



Diocese of Bristol

Creating communities of wholeness with Christ at the centre
Church Planting Policy

INTRODUCTION

The Diocese of Bristol exists to create communities of wholeness with Christ at the centre.

This purpose has a deliberate breadth. It encourages communities that may not be ecclesial but are Christ-centred to be developed. It incorporates the continual renewal of existing ecclesial communities as they seek “to proclaim afresh [the faith] in each generation”. As an ecclesial community is a sign of God’s Kingdom, we believe they can have a leavening influence on the wider community, making not only the Church, but the world more whole.

This policy does not concern itself with these two aspects of our purpose (the creation of non-ecclesial communities and the renewal of existing ecclesial communities). Instead, it concerns itself with the aspect of the purpose that is explicit about creating new ecclesial communities. Generally, this action is referred to as “church planting” and the outcome is an “expression of church” (inherited” or “fresh”). We hope that any expressions of church that results from church planting will become a “community of wholeness with Christ at the centre”.

In the Diocese of Bristol, therefore, when we talk of creating communities of wholeness with Christ at the centre (action and outcome) we are interpreting church planting to create new expressions of church in our context. (For the sake of this policy, expressions of church arising out of the act of church planting will be referred to as “missionary communities”.)

The reason that we are intentionally committed to creating new communities of faith is that 40% of the nation’s population have never been a part of church and a further 40% who have formerly been a part, are no longer. Although our existing churches, along with our partners in other denominations and the independent churches, are seeking to connect, or re-connect, with these people, there are huge pockets of the population who are not being touched by existing churches. In a Church that seeks to be a Church for the nation, we need to identify and seek to fill those geographical and cultural gaps with Christ-centred communities.

This policy seeks to provide those seeking to engage in church planting in the Diocese – whether they are from inside or outside the Diocese – with principles for church planting and guidance as to what engagement there needs to be with and within the Diocese to facilitate this. Although it necessarily refers to some methodologies and talks about some principles, it is not a “how to” of church planting or fresh expressions of church.¹

¹ For further information about church planting and fresh expressions of church, the report *Mission-shaped Church* (Church House Publishing, 2004) is a helpful place to start.

UNDERSTANDING METHODOLOGIES

In order to understand what engagement is necessary if you are thinking about church planting, it is first important to judge what is planned according to *for* whom, *by* whom, *with* whom and *in* whom planting is occurring.²

Who is it *for*?

If church planting is to occur, it needs to be aimed at a clear group that is not being significantly connected with by another church community, amongst whom Christ-centred community can be created. This might be predominately amongst a neighbourhood or a network/sub-culture, people who used to be a part of church (de-churched) or those who have never been a part (non-churched). Incarnational mission involves proclaiming the Gospel and embodying Christ as a community in a culture in a way that identifies with that culture without compromising the Gospel.

Who is it *by*?

For the sake of this policy, this refers to whether the people in the planting team are from an existing church in the Diocese or from outside the Diocese (another church, mission agency, or a variety of places).

Who is it *with*?

Who it is with relates to the relationship with the sending church or agent and other churches. In thinking about this it is helpful to use different categories of plant described in the report *Breaking New Ground*.

“Runners” are closely linked to and supported by their sending church or churches. It may be that the plant is by a single parish. If so, it would usually start and remain within the sending parish, with little or no involvement of other churches. It may be that the plant is by a group of parishes (a Partnership or a Deanery) to complement the ministry of the other churches within the group. If so, it would start and remain across the group of parishes or part of that group. In a runner, the planting team tends to be between 12 and 50 and the biological link with the sending agent/s is intended to wither, allowing some form of independence while being seen as still part of the family. An example of a runner might be an expression of church meeting in a local school, for example, in order to reach young families.

“Grafts” are when a group from one church joins another existing church with permission in order to revive the mission emphasis of the new overall congregation. Depending on the context, the incoming team may take either a junior or a senior role. In this way, it is a missionary partnership where one church gives to another and releases those it sends. It is a renewing rather than a revolutionary device and might be used, for example, to renew children’s or young people’s work.

“Transplants” are when a group from one church joins another existing but struggling church in order to create a church with the marks more akin to the sending church than the receiving one. The incoming team is normally larger than the receiving one and is likely to have a senior role and, although an independent parish, may retain close network links with its sending church.

“Seeds” are when a small team (less than 12) travel – often a long way – away from their sending agency, and make a new beginning in a new way. They cross boundaries, are started by dynamic, strongly motivated and highly skilled pioneers. They will ordinarily move homes to immerse themselves in their new context, dying to

² Some of this is expanded in Chapter 6 of *Mission-shaped Church*, “Some methodologies for a missionary church”, pp.104-124.

their previous identity in order to reincarnate the gospel and church in the mission context. The expectation is that they will grow into a community that is quite different from inherited models of church. We believe that these missionary communities need very different models of accountability, support, recruitment and training.

Who is it *in*?

This refers to the geographical locus in which the missionary community is planted. (This locus will be determined by who the missionary community is seeking to reach – see above, Who is it *for*?) Recognising that much of the new breed of church planting operates in networks rather than geographical neighbourhoods, there will normally be some sort of geographical focus, even if that focus is as big as a city. It is important to take account therefore of the parishes alongside which the missionary community carries out its mission.

To summarise how the different sorts of “plant “relate:

- Runners are usually planted by a parish or group of parishes, in that same parish or group of parishes.
- Grafts are grafted by a parish or an external agent onto the existing life of another parish.
- Transplants are planted by a parish into another parish.
- Seeds are planted by an external agent across one or more parishes and exist in parallel to those parishes.

• POLICIES AROUND CHURCH PLANTING

Local negotiation and legal status

Recognition, authority and legitimacy for any missionary community are vital for its success. It is important for any new missionary community to be negotiated and be afforded some sort of legal status.

In the case of:

- a runner in the same parish, this would be a decision of the PCC and would therefore not require any negotiation with an external body.
- a graft onto another parish, informal negotiation is required between the two parishes.
- a transplant, formal negotiation is required between the sending parish and receiving parish, brokered by the Bishop or his appointed officer (normally the Archdeacon or Area Dean). The PCC of the receiving parish needs to give approval.

Runners by and in the same parish, grafts and transplants require no additional legal status as they operate within the parish system.

In the case of either a runner by and in a group of parishes or a seed, it is likely that the envisaged missionary community will operate in parallel to the existing parishes and therefore requires a parallel legal status. This is provided by a Bishop's Mission Order (BMO), a provision of the Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure and includes a Code of Practice for consultation and negotiation with any affected parishes and parties. In the Diocese of Bristol, we will follow the Code of Practice in the making of any BMO.³

Accountability and governance

With new initiatives, it is particularly necessary for clear lines of accountability and appropriate governance.

In the case of:

- a runner in the same parish, it would be accountable to the incumbent and the PCC. Governance may be delegated to a group of members that reports back to the PCC. As it develops, it may be that independent governance becomes appropriate.
- a graft or transplant, as these are effectively continuations of the existing parish, the incumbent and PCC are responsible and the PCC exercises governance. It is advisable that, at the first opportunity, members of the incoming team stand for election on to the PCC.
- a seed, if the missionary community is provided for by a BMO, oversight is delegated by the Bishop to a Visitor who holds the missionary community accountable on his behalf. The Visitor will also advise on developing appropriate governance structures. A BMO is initially given for a five year period, reviewed and may be renewed for another five years. It may then be appropriate for the Bishop to make an indefinite BMO.
- a runner provided for by a BMO, accountability and governance will be the same as that of a seed (i.e. through a Visitor); but, as it is planted by and part of a group of parishes, it will have a more integrated relationship with the structures of that group.

³ See *Draft Diocese, Pastoral and Mission Measure, Part V: Mission Initiatives, 1 February 2007, Draft Code of Practice.*

Funding

To give a new missionary community the best possible chance of success, it is essential that it is sustainable from the beginning and develops within a continuing framework of sustainability. It is our observation that projects in the Church of England that have been funded heavily in the first few years and faced with a goal of sustainability have rarely become sustainable. Such a funding arrangement can also restrict creativity.

To have sustainability inbuilt from the beginning means that a new missionary community must either already have a significant resource generating base to pay its leaders and the upkeep of a building (this may be the case in a runner or transplant) or start with self-supporting leaders meeting in rented venues or people's homes (which will almost always be the case in a seed).

Leadership

Missionary communities require strong and often pioneering leadership. It is important that such leaders are recognised and authorised appropriately. In many cases, particularly with runners or transplants, this will be someone already ordained or licensed as a lay minister.

However, seeds will generally need the leadership of dynamic, strongly motivated and highly skilled pioneers to develop. The identification, recruitment, training and ongoing support of such leaders needs to be specific to them. The Church of England has created separate designations for ministry in the form of ordained pioneer ministers and lay pioneer ministers. The Diocese of Bristol is committed to identifying and selecting, providing appropriate training and licensing such leaders for deployment.

23rd October 2007

Approved by Bishop's Council on 8th November 2007, to be reviewed after three years.