiastically embraced the aspirations of larger resourcing churches, with a fresh commitment to enhance worship, revitalise children’s ministry and plant new worshipping communities.”

“I have long believed that resource churches are at the heart of the wider growth of the church. I am glad that we can see different – complementary, not competing – models of that growth.”

## Learning – what are key things that dioceses can do to ensure resource churches have impact?

### **DISRUPTIVE LEADERSHIP IS REQUIRED FROM DIOCESAN SENIOR LEADERS**

A resource church is a significant investment by a diocese, with the hope of having the impact described above. While significant effort should be put in to ensure wide consultation and that the design of the resource church project meets the needs of the town or city, it is also crucial that the resource church has everything it needs to be as effective as possible.

This will mean being disruptive in leadership – with senior leaders such as bishops, archdeacons, and diocesan secretaries being prepared to be the public face of the project, assure those who have concerns, and facilitate a smooth start for the resource church. Senior leaders may have to lead transition in places receiving a church plant.

It may also involve changing diocesan policies which are acting against the diocese’s aim of having an impactful resource church. This might cover ministry policies such as curate allocation and financial policies such as adapting parish share formulae which provide barriers to fast-growing churches. This isn’t about showing favouritism towards the resource church, but making sure these policies serve the diocese’s strategic aims.

### **TO HAVE IMPACT, RESOURCE CHURCHES NEED OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE THE DIOCESE**

Once a resource church has started, it will only have wider diocesan impact if opportunities are provided for this to happen.

If a resource church is set up with an objective of planting on an estate, for example, then an estate parish needs to be designated for this, with time and leadership resource made available to the resource church to make it happen. Where this has worked well, it has meant partnership between the resource church and the diocese, with clear expectations on both sides. This partnership means that church planting cannot be a ‘last resort’ and only for parishes in an extreme state.

The resource church can also assist with wider diocesan initiatives. If resource churches are a significant part of the diocese’s plans to reach young people, then it is beneficial for resource church leaders to bring



their experience of growth among this demographic to diocesan groups working more broadly. The same may be true of leadership development, starting new worshipping communities, digital work, discussions about the direction of the town and other areas where resource churches have had impact and could multiply this impact through the diocese.

## **BUILDING FOR A SECOND PHASE OF GROWTH REQUIRES RADICAL CHANGES**

Across the resource church network, growth has tended to come in two separate phases. The start-up phase, where the 'start-up' mentality drives growth behind the vision of the new church, and spontaneous new ideas and initiatives fuel growth. This might take a resource church from, say 0 to 400 attendance.

Some resource churches can get to this point and then get stuck – there might be vision fatigue (if say, part of the vision is planting or city-wide work, and this hasn't been possible) – or it might be that effort is put into consolidating the initiatives set up to date, creating a culture of preservation or stability, rather than entrepreneurship.

Those resource churches which have taken growth beyond this point have, at this phase, radically changed how they are organised, the vision, values and culture of the congregation, and realised that the skills and structures which have got them to this point will not take them to the next step. This might involve working through what aspects of leadership, vision and strategy are centralised, and which are devolved to other staff or lay leaders. Planting is also helpful to underscore the resource church's work as a generous church – this generosity can become the key value among the church congregation, reducing the influence of the buzz around newness.

Resource church leaders may need investment or coaching to help them make these changes. For those that have, there has been a second phase of growth (up to 1000 including church plants) and for those who have continued this growth it has meant periodic renewal of the church's strategy and structure for third and fourth waves of growth.

## **Summary of conditions, activity, assumptions and values of resource churches**

### **CONDITIONS: WHAT SHOULD BE IN PLACE FOR NEW RESOURCE CHURCHES TO HAVE MOST IMPACT?**

**Strategic context:** Clear need for something new in the area; large urban area; ease of starting something new (vacancy, local support, infrastructure); university town; business community; clear social needs.

**Site/location:** visible, city centre, near target demographic, flexible building

**Practitioner characteristics:** entrepreneurial leader, resilience, experience of larger churches

**Local church context:** partnership with local churches, welcomed by receiving church, recent vacancy, local church open to hosting radical changes

**Features of the project:** Mission energy to plant out, incumbent delegating to a wider team and building leaders, good standing in the diocese and integrated in mission, known for being good news, sustainability, outward vision, scale (to send out plants)

**Diocesan support:** Supportive, disruptive bishops and a collaborative relationship, wider strategy for the city/town, sufficient resourcing.

## ACTIVITY UNDERTAKEN BY RESOURCE CHURCHES

Start up:	Growth:	Resourcing:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evangelism courses (Alpha etc.)</li><li>• Cafes and other means to engage with the local community</li><li>• Social action activities</li><li>• Flourishing youth ministry hospitable to those from smaller churches</li><li>• Excellence in worship</li><li>• Excellence in teaching</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learning communities between leaders</li><li>• Developing leaders</li><li>• Promoting marriage and family life</li><li>• Focus on evangelism and discipleship</li><li>• Intern schemes</li><li>• Churchgoers in serving teams</li><li>• Midweek activities (small groups)</li><li>• Lay leadership mentoring/training/support</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• City-wide thinking</li><li>• Resourcing others</li><li>• Church planting</li><li>• Preparing planting teams</li><li>• Church planting course</li><li>• Mapping exercise</li><li>• Curates leading church plants</li><li>• Budgeting church planting</li><li>• Support plants after they're sent</li><li>• Building planting experience in the diocese</li><li>• Contributing financially to the diocese</li></ul>

## ASSUMPTIONS: WHAT ARE THE CAUSAL LINKS WHICH UNDERPIN WHY IT IS BELIEVED RESOURCE CHURCHES ARE WORTH INVESTING IN?

There are assumptions which underpin the reasons why it is believed that resource churches will be impactful. For each, there is evidence based on experience and analysis, and this evidence is being added to as monitoring and evaluation tests the assumptions. For each, a mitigation is also shown which indicates work to strengthen programmes which depend on these assumptions.

### Church planting churches attract those with a vision to plant

**Evidence //** resource churches have undertaken planting to date

**Mitigations //** establish pipelines of planting curates to ensure those with an interest in planting are deployed to resource churches

### Church plants achieve new growth

**Evidence //** resource church surveys, Church Army and other research into Fresh Expressions of Church and church plants

**Mitigations //** monitor the outward focus and growth impact of church plants

### Church plants release new leaders

**Evidence //** level of vocations from resource churches to date

**Mitigations //** enable resource church leaders in leadership development and ensure it is a priority

## **Significant investment is necessary to create a church which regularly sends out church plants**

**Evidence //** study of how churches have been planted in the past

**Mitigations //** gather evidence from other ways that churches are started; make sure that there is additionality from the investment made in resource churches compared to other uses of funds

## **Church planting achieves more impact than growing an even larger church**

**Evidence //** impact of planting churches vs those who have tried to grow very large

**Mitigations //** ensure plants are as well planned and as impactful as possible

## **Resource churches recover after sending out a plant**

**Evidence //** some specific examples, but not yet widespread evidence

**Mitigations //** ensure an effective post-plant strategy for resource churches and monitor closely.

## **KEY VALUES WHICH ARE DISTINCTIVE OF RESOURCE CHURCHES**

**Strategic //** Not a parish, disruptive, city-wide

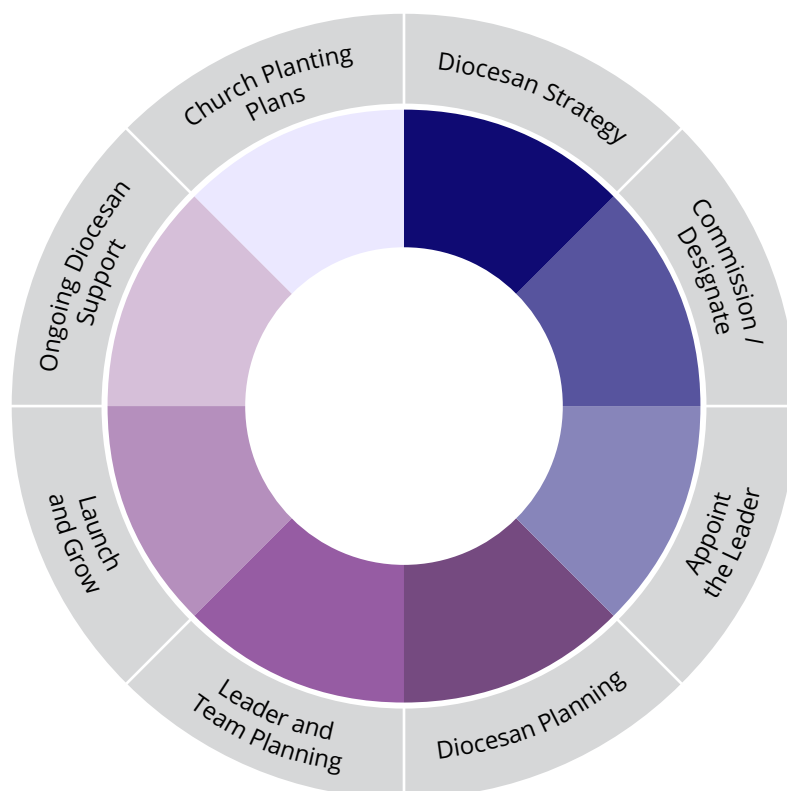
**Intentionality //** Outward-focus, faithfulness

**Entrepreneurial //** Resilience, adventure, adaptability

**Partnership //** Unity-seeking, working with diocesan leaders

**Generosity //** humility, service, giving away

## Appendix: creating a resource church to maximise impact



Below is an abridged version of the advice given to dioceses seeking to start a resource church, the steps they need to take, and questions they should think through.

### DIOCESAN STRATEGY

- Has the diocese identified key geographical areas and demographic groups with which the Church needs to develop its engagement? Will the creation of a resource church (or churches) help fulfil that strategic aim? Have alternative solutions been considered?
- Is there an outline plan of where the resource church(es) could plant and revitalise churches within the area and a wider plan for how mission will be enhanced across the diocese?
- Is there a willingness to make the necessary investment in the strategy and undertake the disruptive change required?

### COMMISSION

- Within the strategic area, are there existing large churches in the target city/area which could be designated as resource churches? Or is there a need to create a new resource church? Or do you need to do both: designate existing churches and create a new one?
- Which governance bodies within the diocese need be involved in the decision to create the resource church? Who ultimately takes the decision?

- Have you consulted widely with local people, ministry leaders, and diocesan representatives to ensure there is buy-in to the vision of creating a resource church?

## APPOINT THE LEADER

- Have you developed the job description and person specification relating to the leadership role of a new resource church?
- How can you access the best possible leader? Is it better to undertake a search than an open advert in the process? Have you sought advice from the Bishop of Islington's office?
- Once the potential leader has been identified, what kind of interview process needs to be conducted with the preferred candidate? If working with an existing church, how can the PCC and existing congregation be brought into the process?

## DIOCESAN PLANNING

Has the diocese created a plan which follows best practice in the following areas:

- **Accountability and support** – a sponsor, programme board, prayer, project management and support for the leader?
- **Planting curates** – are plans in place to link ministry training to your vision?
- **Church planting** – where, when and how will the first plant(s) happen?
- **Communications** – ensuring that everyone knows what is happening and why
- **Building selection** – with a location and shape that fits the vision for ministry
- **Building works** – are these required and what is the timetable and budget?
- **Legal status for the resource church** – a parish? A BMO?
- A budget including costs of the building, operations, people, and church planting, and the sources of income which will fund these including a hoped for giving profile.

## LEADER AND TEAM PLANNING

- Has the leader brought together a team for undertaking the plant including the skills and links to the community that are needed? Have they been trained together for church planting? How is prayer woven into the church?
- Does the leader have a detailed plan for launch and the first 100 days of their work, and a longer-term plan for ministry which focuses on evangelism, discipleship, and social impact?

## LAUNCH AND GROW

- Is there merit in the resource church having a 'soft launch' to build momentum whilst the building works are completed or capitalise on the start of the academic year or Christmas?

- How can the resource church leadership be supported to make the main launch as effective as possible?
- What special efforts can be made to support the resource church's leadership team in the weeks after its launch – when energy levels begin to dip and teething problems emerge?

### **ONGOING DIOCESAN SUPPORT**

- Do the diocesan systems, policies and practices support the diocese's vision for resource church and future church planting plans? Are policies around parish share, curate deployment, encouraging vocations, pastoral schemes, buildings and logistic support for parishes enhancing the impact of the resource church, or inadvertently hindering it?

### **CHURCH PLANTING AND LONGER TERM PLANS**

- Do you have a clear goal within the diocese relating to church planting? Has the overall goal been broken down into goals about different type of church plants – resource churches, parish plants, church revitalisations, small church plants etc?
- Do you have a plan (which is regularly refreshed) setting out where the resource church and other church-planting churches are going to plant, and when, over the next few years?
- Does the planting plan include a leadership development plan so the right number and kind of leaders are ready to lead the planned plants? Does the plan also cover finances, building, and governance arrangements?
- How has succession planning been factored in the resource church if the founder moves on?