

RIC THORPE

Bishop of Islington

RESOURCE CHURCHES

A story of church planting and
revitalisation across the nation

the Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication
ccx.org.uk

Ric Thorpe represents a rare combination, being at once a thinker and strategist, and a practitioner. In his role as the Bishop of Islington, Ric is closely and centrally involved in the Church of England's aim to see all kinds of new churches planted. There is food for thought and inspiration here, and impetus for action.

MOST REVD AND RT HON JUSTIN WELBY, Archbishop of Canterbury

This book is an important contribution to our understanding of resource churches and the Church today. Not only does it describe resource churches in detail and depth, but it provides us with reflection and challenge. These stories of what God is doing give me hope and faith for the future of the gospel in our land.

RT REVD AND RT HON DAME SARAH MULLALY, Bishop of London

Bishop Ric Thorpe provides the definitive handbook on England's 100 Resource Churches. Ric supports his compelling theological and missiological reasons for such churches with authentic stories from different locations and traditions. It is a 'go to' book for parishes, diocesan teams and bishops.

MOST REVD AND RT HON STEPHEN COTTRELL, Archbishop of York

Resource churches have become an important part of the strategy for renewal of many dioceses across the country. This book is an invaluable guide to the history, nature, and potential of these churches to bring renewed life to cities, parishes and the different traditions of the Church of England in the coming years.

RT REVD DR GRAHAM TOMLIN, Bishop of Kensington

Bishop Ric Thorpe writes on church planting with authority and experience. As the first ever national bishop for church planting in the Church of England he has seen new church communities grow and flourish all over the country through a combination of dynamic leadership and the Spirit of God. I hope this inspiring book will encourage the launch of many more such initiatives.

REVD NICKY GUMBEL, Vicar of Holy Trinity Brompton, London

Such a helpful book! Resource Churches have attracted a lot of attention but little balanced reflection. What often goes unnoticed are the great variety of models and approaches, the historical precedents, and the combination of visionary leadership and sacrificial generosity that is involved in extending the Church's mission in these ways.

REVD PAUL HARCOURT, National Leader, New Wine England

Clear, humble, generous, honest. A must-read for anyone involved in resource church planting.

RT REVD DR JILL DUFF, Bishop of Lancaster

Resource churches and church planting are vital for the renewal of the whole Anglican tradition, reaching new populations and young people, who find in them opportunities for discipleship and social engagement. Be encouraged by these stories of real people in real places who are keeping the rumour of God alive.

RT REVD DR JOANNE GRENFELL, Bishop of Stepney

This is a deeply encouraging book, and encouraging on so many levels. It tells real-life stories about churches growing, developing, engaging, learning, and planting... and does so in a way that lets us begin to dream that we can do this too. It engages with the challenges realistically and honestly, because church growth isn't always easy... and yet usually has a sparkle in the eye that is reflected on the pages of this book. It asks good questions, theologically, structurally, and practically. It is rooted both in faith and a deep commitment to share the love of Christ. It spans traditions, geography, and social context. Read it! Read it carefully, read it joyfully, read it inquisitively... and expect neither that you will leave unchanged, nor that you will have a magic formula to employ. For God is at work in his church and his world, and this is part of what he is up to.

RT REVD MARK TANNER, Bishop of Chester

The term 'resource church' has been bandied around in Church of England circles for some 8 years or more, but now with this book we have clarity around the what, why and how of such churches, explained carefully and practically, and accompanied by hugely encouraging case studies. This is both a reference book and a faith-builder for any diocese and church leader.

REVD ARCHIE COATES, Vicar of St Peter's Brighton

As a planter, supporter of practitioners, overseer and now author, Bishop Ric shows us in word and deed how Jesus continues to take all we offer and multiplies it many times over so many more can be fed. The focus isn't solving a problem in the church but the renewal of the world by God's transforming love. This gem of a book has been forged in the reality of experience, is rich in theology, full of practical wisdom and valuable to anyone keen to see how God is at work through resource churches.

REVD BARRY HILL, Leicester Diocese Resource Church Enabler and Team Rector of Market Harborough

I have long been of the view that we needed a new form of church in Newcastle Diocese, and the resource church has fulfilled the hopes we've had for it from the beginning, with a new kind of reaching out. We are delighted with the results – the addition of a resource church enriches us as a diocese, and I believe that resource churches fit well into the wider scope of the Church.

RT REVD AND RT HON CHRISTINE HARDMAN, Bishop of Newcastle

When Bishop Ric challenged some of us Anglican church leaders to think about a new resource church in Bradford, we knew, whatever models were being tried out elsewhere, that the resource church had to be truly 'Bradford'. For us, that meant young, entrepreneurial, and diverse. It meant the church investing into the city's vision of renewal, growth, and well-being, with an offer of the abundant life that God offers to us in Jesus. We are delighted that our new church affirms the diversity of the city while calling people to follow Christ.

RT REVD DR TOBY HOWARTH, Bishop of Bradford

For us to be able to reinvigorate struggling city-centre churches with a resourcing team intent on communicating in every way the joy of the gospel, focused strongly on evangelism and sacrificial in its service of the poor, can only be good news.

RT REVD PHILIP NORTH, Bishop of Burnley

One of the contributions made by the resource church programme was a realisation that a much more intentional approach to growth was needed across the whole of our city. It is still early days and we are learning all the time, but we have five resource churches across Leeds and a number of small plants and substantial plants either completed, or well on the way.

RT REVD PAUL SLATER, Bishop of Kirkstall (Area Bishop for the city of Leeds)

This book has made me restless for more. More churches, more Christians, but most of all, more of God. This is a compelling and inspiring read, with so many great stories and so much practical wisdom all in one place. I highly recommend this for all archdeacons. A hugely inspiring read whatever your tradition.

VEN RHIANNON KING, Archdeacon of Ipswich and Director of Inspiring Ipswich

Straight from the horse's mouth—this primer on British church planting covers both the theology and recent history of the strategic revitalisation of the Church of England. Having played a key role in the establishing of one hundred resource churches (so far), I can think of no one more qualified than Ric Thorpe to guide us on this important journey.

REVD DR CHRISTIAN SELVARATNAM, Director of the St Hild Centre for Church Planting

Throughout the whole adventure of planting Gas Street Church in Birmingham, Bishop Ric has been a constant source of encouragement and support. He has pushed us to think bigger and provided strategic input to help us navigate particular obstacles along the way. This is an exciting, important and necessary book that captures all of Ric's vision and wisdom.

REVD TIM HUGHES, Vicar of Gas Street Church Birmingham

This book is a must for anybody considering church planting. Ric is a fountain of knowledge and wisdom on the theology, the history and the practice of planting churches that reach our communities. This is a brilliant and helpful resource.

REVD MIKE PILAVACHI, Soul Survivor Watford

Ric Thorpe has assembled a compendium of stories of hope for Church and nation. These dazzling accounts of the work of the Holy Spirit, passing on the baton of faith received from the apostles, also prompt us to recognise dependence on God who speaks in stillness and silence.

RT REVD DR AND RT HON MARTIN WARNER, Bishop of Chichester

The call to make disciples is from the Lord Jesus. When disciples gather for nurturing and are further discipled, the assembly of disciples is called 'church'. The setting-up or recognition of the resource church is crucial and important for every diocese. It is the driving force, training centre, focal point for mission-sending and resource-sharing for the revitalisation or new church plants. Bishop Ric Thorpe has certainly captured the essence of the resource church, including its theological understanding, the practicalities and challenges.

RT REVD MOON HING NG, formerly Archbishop of South East Asia

The diversity of local context and opportunity means careful discernment and a mixed ecology in the way we set about our missional task. Today, church planting through resource churches is one effective means to that end. We can no longer rely on one model of church, namely the parish, if we want to see growth. We need innovation. Developing resource churches is demanding of energy and leadership on all concerned, but I am convinced it is worth it.

RT REVD PETER HILL, Bishop of Barking

Bishop Ric's commitment to church planting and growth is infectious, visionary, and yet wonderfully practical. This book helps us all to see what is being achieved, and challenges us to raise our own sights as we seek to present and grow into Christ in our different localities.

RT REVD ROD THOMAS, Bishop of Maidstone

All churches were once 'planted churches', as Christianity spread. Bishop Ric has shown the value of planting and reviving churches. This book tells inspiring stories of the renewed spread of the faith, through new and revived churches across many of the towns and cities of England.

WILLIAM NYE, General Secretary of the Church of England

This is an exciting, informative, passionate book giving the story, theology and vision around resource churches by one of the best leaders I know. You can't read it without being inspired that this current move sits in the long history of the Holy Spirit at work through the followers of Jesus, to the glory of God.

REVD GARETH ROBINSON, Rector of St Philips Chapel Street, Salford, and Head of church planting training for New Wine England; author of *Stones & Ripples: Ten Principles for Pioneers and Church Planters*

Thoughtful, practical, and wise, this book is the guide to the resource church so many have been waiting for.

REVD MATTHEW PORTER, Vicar of St Michael le Belfrey in York; author of *Overflow*

We have been delighted to help enable the development of a resource church in our diocese, especially as its inception came from the local congregation listening to God and reimagining their future. This is a fabulous example of bottom-up discernment and prophetic wisdom.

RT REVD ROB WICKHAM, Bishop of Edmonton

This book captures new journeys of faith that Bishop Ric has championed, including the Catholic renewal at St George-in-the-East. I hope and pray these stories are a springboard for others too.

FR RICHARD SPRINGER, Rector of St George-in-the-East

Resourcing churches are a vital – though not exclusive – plank in our commitment to reach people with the good news of Jesus Christ. I am more than ever convinced of the important part that resourcing churches can play, alongside parish churches, in the renewal and growth of the Church and the spread of the gospel. I value resource churches and also working with the Spirit so as to adapt the vision for individual circumstances. Our particular example of resource church has not turned out as I would have predicted: it's much more exciting!

RT REVD DR AND RT HON JOHN INGE, Bishop of Worcester

This book is a timely and important contribution to the essential work of church planting in the UK. It is helpfully set out, outlining church planting theory, history and theology, interspersed with stories of church plants. These real examples bring to life the joys and challenges of church planting and invite the exploration of different ways of approaching the task. There are helpful frameworks for resource churches, dioceses and churches wanting to form new worshipping communities. Bishop Ric brings his personal experience of planting together with the wisdom he's gathered through networking with leaders from different traditions and streams. It will be an invaluable resource for anyone involved in church planting in the UK today.

REVD VICTORIA RAMSEY, Diocesan Church Growth and Planting Enabler, Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham

This is a story that really needed to be told, and Ric Thorpe is the one to tell it. Inspiring, theologically-grounded and practically useful, Ric shares the story-so-far of how resource churches have brought about the revitalisation of churches and the transformation of communities across the UK.

RT REVD RUTH BUSHYAGER, Bishop of Horsham

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESOURCE CHURCHES

Resource churches are playing an increasingly important role in the Church of England – a new kind of church in a landscape that is wary of change. They are not the only kind of church we need, nor are they better than other churches, but I believe they have a vital role to play.

The missional context in 21st-century England

Why do we need resource churches? Where do they fit into the missional landscape today? For me, this always begins with recognising the enormous missionary challenge in front of the Church in England. At the time of writing, Anglican attendance represents 1.5 per cent of the population. Overall church attendance nationally is approximately 8 per cent. According to the Faith Survey, church attendance was 10.3 per cent of the population in 2013 and is forecast to decline to 4.3 per cent by 2025, unless trends change.¹¹⁹ The greatest challenges lie in the largest urban areas where Anglican attendance drops to 1.2 per cent per capita.¹²⁰ This drops even further in inner-city estates. Urban areas, where 83 per cent of the national population live,¹²¹ have far fewer clergy per capita.¹²² Cities have been underinvested in by the Church of England for many decades, resulting in less ministry and consequently lower attendance. Investing in city and town centres is therefore a strategic decision for dioceses and for the Church of England. This does not mean that rural areas are less important, rather that, in relative terms, urban areas have been neglected.

To address this challenge, mission and growth in the church can be achieved through revitalising struggling churches, developing the growth of existing churches and planting new churches. This, of course, includes the need for a renewed focus on evangelism, discipleship and social transformation, underpinned by worship, sacraments and prayer.

The case for growing the church

In my travels, I often come across the complaint that we should not focus on growth, especially in terms of numbers. I think this is because we are trying to make sense of the overall decline of the Church in England over the last century and because it takes the focus away from the small, beautiful acts of God that can so easily be missed if we only value numbers.¹²³ Growth is not one-dimensional. We must value growth in depth of relationship with God and with one another, and we must value growth in terms of

We must not shy away from valuing numerical church growth

the impact the Church can have on the world, especially in local communities. But we must not shy away from valuing numerical church growth.

The parables of the kingdom, taught by Jesus, point towards the growth of the kingdom when the gospel is preached. The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds, yet it grows an enormous tree towering over a garden (Matt. 13:31–32). When a sower scatters seed on good soil, it multiplies 30, 60, or even 100 times what was sown (Matt. 13:8). When the gospel is preached there should be an expectation of growth in terms of people responding to the gospel.

This growth should be measured in many dimensions – in depth of commitment and discipleship, in being faithful and being present, in making a loving impact on the community, and in number, with more people responding to the gospel. Beth Green and Tim Thorlby helpfully describe the national Church growth debate in general terms that include these three measures.¹²⁴ They are important for every church, including resource churches. There are many examples of ‘spiritual measures’ combining all of these attributes together, including personal spiritual growth, and are better covered elsewhere.¹²⁵

However, sometimes there is no growth. In fact, a 2019 research study conducted by Lifeway Research for Exponential¹²⁶ suggested that 35 per cent of churches in the United States are declining, with a further 35 per cent plateauing in numbers (see figure 5). Figures in England are likely to show more decline.

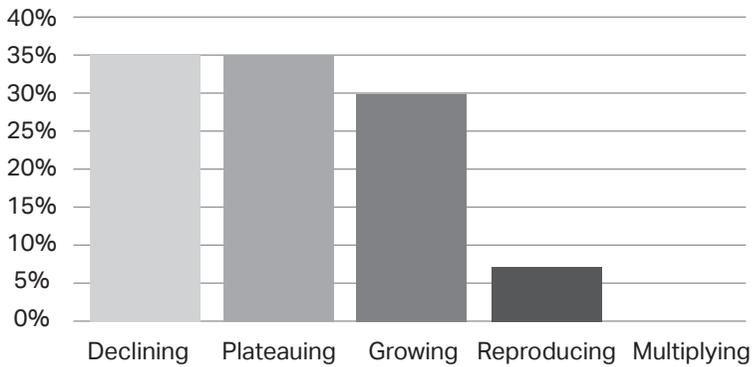


Figure 5. Change in US church attendance since 2016.

Surely death and decline are not supposed to be normal for the church? We need a recovery of the apostolic DNA of the early church so that the gospel can be communicated afresh in our generation and the church can grow again. I am constantly amazed that church growth principles are not taught in our theological colleges and are rarely reflected on seriously in dioceses and churches. Every church tradition has stories of growth in their histories that should be celebrated but also re-evaluated in the light of today's very different contexts. I value and want to commend the various church growth initiatives and courses that are supporting churches and dioceses willing to recognise that they need help to change and develop their thinking and practices to see growth in all its dimensions. If you haven't already, do check out the Grow Course at the Gregory Centre for more details.¹²⁷ This is not just for keen churches. Surely every church should be concerned about growing itself.

The case for church planting

Wouldn't it be fantastic, imagining – and praying – for a moment, if the church in England doubled in size, from 8 per cent to 16 per cent of the population?

We need to plant new churches in new places to reach new people in new ways

That would be a tipping point in terms of influencing and impacting the whole nation. That would be revival. But what about the remaining 84 per cent of the population? Jesus commanded his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations

(Matt. 28:19). With this command in mind, we still have most of our nation to reach! Church growth is important, but it is not enough. We need to plant new churches in new places to reach new people in new ways.

Church planting is about starting a new church in a new place, 'planted' from elsewhere. It picks up Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 3:6, 'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.' 'Church Planting' as a term is a relatively new one in the church – perhaps used more in the last 50 years and not much in church literature over the centuries. But it is something that has been going on for centuries. It is the very essence of how the Church has grown around the world. Every church was planted when it first began.

Church planting is important because

1. it reaches more people, going beyond the existing reach of the church;
2. it reaches new people, who would not normally attend churches that are ministering already;
3. it releases new leaders with new energy at the chance of being involved in addition to the existing leaders ministering in existing churches;
4. it increases the growth potential of the church because there are more places reaching out to more people than was happening with fewer churches;
5. it is more able to design everything around new people and those exploring the faith.¹²⁸

Revitalising existing parish churches, by sending a leader and a team of people, has a similar impact, bringing new missional energy and reproductive potential. Therefore, church planting can play its part in addressing the problem of church decline.

There are many types of church plants and all are needed. Different types of churches reach different types of people. Small, local churches are able to be very specific in a particular ministry to their geographical area or people group. Larger churches reach different kinds of people who are looking for a larger church experience and who are prepared to travel for that. Some churches are traditional, others are contemporary. Some are sacramental, others more orientated around teaching and preaching. One parish church cannot reach everyone in its parish, though its Anglican incumbent might have the 'cure of all its souls.'¹²⁹ If it is attracting 1.5 per cent, and other denominations attracting another 6.5 per cent, there is plenty of room – 92 per cent more room – for other churches too, that might connect in different ways to reach different people.

I believe that every church can be involved in starting or planting new churches, sending leaders and people in a team to reach a different group of people. At a local level, adopting a sending approach to growing the church has the potential to lead to new churches being created. Rick Warren, pastor of

Saddleback Church in California, encourages this approach, saying that healthy churches should measure their sending capacity not their seating capacity.¹³⁰ Research by Peter Brierley in 2012 showed that church growth in London had increased significantly since 2005 by 16 per cent, largely attributable to Black churches and other immigrant churches and larger churches growing. The study showed that one church in seven (15 per cent), had started another church within the last 20 years, with 93 per cent still meeting. Pentecostals had started the most, followed by Anglicans. Two-fifths of the growth was reckoned as people not previously church-goers.¹³¹ Planting churches leads to church growth!

Different planting approaches and models

One reaction to my encouragement to all churches to get involved in church planting is that it's only for larger churches. But the evidence says otherwise. Lots of different kinds of churches have been involved in church planting and pioneering, and they have used a whole range of different approaches and models depending on a whole range of factors in the sending church and the context it is planting into. Different missional networks will focus on particular models, but to reach everyone, everywhere, every kind of model will be needed¹³². These include:

- Reopening closed churches
- Revitalisations
- Multiplying congregations
- New development areas
- New churches in schools
- Churches in urban estates
- Workplace gatherings
- Café churches
- Community space meetings
- Missional communities

Earlier items in this list might be more likely to be led by clergy and might include paid staff. Later items might be more likely to be led by lay people and have unpaid leaders. I believe this is going to be shaken up in the next few years with more so-called 'bi-vocational' church leaders, who might have a different profession, perhaps giving them an income, alongside leading a church or church plant. If that's you, or someone you know, keep exploring this avenue for leadership in the church.

Within this list, resource churches are more likely to be involved in reopening closed churches or revitalising struggling churches and almost certainly multiplying congregations to reach new people in different ways. This approach is more likely to lead to larger congregations and churches than some of the smaller focused models. This also means they will cost more as a model (because of staff and building costs) and therefore they need to pay attention to covering their costs as well as putting aside funding for new planting of this kind. This partly explains why they have a higher profile, both in terms of visibility, planting and growth capacity, and income and expenditure costs.

I want to stress here the point that resource churches are not better or worse than other models and approaches in the missional landscape. Fresh Expressions of church have exploded in number and impact across the country since they were first noticed at the beginning of the 2000s and described in the seminal *Mission-shaped Church* published in 2004. There are now more than 2,800 'Messy Churches' in England, founded and overseen by Lucy Moore since 2004, reaching new families in all-age congregations.¹³³ There are 1,500 Church of England-appointed pioneers creating new ways of doing church in their communities. Researcher Canon Dr George Lings includes 'traditional church planting' in his spectrum of fresh expressions of church and I know plenty of church planters who would include fresh expressions of church in their definition of church planting. The point is this: that there are many forms of church planting, fresh expressions and pioneering, all working in the vast mission field of the unchurched and the Church needs all of them!

Towards a culture of church planting

A mindset of incremental growth alone might be inadequate. The Scriptures point towards multiplication as a way that growth can happen, leading to more prolific results. The first command to human beings in the Scriptures is to 'be fruitful and multiply' (ESV Gen. 1:28). After the flood, Noah is encouraged to 'be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it' (Gen. 9:7). The new Adam, Jesus Christ, builds his church (Matt. 16:18) and the church after Pentecost grew quickly through new disciples coming to faith (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7; etc.). The number of churches planted across Asia and Europe grew quickly too as the gospel was proclaimed and churches planted (Acts 19:10; Rom. 15:19b). Multiplication of churches should be normal.¹³⁴ Some have gone further to say that if there is no reproduction of churches, then that church is sterile.¹³⁵ So while there is no explicit command from Jesus to multiply churches, the natural and emerging instinct of the church, as described in Acts, was to reproduce itself.¹³⁶

The greatest transformation in terms of reach into the mission field comes from creating multiplying churches or church-planting churches.¹³⁷ A church

A church that has church planting in its DNA will not just plant churches itself, but plant churches that plant churches in a continuing, multiplying way

that has church planting in its DNA will not just plant churches itself, but plant churches that plant churches in a continuing, multiplying way. This approach requires being intentional about creating that kind of reproducing culture.¹³⁸ And when you're intentional, extraordinary things can happen.

I love mathematics (I know it's not everyone's cup of tea!) and I love playing around with geometric progressions. That's where you have a progression of numbers with a constant ratio between each number and the one before, like doubling numbers in a series 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, and so on. It shows that if you keep doing something in a particular way, the results begin to multiply fast (see figure 6). If you change the ratio, like planting more often than every three years, the total numbers accelerate even faster. My friend Dave Ferguson leads the Newthing Network in the USA and they became intentional about the multiplication of churches. He told me that each church in the network tries to plant a new church every year. They send a church plant leader and an apprentice leader. The apprentice, like an Anglican curate, learns on the job and then plants a new church, taking a team with them after the one-year 'residency.' Of course, when they plant, they too take an apprentice with them and the sending church takes on another new apprentice. That is intentional!

Year	0	3	6	9	12	15
No. of churches	1	2	4	8	16	32
						

Figure 6. Multiplication of churches where each church plants every three years.

Resource churches can behave like this when they are given planting curates who keep planting so that struggling churches can be revitalised, and new areas can be planted into. Other churches might not be able to do this at the kind of scale of a resource church but nevertheless can still be involved in training church planters and sending them out to plant new churches. When this kind of practice catches on, a culture change takes place, where church planting is no longer seen as something odd and unusual but rather completely normal for every church.

So how do we get there? My experience over the past few years has shown that church planting can be developed in a diocese if specific interventions are made to move it on from a passive approach to an intentional, then strategic, approach until it is normative and there is a culture of planting (see Figure 7):

- *Passive approach*: a diocese has a ‘permission-giving’ culture where occasional opportunities arise, and planting happens almost by chance.
- *Intentional approach*: a diocese sets church planting goals, and it is affirmed as a ministry option for clergy and lay leaders. Existing church-planting energy is leveraged or imported from elsewhere. Some churches are appointed as resource churches and church planting is mentioned in diocesan strategy.
- *Strategic approach*: church planting is part of the growth strategy of a diocese and owned by the senior staff. Significant planning addresses difficult-to-reach places and redirecting resources (people, buildings and money) for a missional end. A foundation of prayer leads to diocesan structures being aligned to support church planting, setting more ambitious goals, identifying planting opportunities proactively, identifying and training church planters and aligning diocesan policy and practice with the church-planting plans.
- *Culture of church planting*: every church is involved in planting fresh expressions, missional communities and planting teams to reach new people in their parishes. Multiplication is the norm.

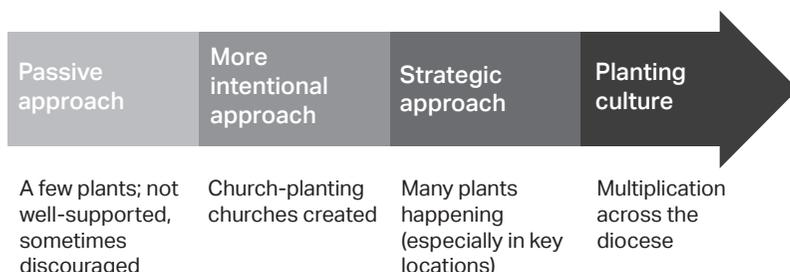


Figure 7. Developing church planting within a diocese.

At this point, there are a small number of dioceses who are actively using a strategic approach to church planting using these definitions. And there are none, in my opinion, where there is an active culture of church planting. There is still some way to go!

The calling of a resource church

So, a resource church is a church-planting church that has this kind of planting and multiplying mindset in its DNA. Ideally, their bishop appoints planting curates to them where they learn their trade before being sent to plant or revitalise other churches, taking a team and funding with them. When they plant, they take an apprentice planter with them, who learns about planting as they plant, so that in time, they will go on to plant themselves. If a standard curacy lasts three years, then planting curates could be planting and revitalising churches every three years. Reproduction and multiplication are at the heart of their DNA. And these churches are growing, reaching new people in new places with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this way, resource churches and their plants join in with the diocesan strategy of growth and impact, evangelisation and social transformation.

With multiplication in its DNA, a resource church will naturally have an area-wide, city-wide or town-wide vision. To support this, it will develop a pipeline of leaders for further planting, alongside its own leadership development practices. As a church that is determined to play its part beyond its parish to the wider area, it will use its own ministries and resources for that mission by generously offering them to the wider church.¹³⁹ With a church like this, they can be invited to join in with some of the strategic conversations alongside senior staff of dioceses, knowing that resource churches can be part of the solution to some of the challenges they face.

As resource churches are created, I believe it is important to differentiate them from other churches. They are not merely a large church; large churches may not have planted or necessarily have the desire, attitude or vocational capacity to plant in this way. They are not merely a church with lots of students, though many resource churches have been intentionally planted to city centres in order to reach the concentrations of students in those places.¹⁴⁰ Being designated as a resource church is not a badge that is used to honour a church that is favoured over others. And, though many churches might be called 'minster churches,' they do not necessarily behave as the minster churches of former centuries that were missional centres sending teams to evangelise and plant new churches in their regions. Neither is a resource church just a parish church with an important calling or vocation limited to reach and minister to its parish locally, incarnationally and tactically.

By contrast, a resource church's calling is to reach beyond its parish as it plants other churches and resources mission in the wider area. It is therefore strategic, city-wide and extra-parochial.¹⁴¹ It develops a culture supportive of planting, and prepares to plant, training leaders and teams and saving and setting aside funds. Once planting opportunities are identified, the resource church supports the planting team before, during and after the plant.¹⁴² Parish churches are not required to give away their people and resources in the same way.

The place of prayer and planning

How does all this happen in practice? When you try to do something new in an institution, there is an inevitable resistance to that change summed up by 'institutional inertia.' Nevertheless, change is important and necessary.

That change starts with prayer. It is a spiritual change that needs to be discerned and brought before God. In that place, hearts change, motives align and courage is imparted. Prayer fans into flame something new, something extraordinary, something supernatural. Prayer gives us new perspective and vision and anchors us in the very purposes of God. Prayer changes things.

Prayer fans into flame something new, something extraordinary, something supernatural

In a recent conversation with Bishop Sandy Millar, he told me that he was convinced that nothing would have happened at HTB without prayer. He recounted how Jeremy Jennings as prayer director there set up corporate prayer meetings three times a week with additional meetings alongside those. Everything was prayed into, from encountering God's presence, to the finances, to evangelism, to church planting, to every aspect of the church's life, and of course for the nation and nations. Effective intercession must be diarised so we can hear what the Spirit is saying, just as the Spirit of God told St Paul where to go as he planted churches throughout Asia and Europe.¹⁴³

On that foundation of prayer, we can start to plan, to consider the possibilities, to count the cost. We do need courage to challenge the status quo and it is no surprise that resource churches might do that. That planning needs to be local and strategic, and we encourage every church to do the Church Planting Course so they can be as prepared as possible for all that lies ahead. Strategic planning involves setting goals for planting, identifying opportunities across a diocese, identifying leaders and training them, and aligning diocesan policy and practice so that there is not a continual struggle to enable this to happen easily and proactively. I will cover more on this in the next chapter.

PRESTON MINSTER

Diocese of Blackburn

*At the invitation of the Diocese of Blackburn, **Sam and Hannah Haigh** were sent with a team from Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB), London, to relaunch Preston Minster as a resourcing parish in September 2019. It is part of a new project led by the Bishop of Burnley, Philip North, combining the two existing parishes of Preston Minster and St George's Preston. Its vision is to be a church that offers a big welcome and a safe space to explore and encounter the person of Jesus Christ. Sam says:*

I sometimes get asked, 'What are resource churches and where did the idea come from?' It's a concept that we see in the Bible – St Paul set up churches in strategic cities that reached the villages and towns in the surrounding areas. But resource churches are also part of our Anglican heritage. In the 1800s the priest of Preston Minster (formerly the parish church of St John's) planted five churches around Preston during the industrial boom. We often talk about this legacy during our services. It's exciting to connect the congregation with their church's history, showing that church planting is part of the life and DNA of Preston Minster. Our vision to start new churches in Preston feels like a continuation of this parish's story.

We planted in September 2019 from HTB, London, at the invitation of the Diocese of Blackburn as part of a new project led by the Bishop of Burnley, Philip North. We have become a resourcing parish, bringing together the two parishes of Preston Minster and St George's. St George's is led by Fr David Craven and is rooted in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, whereas Preston Minster's worship style is charismatic evangelical. We're not merging or trying to change each other's styles of worship, but instead we work closely in partnership and learn from each other. We find it helpful to remember that 'good fences make good neighbours.' For example, Fr David at St George's is involved in Catholic renewal movements but is also able to draw from the HTB model of church planting, with the hope of planting or revitalising struggling Anglo-Catholic parishes in the future. Bishop Philip, who is also from an Anglo-Catholic tradition, has been extremely supportive and we meet with him regularly. It's a partnership of friends and it's been really encouraging working together so far.

Our methods of evangelism look different across this new resourcing parish: St George's might hold an outdoors service of Mass or public Ash Wednesday service, whereas our focus at Preston Minster is more on street evangelism or Alpha. But we both share a sense of wanting to be present in the community

and this common missional focus holds us together. There's definitely a sense that the congregation at St George's is being mobilised and becoming more outward facing, and it's been really encouraging to see early signs of growth there. We know we'll need different types and traditions of churches and church plants to reach the whole city of Preston. Some people won't connect with Preston Minster and its style of worship, so St George's might be the right place to help them with their journey of faith. We want to release each congregation to be true to its tradition so we can play our unique part in reaching people across the city.

We're already seeing lives being changed since we launched Preston Minster. One lady called Charlotte came to the pre-launch gathering at our house. She had a vague Christian background but neither she nor her husband had settled in a church. After the pre-launch gathering, she attended the launch service and rededicated her life to Christ that day. She is now fully part of the church community, engaging in mission and living out her reawakened faith.

Colin and Amy, a couple in their mid-20s, would walk past Preston Minster whenever they went to The Warehouse, a nightclub next door to the church. They wanted to get married and had always thought that the church was a beautiful building on the outside, but they'd never seen inside this church or any church before. One Sunday, they decided to come along and they were blown away by the welcome, the message, and the whole experience. They've been back every week since, they have done Alpha, and are now serving on team. Having found a sense of home at Preston Minster, Colin and Amy love sharing this new faith and hope with their friends. They're brilliant at inviting people to Alpha: they know that it won't be awkward or pressurising so they're confident to bring friends along and share what God's done in their lives.

Our latest Alpha course had 60 guests, and over half of these were people that we've never met before. They'd heard about us from adverts on the buses, flyers, or friends. We're passionate about the re-evangelism of Preston, so we keep this as a high priority in terms of our budget and focus. We've recently launched an evening service to help us connect with more people, especially students, so we've begun by planting internally. It helps us to remember that starting new things is part of our DNA. We also encourage connect groups to look at how they can grow and plant, so that we are creating a culture where it is normal to multiply. Even though we're not sure yet what opportunities will appear, we want to prepare people so that planting is embedded in who we are.

Preston is a historic place, dating back to Roman times, and sits right in the centre of Lancashire. It was only designated a city in 2002, so there's been a lot of development recently in the city, and Preston has worked hard to reinvent itself. There are about 140,000 people living in the city and about

400,000 including the surrounding urban areas. The University of Central Lancashire is a strong presence in the community and there's a thriving student population of over 30,000 here, increasing employment and entrepreneurship. We're excited about working with students as university is often a key time in someone's journey to faith. However, there are still huge needs – Preston has one of the highest suicide rates in the country and there are many issues with homelessness, addiction, alcohol abuse, and deprivation. Our church sits on the cusp of this split – the redeveloping town centre full of energy is on our left, but the clubs, pubs with late licences, and red light district sit on our right. We're sensitively exploring how we can get involved in some of these areas. We didn't want to roll in with our social action projects, so we're spending time listening to the needs of the people around us and to God. Interestingly, Preston was at the heart of the Temperance Movement in the 1800s and the city has an epic Christian heritage. Its name is derived from Old English, meaning 'the dwelling of priests.' There are many Catholic churches and a strong Catholic influence in the Anglican churches too. We're excited about building on this legacy and seeing what God does over the coming years in this wonderful city.

The Rt Revd Philip North, Bishop of Burnley

Struggling town or city-centre churches can be a big headache for a diocese. The size and visibility of the buildings mean that they are often perceived as a measure of the vitality of the Church more generally, so their weakness gives an impression of a Church in retreat and decline.

There are two churches in Preston city centre, the minster and St George's, which have been run as a single benefice for many years. They had benefited from a loving and generous ministry from their former priest, but insufficient resources, both in terms of people and funding, had left both churches struggling for viability. Lying in the centre of the largest city in the diocese, set amidst the shops, nightlife, and civic buildings, and close to the fast-expanding University of Central Lancashire and Cardinal Newman Sixth Form College, this was crying out to be a resourcing parish.

But the nature of this benefice meant we could form a resourcing parish with a difference. The Church of England is afflicted with tedious, tribal dichotomies: Catholic or evangelical; liturgical or informal; biblical or sacramental. In much of the Anglican communion, these dichotomies make little sense. In the UK they can be all-defining and can drain energy away from the mission into circuitous and sclerotic internal arguments.

The existence of two church buildings in the Preston resourcing parish has given us a place where we can tackle such dichotomies and a place where

traditions can learn from each other. The minster offers informal charismatic worship with a focus on preaching. St George's proudly retains a strong Catholic identity and is Eucharistic. But both remain in the same parish and are committed to growing together, learning from each other, and drawing on the richness of each other's traditions. This vision has been warmly embraced by Sam Haigh, the vicar, and by the associate vicar, Fr David Craven, who, in the strength of their personal relationship, model the shared ministry we want to see. Our hope is that Preston will be a resourcing parish that can plant or renew churches in both traditions across the Blackburn Diocese.

Absolute transparency, lots of conversations and meetings with stakeholders, and a clear vision meant that Preston resourcing parish was able to launch without some of the opposition that has been experienced in other parts of the country, and the leadership is developing extremely positive links with the city leaders and influencers and with other churches. The Covid-19 pandemic came at a very difficult time, just as the minster was starting to grow to the size and energy necessary to enable planting. But the team demonstrated the most extraordinary agility in the height of lockdown and was able to start a food bank and a meals service which has made a huge impact on local perceptions.

As we look to the future, the project faces a number of questions and challenges. Firstly, while the minster has grown to over 100 regular worshippers, we are yet to learn what sort of strategic and evangelistic flexibility will be required to adapt the resource church model to the context of a working class, Lancashire city which does not have the younger and more cosmopolitan graduate populations upon which other resource churches draw. Secondly, finance and buildings will present formidable challenges, especially given recently discovered cladding issues at St George's and the need for extra space at the minster. It would be a pity to see huge amounts of staff time drawn into the complexities of two concurrent building projects. The tapering out of diocesan and Strategic Development Funding grant monies will also be hard to manage as the presence of a large team is critical if the churches are to continue to reach outwards into communities desperate for physical and spiritual nourishment.

But there are also enormous opportunities. A planting strategy is being developed which will reach across Lancashire and especially into areas where church life is weak. A strong focus on young people in Preston and in the churches that the resourcing parish plants will help us as a diocese to develop ministry into and alongside schools, especially our many Church of England schools. The formation of a new theological college in the North West will give the parish the opportunity to contribute even more richly to the formation of

new leaders, and it is our hope that the resourcing parish will be a key player in that development. 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.

It would be wrong to see any strategy as the golden bullet. The resource church model is complex and extremely resource-intensive and hence expensive, and there will be questions, especially post-Covid, about the viability of direct replication in other parts of Lancashire. But to be able to reinvigorate two struggling city-centre churches with a team intent on communicating in every aspect of its life the joy of the gospel, focused strongly on evangelism and sacrificial in its service of the poor, can only be good news. If people's perceptions of the Church of England are now informed by the energy of Preston Minster and St George's, then hearts will surely be changed and imaginations captured with the wonder of Jesus.

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