

# Resourcing the Church?

## Resource Churches in the Church of England

Prepared in partnership between the  
Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication,  
Faith in the North and the Bede Centre for  
Church Planting Theology



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## Executive Summary

### 130 Resource Churches as of 2025

There are currently around 130 designated Resource Churches in the Church of England. This briefing paper is intended to inform strategic planning and further theological reflection about their ministry.

### An updated definition

We offer the following definition of a Resource Church: *a church called to repeated parish revitalisation through sending leaders and teams to plant or graft into other localities.*

As they pursue this calling in the Church of England, Resource Churches will characteristically:

- Work with their bishop in intentional partnership
- Be part of their diocesan strategy to revitalise mission across a wider area
- Have the vision and capacity to revitalise and plant other churches
- Have a culture of growth through evangelism, discipleship and leadership development
- Connect with a wider network of churches which supports this task

## Part of the mixed ecology

Resource Churches are best understood as a distinctive part of the Church's mixed ecology. They can play a part in the revitalisation of parish ministry through planting and grafting, at its most effective when part of a coordinated diocesan strategy.

## Building on precedent

The act of sending leaders and teams to new contexts reflects the historic practice of the Church in England. More recently, in the context of a global movement of church planting, networks such as the Revitalise Trust and New Wine have developed a new iteration of this pattern.

## Impactful, but more research is needed

Evidence for the impact of Resource Churches is not comprehensive, but there are initial signs of significant congregational growth and engagement with young people. A proportion of this growth reflects transfer from other churches, but the net effect on Church of England statistics for worshipping congregations has been positive.

## Rooted in divine mission, but requiring vigilant discernment

The sending pattern involved in starting Resource Church networks draws on the sending pattern in the life of God. This gives Resource Church ambitions a generous aspect, realised in their best expressions. At the same time, language of generosity can mask dynamics of power. All the virtues of Resource Churches – generosity, courage, vision, creativity, partnership – require a corresponding vigilance and careful discernment.

## Contributing to the vision

Resource Churches are well placed to make a contribution to the vision and strategy of the Church of England, not least the aspiration to grow younger. In order to optimise this effect, dioceses should be encouraged to plan strategically, work in partnership with Resource Church leaders, and recognise the unique challenges and gifts this ministry can bring.

## Further discernment is crucial

We identify five key areas for further discernment:

- What is the place for other models and traditions?
- Should funding be focussed on Resource Churches or more widely spread?
- How can Resource Church leadership become more diverse?
- What are the risks in the use of power and in safeguarding?
- Do Resource Churches evidence an Anglican ecclesiology?

## Where next?

The next decade of Resource Church ministry could be more significant than the last in terms of the potential for wider impact, the need for more diverse models, and continued discernment regarding the questions raised above.



# 1. Introduction: Resourcing the Church?

In recent years, Resource Churches have become a significant feature of the Church of England.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with the first formal description of a Resource Church in 2011, a growing number of churches have now been launched or designated with this title as part of the strategic plans of dioceses, reflecting an increased focus on parish revitalisation through church planting.

The development of the Resource Church model has already had a notable impact:

- As of early 2025 there are around 130 Resource Churches across 27 dioceses.
- The majority of Resource Churches have experienced significant numerical growth.
- Resource Churches have much higher than average levels of attendance among children and young people.

At the same time important questions have been raised:

- The financial cost of establishing a Resource Church is significant, and questions remain about the long term sustainability of the model.
- The impact of Resource Churches on surrounding parishes and the ecology of a diocese has been questioned.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Below we define a Resource Church as 'called to repeated parish revitalisation through sending leaders and teams to plant or graft into other localities' (section 2).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, *The Once and Future Parish*, Alison Milbank (London: SCM, 2023)

- The diversity of Resource Churches has come under scrutiny in terms of those leading churches and the breadth of traditions engaged in this model.

The notion of *resource* is an important one here. Significant financial resources have been invested in some of these churches, but with the ultimate purpose of resourcing the Church as a whole. What, then, is the relationship between receiving and giving in this model? Is the outflow of resource from these churches to be understood as general ministry support or in very specific terms as sending teams to plant or graft into other parishes? And should churches from a wider range of traditions receive this kind of investment?

As a fourteen-year retrospective, this paper seeks to articulate these questions. It begins with the question of definition, seeking to bring additional clarity to the term Resource Church and its key features (section 2). It tells the story of the Resource Church model, with illustrations from particular places (section 3), and offers an initial overview of the data we currently have (section 4). This is followed by a set of assessments in relation to some key theological themes (section 5) and the vision and strategy of the Church of England (section 6), leading to some questions for further discernment (section 7). In conclusion, we consider the promise inherent in this model and the weaknesses still to be overcome (section 8).

Our purpose throughout is to offer a constructive account of the strategic role that Resource Churches play in the Church of England. This springs from a conviction that Resource Churches can complement inherited patterns of parish life, enabling the renewal of worship and mission as part of a global movement of multiplication at work in the Anglican Communion and beyond. At

the same time, there needs to be ongoing rearticulation and critical assessment of their role in the light of theological reflection and evidence on the ground.

The analysis here is intended principally for those involved in strategic decision-making in dioceses, but also as a contribution to further reflection in the wider Church. The drafting process has involved engagement with Resource Church leaders, theologians and a range of reviewers (see Acknowledgements). We have benefitted particularly from the insight of the Bede Centre for Church Planting Theology at Cranmer Hall, Durham, who have offered critical and constructive perspectives as part of the editorial process.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Bede Centre is currently developing a number of reflection and reporting projects related to revitalization and church planting.



## 2.2 What is a Resource Church?

### 2.1 What is a Resource Church

Language around Resource Churches has evolved from the first proposals to more recent usage in diocesan strategies and national reflection.<sup>4</sup> Building on work in this area, the present analysis is based on the following working definition.

**A Resource Church is a church called to repeated parish revitalisation through sending leaders and teams to plant or graft into other localities.**

As they pursue this calling in the Church of England, Resource Churches will characteristically:

- Work with their bishop in intentional partnership
- Be part of their diocesan strategy to revitalise mission across a wider area
- Have the vision and capacity to revitalise and plant other churches
- Have a culture of growth through evangelism, discipleship and leadership development
- Connect with a wider network of churches which supports this task

The essential feature of this definition is revitalisation through church planting. Each element above serves this task. An effective Resource Church can be expected to share the characteristics

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Ric Thorpe, *Resource Churches* (London: CCX, 2021), 9-12. Further analysis is provided by Jack Shepherd, 'What's in a Name? An Examination of Current Definitions of Resource Churches', *Journal of Anglican Studies* (2023): 251-269.

of other healthy churches and, like other churches, can be involved in launching a range of context-specific new worshipping communities.<sup>5</sup> But its defining characteristic will be the calling to revitalise other parishes by planting on a repeated basis. Here, and throughout this paper, we incorporate within planting either sending a team to 'graft' into a church that is struggling or to 'plant' into a church that is closed or in a new location.<sup>6</sup> Broadly speaking, whereas parish churches exist to serve their own parish or benefice, Resource Churches exist to revitalise other parishes.

It is true that a number of churches play a wider resourcing role – for instance, sharing ideas, offering training and acting as a hub for ministry support – without meeting the definition offered above.<sup>7</sup> We consider later a number of emerging models which support revitalisation in other ways. We propose here that Resource Churches engage resources in a distinctive way in order to fulfil their essential church planting role. They are *given* a specific kind of resource to accomplish this task, including diocesan support, leaders (e.g. planting curates) and sometimes financial investment. They also *provide* a specific kind of resource – teams of people and leaders to plant and revitalise in other contexts. In practice, this role is almost always performed as part of a wider network of churches: together they share plausible models for evangelism, develop leadership pipelines, cultivate a shared vision for church planting and provide ongoing support for leaders.

5 New worshipping communities (NWCs) can be defined as follows: *new* - aiming to reach people who are currently not attending church; *worshipping* - through practices involving (at least two of) prayer, scripture, praise, sacrament, and acts of service; *community* - meeting together at least monthly in person or online, and connected with the wider Church through the parish church, deanery or diocese. This definition is used, for instance, by the annual Church of England Statistics for Mission process.

6 We acknowledge that some prefer alternative language to 'planting'. Chichester Diocese, for instance, consider planting and grafting under the rubric of apostolic partnerships: <https://www.chichester.anglican.org/apostolic-partnerships/>

7 Southwark Diocese, for instance, call these Hub Churches.

The work of a Resource Church can therefore be understood as a distinctive ministry – much like that of a chaplaincy or cathedral. It exists within a broader framework of practice, but it also requires certain skills of its leaders. Given the level of investment often required, the potentially significant effect on other parishes and the need for accountability in this process, it is important that these churches are clearly identified.

It also follows from the above that the ministry of the church is the determining factor, rather than the designation as such. There are examples of churches playing this role where the language of Resource Church is not used; similarly, some churches have been designated Resource Churches but their ministry has in the end developed along other lines. To call any church a Resource Church is to recognise an ongoing charism and impulse for church planting, even if this is yet to be fully realised. There may be wisdom, then, in reviewing the designation of a Resource Church from time to time to ensure that it is appropriate.

## 2.2 Resource Churches and the Mixed Ecology

Resource Churches can be understood within the framework of the mixed ecology as one of many expressions of church life.<sup>8</sup>

There has always been a degree of diversity in the English church, as indicated by its abbey, cathedrals and minsters, parish churches, chapels of ease, guild churches for particular professions, chaplaincies in various settings, and more recently fresh expressions of church. In the present context, the notion of a mixed ecology seeks to capture the way in which what we have inherited can coexist symbiotically with new forms, giving a range of expressions:

8 'The mixed ecology describes the flourishing of church and ministry in our parishes, and in other communities of faith through things like church planting, fresh expressions of church, and chaplaincy and online', <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/vision-and-strategy>



- Inherited church, in the form of longstanding patterns of worship in parishes and the established work of chaplaincies.
- New worshipping communities hosted within the regular settings of parish life, for instance a new Sunday service or an additional mid-week congregation.
- New worshipping communities arising from community engagement in new locations, or through new networks and activities. E.g. "Messy Church" in a local hall, a church plant in an unreached part of a parish, a fresh expression in a cafe or a "Flourish" congregation at a local school.
- Revitalising a parish through a planting team or a graft into an existing congregation that leads to a new chapter in the church's life.

### Resource Churches and the Parish

Resource Churches can be a fruitful aspect of this ecology, but their effectiveness depends on being integrated into the whole. At their best, they complement the ministry of other parish churches in two ways. First, they serve their own parish. Second, they contribute to the renewal of other parishes through sending teams to revitalise them. In this way, what begins as a gathering dynamic within a geographically eclectic church becomes in turn a sending and re-seeding dynamic, mobilising teams to reinvigorate worship and mission in other places.<sup>9</sup> Understandably, parish revitalisation can raise concerns, especially when a larger congregation sends a team to a smaller one. However, when done with a deep understanding of both the receiving and the sending parishes – attentive to their history, needs and the potential power dynamics at play – it can be mutually enriching and beneficial to both communities.

<sup>9</sup> As Will Foulger writes, 'if we are to be present to place, then we need to plant more parish churches, and we need to intentionally revitalise others that are at risk of becoming lost', *Present in Every Place?* (London: SCM, 2023), 102.

Where this is done in a contextually sensitive way, the church re-establishes a commitment to presence and place, including possibilities for community engagement and the occasional offices. In this way, Resource Churches need not be seen as an alternative to parish ministry but as one means of its renewal.

### Resource Churches and fresh expressions

Similarly, the practice of church planting can complement the exploratory missional journey of fresh expressions or other locally run new worshipping communities. Planting from a Resource Church is a strategically intensive way to renew the congregational life of a parish and to attract those in missing demographics. These church plants and grafts tend to begin with 'worship first' and grow from there.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, fresh expressions and other pioneering communities can reach into currently unreached areas or networks in a more agile and flexible way. They tend to begin with a process of listening and service in a local context, co-creating the form of church that emerges. The two approaches need not be seen as alternatives but as symbiotic parts of a living system. Fresh expressions can teach Resource Churches and their plants creative forms of local mission; Resource Churches can provide good examples of leadership development, and can host new experimental worshipping communities of their own.

## 2.3 The Calling of a Resource Church Leader

Given the nature and challenges of this ministry, it would be beneficial to recognise the role of a Resource Church leader as a particular vocation within the broader calling to ministry in the Church of England. Resource Church leaders need focussed support in order to play their role well (see Section 8). They also require a particular set of gifts.

<sup>10</sup> Ed Olsworth-Peter, *Mixed Ecology: Inhabiting an Integrated Church* (London: SPCK, 2024), 28.



Needless to say, many of the following characteristics are relevant to all lay and ordained ministry, but they are worth restating here in relation to Resource Church leadership.

- Secure personal identity: a strong sense of security in God evidenced by generosity and humility in ministry.
- Informed calling: approaching the role with genuine enthusiasm and clarity about what a Resource Church is and its contribution to the Church's mission.
- Collaborative leadership: the emotional intelligence and interpersonal finesse to work effectively with other leaders in the church and the diocese.
- A vision for scale: the ability to strategise at a city-wide or regional level and lead others into a bold vision.
- Capacity to empower others: excellence in gathering team, nurturing the gifts of others, and building a culture of collaboration and delegation.
- Capacity for discernment: sensitivity to missional and cultural context, and the ability to nurture missional imagination in others.
- Willingness to embrace practicalities: engaging with less glamorous aspects of leadership, such as HR, finance, and administration.
- Ability to navigate complexity: working within complex systems, processes, and structures, demonstrating resilience and adaptability.
- Desire to serve the whole: a robust commitment to the unity of the Church and the flourishing of the Church of England as part of it.

*'There were quite a few of those skills that I had to learn 'on the job'. For example, conflict management, change management, budgets and grant funding, HR processes. I had some idea about operational*

*processes and so on from my curacy...but this was of a totally different scale'*

A RESOURCE CHURCH LEADER, VOICE OF THE RESOURCE CHURCH LEADER RESEARCH PROJECT

## 2.4 Resource Churches and Diocesan strategy

For Resource Churches to effectively contribute to a diocesan strategy to revitalise mission across a wider area, experience across a range of contexts has shown that the following key elements are needed:

Resource Churches play a key role in the diocese's strategic conversations and plans.



The bishop, in partnership with the incumbent, appoints planting curates or an associate vicar who are trained within the Resource Church and, in turn, gather a planting team.



The planting curate/associate vicar and team are deployed to revitalise a local church.



Vocations are inspired and nurtured in the Resource Church and church plants.



Planted churches themselves seek to grow and send their own teams to revitalise other parishes or launch other contextually appropriate new worshipping communities locally.

Dioceses can support this work with a designated senior role taking responsibility in this area and a widely communicated vision into which parish revitalisation through planting is well-integrated.

They can also recognise Resource Churches as an appropriate context, alongside others, for the formation of ordained ministers, and invite Resource Church leaders into conversations about future opportunities for revitalisation.

As this process develops, a crucial dynamic becomes possible: the renewal of confidence. That is, confidence born of seeing communities of faith grow, and an expectancy for where this could happen next.

## 2.5 A Vision for Resource Churches

The work of a Resource Church is an intensive and costly form of ministry, not unlike a missionary journey, made worthwhile by the generosity of its intention and the fruitfulness of its effect.

At its best, the dynamic is one of *gift*. A Resource Church exists to give itself away repeatedly, gathering and sending teams, raising and commissioning leaders, sharing resources and willingly surrendering the financial support it might have received from those it sends. Yet, despite its demands, this expansive ministry is also one of adventure and joy. More than that, its kingdom-focussed vision can attract and inspire others, leading to further growth.

Michael Moynagh has recently explored the importance of rooting our ecclesiology in the theology of gift. Summing this up, he writes,

*The church is to be drawn into God's mission of self-giving, gratefully joining the Spirit in giving the church to others for the benefit of the world. The church should do this by receiving first, giving appropriately and releasing the gift, and by welcoming recipients into the universal church as they accept the gift and in their turn pass it on to others with thanks. By giving away itself, communion in Christ, the church can become like Jesus – generous through and through.<sup>11</sup>*

<sup>11</sup> Michael Moynagh, 'Giving the Church Away' in *New Churches: A Theology*, edited by Will Foulger and Joshua Cockayne (London: SCM, 2024), 254.

Whereas in other contexts larger churches may have focussed their resources on growing bigger congregations indefinitely, Resource Churches are called to see their resources as gifts to be released for the benefit of the wider church through the work of planting and church revitalisation. As Matthew Porter writes, generosity 'is probably the most basic and foundational characteristic of a Resource Church'.<sup>12</sup>

What must be named, though, is that, like all acts of giving, the generosity aspired to in this case is not without ambiguity. Gifts can bless and release but they can also bind and control. An appeal to generosity, such as the one made in this paper, should not be used to deflect questions about power and justice, as explored later (section 5). This double aspect makes generosity potentially the most impactful element of the Resource Church model but also its area of greatest vulnerability.

We should also note that the choice to invest in Resource Churches rather than to disburse funds equally between parishes is a strategic decision. It entails not simply an act of giving away but rather a strategic reconfiguring of resources. In many cases there is first a process of building up and investing in a vibrant centre, in order to give away in due course. This calls for trust in the process, but also accountability to the vision of a wider reviving effect. To invest in this way is not so much an ideal configuration of the church's resources as a dramatic intervention in response to extended and widespread decline; it is a disruptive strategy in pursuit of a step-change renewal of the church's capacity to witness in the nation. The choice to utilise resources in this way needs to be judged, for better or ill, against this greater vision of bringing life to the wider ecology of the church and to society as a whole.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Porter, *Overflow: Learning from the Inspirational Resource Church of Antioch in the Book of Acts* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2020), 138.



## 3.3 The Story So Far

The practice of establishing new churches to serve unreached populations has a strong historical precedent in the Church of England, not least because every church was planted once. The renewal of this practice is particularly associated with the Evangelical revival and Oxford Movement of the 19th century.<sup>13</sup> During this period, for instance, Bradford Cathedral founded at least five other parish churches, supporting them with clergy and lay teams.<sup>14</sup>

Another key movement of church planting is the post-war daughter church movement. In response to new housing estates and burgeoning urban communities, nearly 800 additional churches were built within parishes to serve unreached parts of the population. For example, St Mary's Portsea built several mission churches (St Barnabas, St Faith's, St Mary Mission, St Boniface, St Stephen's and St Wilfrid's) within the parish in order to serve everyone in the community.<sup>15</sup> During this time, the parish reportedly had over a dozen curates at any one time, to support this mission of the mother and daughter churches.

In recent decades, models of church planting have come to prominence globally and nationally. In the early 1990s, Bob and Mary Hopkins convened Anglican Church Planting Conferences to promote the creation of 'new communities of Christian faith as part of the mission of God, to express his Kingdom in every geographic and cultural context.'<sup>16</sup> 1994 saw the first official consideration of church planting in the Breaking New Ground Report, and in 2004 church planting was recognised in the Mission-Shaped Church report.

<sup>13</sup> Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, 58-9.

<sup>14</sup> With thanks to the Bradford Cathedral heritage team for this information.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.portseaparish.co.uk/a-brief-history/>

<sup>16</sup> Graham Cray, ed. *Mission-Shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2nd edn, 2009), 29.

The role of Resource Churches is best understood in this context, as one way of multiplying Christian communities. The resulting story can be told as one of partnership and place across a wide geographical canvas, as the following examples illustrate.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.1 York and Newcastle

In York, St Michael le Belfrey planted a number of communities including G2 – which began initially in a gym, then moved to a school. G2 subsequently planted two new congregations in the city centre of York – G2 Central and G2 City. These are no longer running but, alongside G2, have had a notable effect on mission and producing new vocations. The Belfrey also sent teams to other churches, including a partnership with Newcastle Diocese to revitalise St Thomas' in the city centre. A team of 30 with a planting curate was sent from York, and St Thomas' has since seen dramatic growth, initially through reaching students and then building a broad-based congregation centred on a regular eucharistic pattern of services. St Thomas' has now grafted again into the nearby parish of St Luke's Claremont Street, working with the grain of its charismatic tradition, in a parish with a significant ministry to those returning to the community from prison. In addition, they have planted both a missional community and a new worshipping community in Byker, a low income area nearby.

The most recent grafting team from the Belfrey have partnered with The Ascension, Hull, working in partnership with the diocese's Mustard Seed programme to develop leaders in working class contexts. These further plants and grafts represent three generations of parish revitalisation, developing in different directions, with different charisms. While all remain broadly within the evangelical charismatic tradition, it is difficult to think of them as carbon copies. For example, G2 was established as a community to

reach those on the edges of the church's life, meeting around cafe tables and encouraging discussion throughout services. Today, it retains that creative and innovative approach to church and is led by a lay-leader under a Bishop's Mission Order (BMO). In contrast, one of the distinctives of St Thomas' is its strong emphasis on its liturgical identity, particularly the sacraments.

### 3.2 Sheffield

In Sheffield, St Thomas Crookes (STC) also developed a ministry of using teams to grow missional communities in local areas. More recently it has worked with the Yorkshire Baptist Association to establish a community on the Fir Vale Estate. It has also sent grafting teams to Christ Church Stannington and St John's Park in Sheffield. STC is now one of at least 12 churches, working to revitalise local parishes as part of the vision to renew the witness of the church across Sheffield Diocese, by planting 50 churches by 2035.

Sheffield Cathedral is one of these Resource Churches, with a plan to train planting curates and missionaries over a 3-year period in an intentional missional community anchored at the Cathedral. Following this training, the goal is that the curate or music missionary is then fully embedded in their context to ensure sustainability of the new congregation but with ongoing support from the cathedral. In this plan, Sheffield Cathedral sits on the borderline of the definition of a Resource Church, which typically sends a team with the leader to revitalise a church. It, therefore, offers a potential illustration of the creative ways other traditions might receive and implement the Resource Church model.

### 3.3 London, Brighton and Wales

Over a similar period, the Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) network of churches has developed a widely deployed and well-structured model which has become something of a template for revitalisation

<sup>17</sup> For a fuller range of examples, see Thorpe, *Resource Churches*.

through planting and grafting. In 2009, HTB partnered with the Diocese of Chichester to plant in Brighton. A leader, team, and resources were sent from London to reopen and revitalise St Peter's, a large church in the middle of the city. As St Peter's grew, it began planting across Brighton, by sending a leader, team and resources to revitalise other parishes. Then, St Peter's and its plants began to plant more churches around the South-East and West, and eventually into Wales. In this way, this initial partnership between London and Brighton further revitalised the missional and worshipping life of an entire region and beyond (see map). The St Peter's family of churches continues to operate on a partnership basis throughout Brighton, supporting each other in recruitment, schools work and sharing resources.

At the same time, HTB was working to revitalise other parishes in the Diocese of London. In 2005 a team was sent from Kensington to revitalize St Paul's Shadwell. By 2014, this church had revitalised four other churches in Tower Hamlets, including St Peter's Bethnal Green, a cross-tradition church worshipping in both Anglo-Catholic and Charismatic Evangelical traditions. After this, it went on to support plants in the dioceses of Chelmsford, Southwark, and Europe. Two of the earlier plants have since planted again in Tower Hamlets and Newham.<sup>18</sup> Tim Thorlby, a researcher for the Centre for Theology and Community, notes that even though these churches may have introduced more Charismatic evangelical forms of worship, there was still a strong degree of continuity with the existing traditions of worship in these places.

### 3.4 Further Reflections

The story is not one of unqualified success. Some Resource Churches have not fulfilled their vision to plant churches and others have experienced significant difficulties (see 4.6 below).

The positive impact of the majority needs to be assessed in the understanding that not all Resource Churches have been successful.

It should also be noted that none of this would have been possible without the sponsorship of diocesan leaders and, since 2016, additional investment from national Church funds (though a number of plants have taken place without any additional external funding). The overriding rationale for this support has been the impact of which Resource Churches are capable. This is further addressed in the next section.

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<sup>18</sup> Tim Thorlby, *Love Sweat and Tears* (London: CTC, 2016) 40-51.



## 4. The Impact of Resource Churches

At present there is a modest body of evidence about the impact of Resource Churches in the Church of England. The following observations can be offered on the basis of the data that we have so far. However, in many cases further work needs to be done to lend confidence to these observations.

### 4.1 The Growth in Resource Churches and their Attendance

As of early 2025, there are around 130 Resource Churches, which have either revitalised other parishes in recent years or are working to do so in the near future. The first Resource Church was officially designated in 2011, meaning that, on average, around 9 Resource Churches have been designated or planted each year.

On average, Resource Churches experience growth at a higher rate and have higher attendance than the national average.

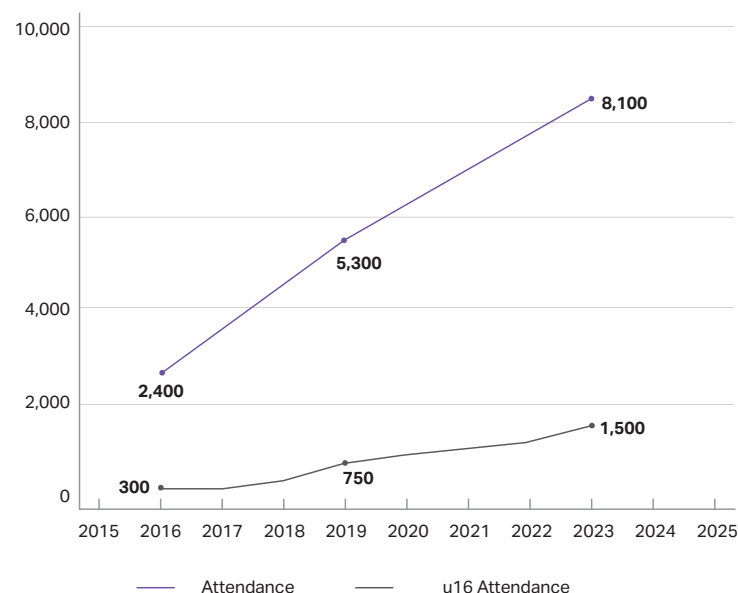
Evidence:

- In a sample of 25 Resource Churches between 2016-2023 total attendance increased by 238%, compared to a national decline of 25%<sup>19</sup> (See next page).

<sup>19</sup> Sample of 25 Resource Churches in cities or large towns created in recent years with the support of national funding, in analysis supplied by the Church of England Vision and Strategy team.



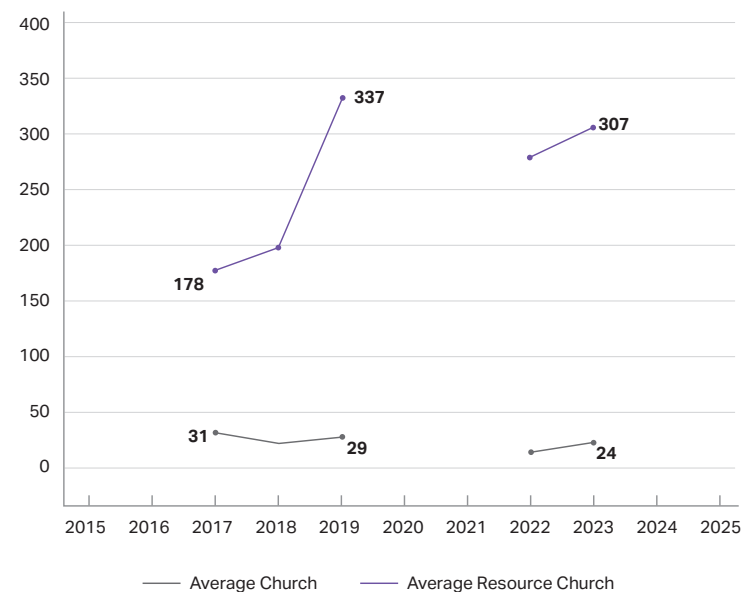
## Total Attendance Across 25 Churches



- In 2023 the average planted Resource Church had an average attendance of 307 people which was nearly 13 times the national average.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For this and the following data point, the Resource Church sample is subject to new churches opening – but only after two years of ‘maturity’ do churches join the sample. This is to provide a more robust macro figure. Data from the Vision and Strategy Team.

## Church Attendance: Resource Church against the National Average



- In 2023, 28 city centre Resource Churches in the HTB Network had an Average Sunday Attendance of 352 (288 adults and 64 children) and 10 town centre Resource Churches had an Average Sunday Attendance of 229 (183 adults and 46 children).<sup>21</sup>

These statistics are dramatic by any recent measure in the Church of England. They do, however, reflect the considerable growth in new churches throughout the UK over recent years, often outside historic denominations.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Data here and below shared by the Revitalise Trust.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, the number of churches in London rose by at least 50% between 1979 and 2019; see D. Goodhew and A. P. Cooper (eds.), *The Desecularisation of the City: London's Churches* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019). See also the examples in D. Goodhew and R. Barward-Symons, *New Churches in the North East* (Durham: CCGR, 2015).



There are important questions of context and interpretation here. As discussed below (Section 7.2), this growth reflects a substantial investment of focus and financial resources in settings deliberately chosen for their strategic location. Other forms of ministry have not received the same treatment. At the very least, this makes some statistical comparisons problematic. On the other hand, though, it can be argued that many declining parishes have received a subsidy through support for their ministry costs over a number of years.

## 4.2 Children and Young People

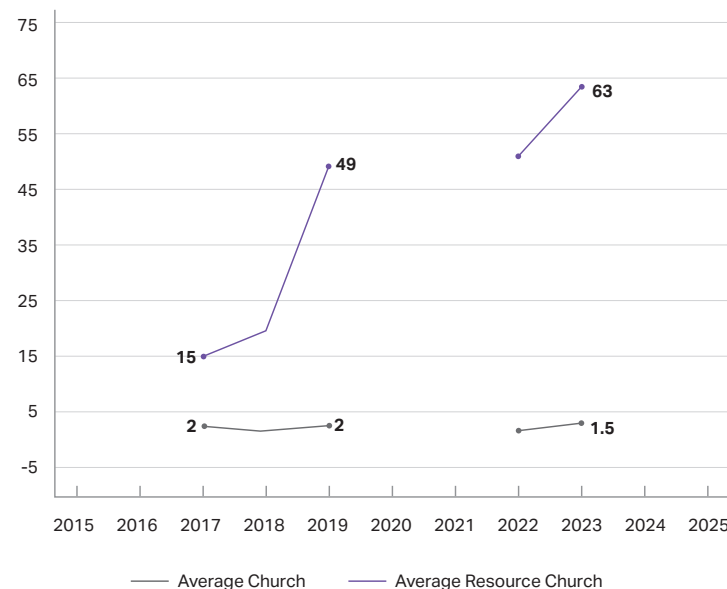
A key feature of Resource Churches is the increased involvement of children and young people. This may be related to the high priority given to this ministry in church planting strategies and staffing roles, the appeal of a fresh approach with a growing critical mass, and the way planting teams can connect with a younger demographic. Again, further research is needed in this area.

Evidence:

- Among of 25 Resource Churches between 2016-2023 under 16 attendance increased by 400%, compared to a national decline of 30% (see earlier graph).<sup>23</sup>
- Resource Churches tend to very quickly develop a large u16 congregation – an average of 63 in 2023, which is 42 times the national average.

<sup>23</sup> Sample of 25 Resource Churches in cities or large towns created in recent years with the support of national funding, in analysis supplied by the Church of England Vision and Strategy team.

U16 Church Attendance: Resource Church against the National Average



- The report *New in the North: New worshipping communities in the Northern Province 2023* found that:<sup>24</sup>
  - Resource Churches account for 10% of child AWA in the Northern Province 2023.
  - 42% of the child AWA growth was in Resource Church networks.
  - 20% of AWA in Resource Churches is comprised of children, compared with the provincial average of 15%.
  - In 2023 their combined child AWA went up 19%.

<sup>24</sup> Bev Botting and Bob Jackson, *New in the North: New worshipping communities in the province of York 2023*, 16.

## 4.3 Growth and Transfer

As highlighted above, Resource Churches have seen significant growth among all ages. Some of this is associated with transfer from other parishes, or from outside the Church of England. Transfer is, however, a relatively simplistic category. Alongside those simply opting to change church, it can also include others whose previous commitment was in danger of lapsing, or who feel strongly called to the vision of revitalisation, or who have been looking to return to the Church of England.

The modest data available suggests that a reasonable proportion of the growth in Resource Churches is un/dechurched people, and that it also exceeds decline in other Church of England parishes. But further work needs to be done on the nature and extent of transfer growth, and its relation to denominations outside the Church of England.

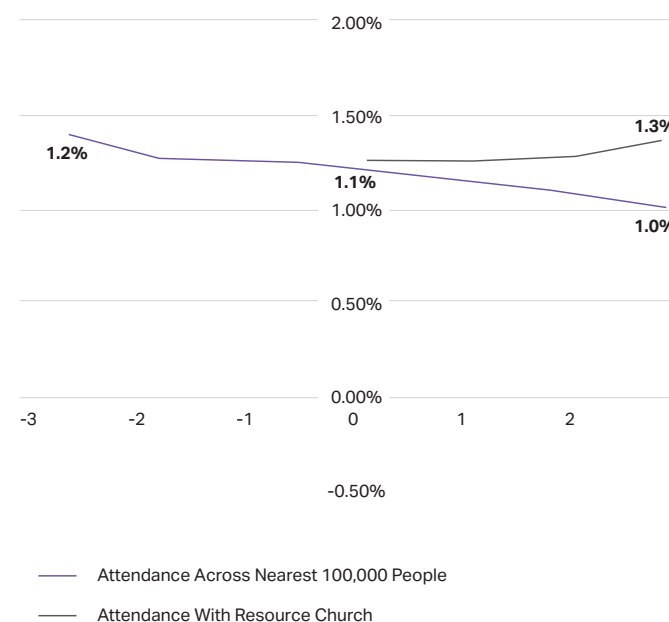
Evidence:

- A 2021 SDF learning summary observed that 23% of attendance at Resource Churches was un or dechurched people, whilst 38% represented transfer from a local church.<sup>25</sup>
- Data from the Vision and Strategy team suggests that Resource Churches have no detectable attendance impact on neighbouring parishes – churches in the surrounding area, not connected with the Resource Church or its planting/grafting activity, tend to continue the attendance trajectory they had before the establishment of the Resource Church. Also, the attendance growth at the Resource Church within the first 3 years is more than enough to turn around attendance decline across the area over the previous 3 years, providing a modest 'net' increase.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/topic-summary-new-resource-churches.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Data from Church of England Vision and Strategy team.

Average Attendance per Capita, with and without RC  
(Resource Church is planted at Year 0)



- According to the 2022 Chote report, 'The [Church of England Strategic Development Unit] has also analysed the impact on the parishes containing the closest 100,000 people to four relatively mature SDF resource projects and found that in three of the four cases attendance at the neighbouring churches had continued on the same path as before the Resource Church was planted. In one case the local decline was greater but within the bounds of what other urban areas had seen. The growth in the Resource Church exceeded any ongoing decline in other parishes.'<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/irls-final-report-2.pdf>, 28.

## 4.4 Vocations

Resource Churches have been observed to make a considerable contribution to lay and ordained vocations. The data available is partial; nevertheless it suggests that they have a strong record of attracting, identifying and sending leaders for ministry in the wider church. Further research from across the Church of England is necessary to further substantiate this claim.

Evidence:

- Diocese of London 2020-24: 29% of ordinands were sent for ordination training by Resource Churches.<sup>28</sup>

## 4.5 When Resource Churches Struggle

Not all Resource Churches have been successful along the lines originally intended. A range of reasons could be offered for this,<sup>29</sup> depending on the particularities of each case:

- *Pressure on leaders.* Similarly to other forms of ministry, Resource Church leaders and leadership teams are often subject to a high degree of pressure, especially if insufficient support is in place from diocesan structures, informal networks and ongoing coaching.
- *Lack of shared vision and clear intention at local or senior level.* The tasks of growing, planting and recovery are complex and demanding, with implications for local parishes, clergy deployment and diocesan resources. Without ownership of a consistent vision for change the obstacles involved can overwhelm a potential Resource Church project. Changes in diocesan leadership can exacerbate this issue.


<sup>28</sup> Data shared by the Diocese of London Vocations team. 13% SDF London Resource Churches, 16% National Resource Churches in London (Holy Trinity Brompton and St Helen's Bishopsgate).

<sup>29</sup> A number of these themes are found in *Listening to the Voice of the Resource Church Leader* (CCX, 2024).

- *Lack of supporting infrastructure or resources.* Some churches have been asked to play a sending and revitalising role without the support of a strong and well-equipped network to give coherence to the efforts of leaders and congregation members, or with a fraction of the funding deployed in other cases. Some Resource Churches have been able to attract wealthy donors, but not all.
- *Mission disconnect.* Not all planting strategies have been able to show sufficient contextual sensitivity and the 'soil' of some contexts is very difficult to plant into. At times, a 'low', informal style among church plants can be a flexible connection point, at others it may be perceived as an imposition or make only a shallow connection with local communities.
- *Can a Resource Church fail at the same time as numerically 'succeeding'?* A Resource Church may grow, but not give away significant numbers to plant. Or it may not remain aligned with the vision and polity of the diocese and therefore become disconnected from the ecology it was intended to renew.

The concept of a Resource Church, in its contemporary form, is still relatively new. It would be surprising if there were not examples of difficulty, and even failure, in trying to develop a new model for ministry in an institution as complex as the Church of England.

It is also important to note that, as an emerging ecclesial movement, there are urgent theological questions around their relation to Anglican ecclesiology, as well as their use of power in revitalising parishes. We reflect further on issues for ongoing discernment below (Section 7).



# 5. Theological Reflections on Resource Churches

How might we reflect theologically on the evidence we have seen so far? The following section offers some thoughts on the basis and precedents for Resource Churches, with some further comments about the strengths and weaknesses they bring.

## 5.1 Theological Basis

The dynamic at the heart of church life is one of mission. In the words of James Torrance, 'The mission of the Church is the gift of participating through the Holy Spirit, in the Son's mission from the Father to the world'.<sup>30</sup> Resource Churches share in this through particular kinds of sending. The act of being commissioned and deployed – long-practiced in the case of mission partners, evangelists and clergy families – here includes teams of lay people opting to move church, and at times to relocate and find new work. What we see in the work of the Trinity finds an echo: sending and being sent, breathing in new life, drawing elements of the world into the divine purpose. In all of these ways, Resource Churches can express the apostolicity of the Church.

This apostolicity has certain implications. First, because mission begins with God, the processes of planting and revitalisation should be marked not only by boldness but also attentive listening. Those involved with a local revitalisation must ask: what is God doing in and through this context? In the words of the reformed theologian, Edwin van Driel, locating our own ministry in the

<sup>30</sup> James Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), ix.

perspective of God's mission helps us to see that 'strategic planning' must be first and foremost a process of discernment.<sup>31</sup> Truly apostolic Resource Churches will show contextual sensitivity as they bring the gospel to the communities they serve.

Second, with apostolicity comes mutual belonging. In Lesslie Newbigin's words, 'an unchurchly mission is as much a monstrosity as an unmissionary church'.<sup>32</sup> It is as one Church that we share in God's mission in the world. Within Anglican theology, the apostolic nature of God's Church means recognising the authority given to tradition and the structures of the church. In other words, Resource Churches do not exist in a silo. They exist within the one mystical body of Christ, and within the historic tradition of the Church of England.<sup>33</sup>

## 5.2 Biblical and Historical Precedents

Several biblical and historical precedents have been explored for Resource Churches. First, some of the city churches of the New Testament era. Jerusalem clearly functioned as a base for the church, but the gospel seems to advance from there less through strategy and more through scattered believers and negotiated acceptance of developments elsewhere (e.g., Acts 8:1, 14-17). In Antioch, by contrast, the work is more deliberate, initiated through prayer and progressed through commissioned teams. Antioch and Ephesus thus became a platform for seeding new communities in their region.<sup>34</sup>

31 Edwin van Driel, 'Rethinking Church in a Post-Christian Age' in *What Is Jesus Doing? – God's Activity in the Life and Work of the Church* edited by Edwin van Driel (Lisle: IVP, 2020), 61.

32 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1964).

33 See, Joshua Cockayne, "'Are You Really Anglicans?' Reflections on Church Planting, Innovation and Ecclesiastical Authority in the Church of England," in *Journal of Anglican Studies* (2024): 1–22

34 See Jack Shepherd, 'Creation Stories: What Were the First Resource Churches?' in *Journal of Anglican Studies* (2024); Daniel McGinnis, *Missional Acts* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2022).

Closer to home, we may think of the way monasteries in Anglo-Saxon times were founded by groups of missionary monks sent from an established base. The revitalising movements from Rome to Canterbury and then to York, and from Iona to Lindisfarne and then to Melrose are examples of this. A similar pattern – radiating out from a central point – is evident around cathedrals and minsters over many centuries, and then in the founding of daughter churches in more recent times.

In each case above there are clear parallels with Resource Churches. First, there is a propulsive dynamic, sending leaders and teams of people as an expression of mission. Second, these are costly and significant ventures, underpinned by fervent prayer and deliberate strategic thinking. Third, this process works through key cultural and geographic locations which become nodes in an expanding network. This is so for Paul, connecting with synagogues around the Mediterranean, and the 'god-fearers' associated with them.<sup>35</sup> In a similar way, early monastic missionaries utilised the natural vantage of river settlements and Anglo-Saxon centres of power. In this sense, the resource at issue is not simply what is donated by a sending church but the resources of the context itself, harnessed in a new way by the creative interplay between gospel and culture.<sup>36</sup>

These parallels notwithstanding, there is no need to propose a 'blueprint ecclesiology' which collapses historical differences into a single model of church planting.<sup>37</sup> The current Resource Church project is a distinctive contribution to the life of the church, reflecting its cultural time and place, and bringing its own

35 Paul, for instance, follows the location of synagogues, their practices (such as public reading of Scripture, 1 Tim 4:13) and their relational networks (e.g. Acts 18:5-8).

36 The context as a site of resource was highlighted by the Transforming Experience Framework of the Grubb Institute, see also Timothy L. Carson, Rosy Fairhurst, Nigel Rooms, Lisa R. Withrow, *Crossing Thresholds A Practical Theology of Liminality* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2021), chapter 7.

37 Nicholas Healy, "Blueprint Ecclesiologies," in *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 25–51.

strengths and weaknesses. It fuses the evangelistic impulse of the Church Growth Movement and the inherited structure of the parish system. The result is a 'revitalisation' of congregational life through an infusion of social capital in the form, for instance, of younger leaders and new cohorts of worshippers who feel connected to an emerging family of churches. This is frequently accompanied by practical changes: an injection of financial resources, technologically upgraded and restyled facilities, and greater connection with a global media network of worship music. It is supported by a theology of renewal that combines the modern instinct for novelty with the Western tradition of reformation. All these features give the Resource Church model, as it has developed so far, its distinctive imprint.

### 5.3 Virtue and Vigilance in the Resource Church Model

Initial work has already been done on the character of Resource Churches.<sup>38</sup> Building on this, we can identify certain virtues to celebrate, which at the same time can occasionally 'tip over' into excess - hence the need for vigilance and discernment.<sup>39</sup> This can be illustrated especially in terms of generosity, a key theme in the present analysis, but also with other Resource Church virtues.

#### The Virtue of Generosity

We have made the claim that Resource Churches grow to give themselves away. This is, of course, the pattern of Christ, the one 'for others', whose very life is eucharistic. Many Christian traditions have seen this especially in Mary, who exemplifies generative giving by freely offering her body to become a space in which Christ can come to be born. Resource Churches can imitate

this generosity for the sake of the kingdom, giving away their best in terms of people, talents and financial resources. Rather than aiming to become 'megachurches', they point away from themselves, giving life to new or renewed communities, nurturing them through connection but also releasing them into independent existence.

But, as noted earlier, giving to others can also be a means of establishing patronage, power and control. The line that separates truly releasing forms of generosity from other gifts is hard to establish. As Michael Moynagh highlights, giving is a two-way-relationship in which the giver recognises what is needed by the recipient through 'empathetic dialogue' and deep listening. A gift must also be released to be a gift. Moynagh argues that if the giver attempts to control and keep hold of the gift, it fails to be a gift at all.<sup>40</sup> This is why giving is so costly and sacrificial.

Vigilance here means going beyond generosity alone to true partnership. In a Resource Church context, this means attention must be paid to flows of power and trust between sending churches and receiving partners, between donors and beneficiaries, and between the diocese and its parishes. It involves a high degree of transparency about the financial commitments made, and the expectations of dioceses, networks and Resource Churches in this respect. It depends on a careful practice of mutuality throughout the whole process. What is the table around which partners gather? How are all voices heard? What is the legitimate and recognisable benefit to the giver (as in Acts 20:35; Phil 4:17), and where is the blessing for the receiver, including giving in their turn? Is there merely a transfer of resources or a true gift, characterised by creativity, freedom and mutual blessing?

<sup>38</sup> Thorpe, *Resource Churches*, 12.

<sup>39</sup> The analysis in this section constructively builds upon Gregory of Nyssa's insight, developed in *On the Soul and Resurrection* (42.8-43.1, 43.12-6), that, if it is improperly directed, a virtue can tip over into its corresponding evil. E.g. Courage can become anger.

<sup>40</sup> Moynagh, 'Giving the Church Away,' 250.



## Other Virtues of Resource Churches

The same analysis could be applied, with appropriate changes, to other virtues at work in the Resource Church model. *Courage*, for instance, is a key component in sending out teams. It complements the faithful constancy of parish life with boldness, on the part of those sponsoring the change, by those sending and receiving a team, and by the team themselves. But the attendant dangers of courage are unreflective arrogance and an unfair distribution of the costs of change. At their best, therefore, Resource Churches must exhibit this virtue with a humility which is willing to be vulnerable and to remain attuned to their impact on others.

*Vision* is another key virtue of Resource Churches, including faith for a new or renewed worshipping community that is not yet visible. But strategic vision is always subject to the judgement of all human plans; it must remain open to the surprising work of the Spirit and be accountable to the values of the kingdom, not merely numerical success.

Likewise, *creativity* is a great virtue of many Resource Churches. This can be resource-intensive yet incredibly generative. Here it needs to be allied with generosity and with missional imagination to inspire other contextually appropriate expressions of faith.

Finally, the whole process of planting depends on the virtue of *partnership*, a kingdom *koinonia* that forms an even wider network of sending churches and plants (first generation, second generation, and so on). A successful church plant draws on a set of costly yet fruitful commitments: from the diocese, from members of the sending and receiving churches, and from a wider network of support and prayer. These partnerships can be incredibly powerful, but always need to be kept in the perspective of the whole church – the body of Christ is never just one of its limbs or organs; blessing in one part should be shared with the whole; we are called to reflect the manifold wisdom of God not just one social network, however

extensive (1 Cor 12; Rom 12:3-8; Eph 3:7-10). As Leslie Newbiggin wrote, 'each local congregation must be knit by bonds of mutual recognition and mutual responsibility with the Church in all places and ages'.<sup>41</sup> Here the congregational focus of Resource Churches needs to be grounded in a robust Anglican ecclesiology (see section 7).

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<sup>41</sup> Cited in Graham Cray, 'Discernment – The Key to Planting Missional Churches,' in *Cultivating Missional Change: The Future of Missional Churches and Missional Theology*, edited by Coenie Burger, Frederick Marais, and Danie Mouton, (Wellington: Biblecor, 2017).





## 6. Resource Churches and the Vision and Strategy of the Church of England

Resource Churches, in their current form, are closely bound up with strategic development work in the Church of England, having first benefitted from the Strategic Development Fund (SDF) investment programme and now the Diocesan Investment Programme (DIP) which is governed by the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB). What frameworks does this provide to reflect on their ministry?

### 6.1 Working towards strategic goals

#### **A church that is younger and more diverse**

The statistics that we have highlight the ability of Resource Churches to connect especially well with teenagers, students and other young adults, a demographic largely missing from many Church of England congregations.

As the Resource Church model develops, it is demonstrating the capacity to support mission in an increasing range of contexts. In a plural context, this flexibility is crucial to reaching and reflecting every community we are called to serve. Having said this, currently Resource Churches overwhelmingly reflect only one tradition in the Church of England. Diversity of leadership in terms of gender, ethnicity and working class background is also an important issue (see section 7).

## A church where mixed ecology is the norm

The vision of a mixed ecology is fleshed out in two 'bold outcomes'. First, a parish system revitalised for mission. Here Resource Churches seek to make their distinctive contribution. As suggested in Section 4, there is some promising evidence of a positive impact, but more data and reflection is required to judge the reach, extent and sustainability of this form of revitalisation. At the same time, there are many potential routes to revitalising a parish, including local and regional church partnerships, programmes for spiritual renewal, accompaniment in mission, training for parish leaders and new models for engaging with children, young people and families. Growth can be propagated without a team being permanently sent; confidence can be built up through other kinds of connection. Still, Resource Churches have opened up a new avenue for an intensive form of revitalisation that can have consequential and cascading effects across a town, city or region.

The second intended outcome is the establishment of ten thousand new worshipping communities working to reach people with the gospel. Sometimes the establishment of a resource church is effectively a new worshipping community in itself, but certainly Resource Churches and the churches they plant can become centres for innovation, whether through multiplying services, launching new groups or other mission work in the local context. Again, though, Resource Churches are only part of an effective strategy, massively outweighed by other parishes. There are numerous innovative ways to launch new worshipping communities within the mixed ecology (see Section 2.2), and we can expect the vast majority of the 10,000 new worshipping communities to come through local listening and experimentation in parishes. In both revitalisation and new worshipping communities, Resource Churches play their role best as part of a diverse system, contributing their specific gift and then sharing learnings and encouragements with others.

## Missionary disciples

Resource Church congregation members may be more likely to think of their role as sending and being sent. Resource Churches tend to recognise the need to develop their discipleship and this can contribute to the wider church as they develop resources for themselves and give them away to the wider church. The effectiveness of this may depend on the ability of those nurtured at Resource Churches to apply their faith missionally in new contexts, as they are sent out. A faith that cannot thrive in contexts that are small, local and lightly resourced is unlikely to have a widely renewing effect. This underlines the importance of careful attention to practices of formation and an openness to the work of the Spirit in a range of contexts.

## 6.2 How dioceses can support resource churches

The analysis here is informed by the conviction that Resource Churches are part of the new and renewing work of God through the gospel. If this is so, how can this work be well supported?

A 2024 qualitative piece of research, *Listening to the Voice of the Resource Church Leader*, highlights how bishops, the national church and other organisations can better support Resource Church leaders (*Listening to the Voice of the Resource Church Leader*) highlights how bishops, the national church, and other organisations can better support Resource Church leaders in these challenges.<sup>42</sup> It gave the following recommendations:

- There is a need to inform the broader church of the nature and role of Resource Churches, in order to facilitate productive strategic relationships with local clergy, bishops and diocesan teams.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> <https://ccx.org.uk/content/voice-resource-church-leader/>

<sup>43</sup> The present paper is intended as a contribution to that end.

- Effective stakeholder engagement between the bishop and Resource Church leaders—especially during the church’s initial designation and following a transition of bishop—can foster strong strategic alignment between the diocese and the Resource Church.
- An online portal containing specialist knowledge (e.g. HR processes) as well as access to expert advice would help Resource Church leaders overcome any gaps in their own knowledge and experience.
- Resource Church leaders would benefit from specific training in areas such as scaling leadership, leading through change, delegation, leading across multiple locations.
- Access to mental health and wellbeing services, opportunities for personal development, and coaches/mentors would help offset the personal cost of leading a Resource Church.
- Some Resource Churches receive excellent support from their networks. It would benefit all Resource Church leaders to have access to supportive networks.
- A leadership pipeline, where potential church planters are identified, trained and deployed, needs to be maintained and developed.

The research and subsequent reflection highlighted the importance of regular and affirming connections between dioceses and Resource Church leaders, working together where possible on strategic planning.

If dioceses and other partners can provide this supportive context, and Resource Churches and their networks can address the challenges highlighted in this briefing, we have good grounds to expect this model to further develop and bear fruit. The potential long term effect would be a ‘resourcing culture’ where revitalisation

and church planting are normalised across the Church, every parish is enabled to play a part, and more and more communities and contexts are reached with the gospel.



## 7. Questions for further discernment

Throughout this paper we have highlighted areas for further thought and reflection. We address these briefly here in the hope of stimulating further research and reflection.

### 7.1 What is the place for other models and traditions?

Resource Churches in their contemporary form have emerged as a model from the charismatic evangelical (and in some cases conservative evangelical) tradition, and this gives rise to the question as to why this might be. Though not an exhaustive account, the following factors may be at work:

- *Theological emphases.* More than any other tradition, evangelical charismatics embraced the logic of the Church Growth Movement and its later iterations. They have been influenced by the revivalist concern for individual salvation and societal change, and are connected with the global growth of forms of Pentecostalism. All this supports a strong practice of evangelism and a pragmatic willingness to be flexible in pursuit of growth, underpinned by a sense of urgency and the belief that the kingdom grows through a principle of multiplication.
- *Strategic factors.* Compared to those of other traditions, evangelical networks are highly structured and well-resourced, with a clear vision for church planting, opportunities for leadership formation and large festival celebrations. They have notable pioneering exemplars to draw on, wider cultural resources (e.g., digital music media) and a sense of movemental impetus.

- *Practical and opportunistic factors.* The rise of church planting networks has coincided with a time of experimentation with local structures and, more recently, the pursuit of a more explicitly strategic focus by senior leaders in the Church of England. In principle, networks in other traditions could also take advantage of some of these opportunities – but to do so they might require additional encouragement and investment in order to bring about the kind of culture change and infrastructure capacity necessary to support a movement of revitalisation.

None of the above means that Resource Churches cannot exist outside of the Charismatic and Conservative Evangelical traditions in the future. A deeper grappling with the theological commitments of Resource Churches may be needed to expand this vision more fully. There are already signs of churches from other traditions beginning to use similar models to plant and revitalise. For example, St Mary's Cockerton in Darlington recently released their curate to plant "The Haven", an Anglo Catholic plant with a "charismatic twist".<sup>44</sup> Developing the model in a different direction, dioceses such as Edmundsbury and Ipswich are giving attention to the development of rural Resource Churches operating in the context of dispersed village life. These aim to build on local contact points through a listening journey across a collection of parishes with a view to developing, and multiplying, local worshipping communities. Other models explore a mix of gathered worship and scattered discipleship that could eventually seed multiple communities across a wide rural area.

The challenge of working in different contexts is arguably drawing out some creative new models for resourcing and revitalising other churches, some of which may be on the boundaries of the

definition of a Resource Church but all of which are valuable for mission. Sheffield Cathedral has already been highlighted as an example (section 3). Another example is found in St George-in-the-East, who plant churches out of a community organising methodology. The parish developed Choir Church, a model for new worshipping communities built around children's choirs in schools, offering worship, musical excellence, and spiritual formation designed to build and grow congregations, working for social justice. St George's began by planting a Choir Church within their parish in Shadwell. However, since then, they have shared this model with the whole Church of England. Several parishes and Cathedrals, including Portsmouth and Worcester Cathedral, have started their own Choir Churches, and funding has been secured to develop this model in the Diocese of Blackburn. In these cases no team is sent to partner parishes, rather the focus is on offering fruitful models and ongoing support. This difference in approach from planting/grafting may mean that congregational renewal takes longer and is more challenging. But these developments are also helping to diversify models for revitalisation and to build a wider capacity for change in dioceses. If Resource Churches, as defined in this paper, are forms of multiple-planting revitalisation, these other examples may point the way to other emerging models of revitalisation equally worthy of attention and support in future.

## 7.2 Should funding be focussed or widely spread?

Resource Churches can be highly resource intensive. Many began their current form of ministry with some form of strategic funding. We need to explore how financially sustainable Resource Churches are and what would support this ministry over the long term.

The question has been understandably raised as to whether this level of investment is justified or fair. Appeal might be made to the biblical tradition of equalising resources, such as Luke's description

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/durhamdiocese/posts/pfbid01Lx7X4UC2VsmLfwuKxmSVA3GigCGdw2V5eWE56EQVfrhwibzYrE8g43nxusnNa6kl>

of the early church in the light of Deuteronomy that 'everything they owned was held in common' so 'there was not a needy person among them' (Acts 4:32 & 34; see Deut 15:4, 7), or Paul's concern about the churches in Corinth and Jerusalem: 'I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance' (2 Cor 8:13 NRSV). On these terms, can focussed investment in one church in a given area be defended?

From a different perspective, the argument is made that it is precisely in order to impact the health and witness of the church over a wide area that, in the short to medium term, we should invest in a limited number of churches that can in turn breathe life into others. A step change in congregational culture and the critical mass to support it may not be achievable with smaller amounts of disbursed funding. The irony that 'those who have are given more' is mitigated by a weighty responsibility – 'from those to whom much is given, much will be demanded' (Matthew 25:29; Luke 12:58). All this is set in context by a sense of urgency, as with the unjust steward who at least rightly perceives the need for radical action (Luke 16:1-13). Given that equal disbursement of financial resources did not previously arrest half a century of decline, the hope is to resource some churches today in order to resource many more in the coming generations.

The references to parables above highlight the need to 'read the signs of the times' (Matt 16:3). Is now a time to settle concerns for justice between all parishes, or to boldly provide additional investment in a limited number for the sake of the whole? The two approaches may not be entirely exclusive: dioceses may experiment with a range of intensive and widespread forms of intervention. But there is clearly a judgement call to be made in the present time as to how kingdom justice and kingdom boldness relate in any given context.

### 7.3 How can Resource Church leadership become more diverse?

We have noted above the contribution of Resource Churches to diversity. In terms of youth ministry alone, they have enabled the Church of England to connect with a significant number of people we have difficulty engaging and retaining in other contexts. Resource Churches can be places of cultural consonance for young adults where faith feels passionate and plausible. This itself is a contribution to diversity in a church whose demographics are overwhelmingly skewed to older generations. There is also some evidence of ethnic diversity among congregations in urban Resource Churches.<sup>45</sup>

Ordained leadership roles, however, are not currently diverse in ethnicity, gender or class. Among roughly 130 recognised Resource Churches, only around 13% are currently led by women. Among the same number, based on the information available to us, we estimate that between 1-3% have a UKME or Global Majority Heritage. A similar analysis could, and should, be developed along the lines of class, though metrics and measures for this within the Church of England are not so well developed.

This is an important issue in relation to the Church's vocation to represent the communities it seeks to serve. If church is a place of empowerment and generous opportunity, we would expect it ideally to be a beacon of diversity or at least to keep pace with developments in wider society. As yet, this is not the case.

The risk of a homogenous approach to Resource Church leadership is that revitalization and planting simply reflects the image of the leadership. This approach may have colonial

<sup>45</sup> In a sample of 5 Resource Churches, on average the congregations were 19% Global Majority Heritage (GMH), aligning with the UK's 18% GMH population. St Mary's, Southampton; St Thomas Norwich; St John's Hampton Wick; St Mark's Battersea Rise; St Barnabas Penny Lane.



undertones, where a particular group imposes its tradition on the rest of the church. By contrast, diversity in leadership will ideally lead to diversity in kinds of communities being planted, and a greater sensitivity to the dynamics of different contexts and communities in the work of planting.

#### 7.4 What are the risks in the use of power and in safeguarding?

The establishment of a Resource Church is a powerful intervention. With the investment of money and attention come explicit and implicit forms of influence. In addition, the networks that support Resource Churches provide a strong form of patronage – they bring the benefits of preferment for leadership, opportunities for future roles, avenues to resource, wider connections and greater profile. The Church of England is hardly unused to patronage, but with this greater power comes questions: how are leaders and networks held accountable? How might lines of patronage operate healthily in a wider matrix of ecclesial relationships and partnerships? What resources are available to those outside well-established networks?

The 2024 Scolding Report highlights specific issues relevant to the culture of Resource Churches, including: asymmetry of power (in this case between churches, or when leaders operate in large churches and networks); the strong role played by founding leaders; the effects of accelerated growth; focus on younger leaders; and the challenges that come with success. Great care and attention must be given to this. As the report states, ‘the larger the numbers, the greater the power and the greater need to check oneself and reflect upon the opportunities to abuse power’.<sup>46</sup> In line with the report’s recommendations, attention to practical issues of governance and diocesan accountability, alongside a culture

of transparency and openness to critique, are important areas for ongoing work.<sup>47</sup>

#### 7.5 Do Resource Churches evidence an Anglican ecclesiology?

How can we understand Resource Churches as a distinctively Anglican ecclesiological movement, rather than simply a movement that uses the resources of the Church of England but with no strong Anglican identity or ecclesiology?

The notion of Anglican identity is notoriously hard to define absolutely – Anglicanism is a living tradition which has evolved and changed at various points of its history. As such, it may be best to think of Anglican identity as a family resemblance which is rooted in a shared history. Not all members of the family will have all the same features, but they are united in a common heritage and have many common points of identity. For example:

- A shared inheritance in the Scriptures, the catholic creeds and our historic formularies, received through a tradition which is both Catholic and Reformed
- A broad approach to mission in which the Church engages the whole of society with the gospel
- A commitment to place and to building communities within geographical locations.
- Structured worship which can hold together diversity in demographic and theological conviction through a celebration of Word and sacrament recognisably shared with the wider Church.
- A sanctifying of time through the celebration of the church’s year, regular patterns of corporate worship, and by marking key events in the lives of communities.

<sup>46</sup> Fiona Scolding and Ben Fullbrook, *Independent Review into Soul Survivor* (2024), 52.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 94.



- A commitment to the Church's authority exercised through episcopal oversight, and synodical process.
- Engagement in local and wider collegiality through a set of interrelated structures including deaneries and dioceses, national institutions, theological colleges, religious communities, charities and mission agencies

In some of these areas there are strong connections with Resource Churches. As articulated in the sections above, they are born of a commitment to mission, expressed (albeit in a particular way) in local communities. This is part of a widely shared commitment to the transformation of society according to the values of the gospel. In terms of credal confession and attention to Scripture, they tend to be enthusiastic and committed. Measured against Article XIX – 'The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered' – Resource Churches clearly give priority to the task of preaching. Another strong connection is with baptism. Anecdotal and quantitative evidence highlights that Resource Church churches are places where many receive baptism as adults. Given their emphasis on families, they may also baptise many infants. There is a powerful testimony in this, and perhaps a gift to the Church of England at large where the joyful practice and transforming effect of baptism has at times been occluded by long habituation into Christendom.

In practice of Eucharist and the church year, the connections to the wider tradition tend to be weaker. Received Anglican theology describes Holy Communion as an effectual sign of grace by which, along with baptism, God 'doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our Faith in him' (Article XXV). Despite this, it would be inaccurate to suggest that the standard Resource Church is a place where Holy Communion is celebrated weekly at the main Sunday gathering, as became common in Anglican

Churches in the 20th century. Nevertheless, one can reasonably expect Holy Communion to be celebrated at a service in each Resource Church (either the church or within the benefice) every Sunday, in keeping with canon law. Furthermore, there are examples of Resource Churches in the Charismatic evangelical tradition, experiencing remarkable growth, for whom eucharist worship is central. For example, St Thomas' Newcastle has two Sunday gatherings, each being a eucharistic service at least twice a month.

In their weekly liturgy, Resource Churches tend to follow the informal style of other charismatic evangelical churches. Attendance statistics suggest that this has had a level of effectiveness in terms of congregational reach and appeal to those currently outside the ambit of the Church of England. But there is a cost in terms of unity, coherence and depth of spirituality for growth in the long run. It is sometimes overlooked that there is significant flexibility within the authorised texts of *Common Worship*. More work needs to be done to equip churches, including Resource Churches, to lead liturgy which is faithful to both their tradition and their contexts.

Lastly, we observe the difficulty of retaining close and healthy ties within the wider Church of England. Resource Churches have a highly focussed calling which tends to demand single-minded commitment; they have flourished so far through relatively independent leadership networks; elements of their style and congregational membership draw on non-conformist or independent churches which may make understanding and engaging with Anglican tradition more difficult. All this can threaten to diminish this ongoing conversation and partnership by which Anglicanism is constituted. Patient work is therefore needed to attend to the bonds of affinity and mutuality that root Resource Churches in the Church of England as one body across its traditions and contexts.

## 8. Conclusion: Next Steps

Can Resource Churches indeed resource the church? The evidence surveyed in this paper suggests that they can. In a growing number of places Resource Churches are revitalising faithful Christian witness and worship in partnership with inherited parish structures. This model can therefore bring great gifts to the church.

This paper has, at numerous points, explored the theme of generosity in relation to Resource Churches, which have at their heart the task of giving away both people and resources to other parishes through multiple revitalisations. It has also probed the limits of this theme, where the intention for wider benefit and deep missional connection has not occurred, or where the dynamics of power and disruption have obscured the mutuality, justice and diversity the Church is called to display. This tension is worthy of further exploration, both in theological reflection and in creative local practice.

Perhaps, though, we could call at this point for another kind of generosity – generosity of interpretation. For advocates of Resource Churches as drivers of revitalisation, it is possible to adopt the rhetoric of crisis and decline in a way that does not honour other traditions at large or particular communities of Christians. It is possible to build in ways that do not share resource or power along the lines of the ultimate vision of the kingdom. There is a call here for generosity. On the other hand, for critics of Resource Churches it is possible to overlook the costly and bold faith of those involved in this ministry. It is possible to judge by the least impressive examples or fail to give this emerging movement time to mature. Again, we wonder what a maximally generous

engagement looks like. Whilst researching and writing this booklet, the authors consulted with a broad range of individuals from across the Church of England, all of whom demonstrated a considerable openness to dialogue and willingness to opt for a charitable reading. This process offered a window into the possibility of fruitful and open dialogue going forward.

### 8.1 Into the Next Decade

The conviction guiding this analysis is that these are the challenges of a growing and maturing movement. It has much to learn but also much to give. Continued openness to learning is vital at such a crucial developmental stage. There are important opportunities in this process for new models to be developed, new partners to be involved, and new possibilities to be explored.

In this sense, the next ten years will be the making of the model, for good or otherwise. As Resource Churches enter the second decade of their recognised ministry, there is significant potential for the further expansion and diversification of the model. Resource Churches will likely always be a dramatic intervention in the strategic work of a diocese and in the networks where they are called to become embedded. But managed well this disruption can stir up the church to mission, provoke new models of ministry and increase confidence across the church as a whole. In this way they can, indeed, resource the church for the challenge and adventure of our current age of mission.

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