

# FROM ANECDOTE TO EVIDENCE

Findings from the Church Growth  
Research Programme 2011-2013

“ I planted the seed,  
Apollos watered it,  
**but God made it grow.**”  
1 Corinthians 3:6

[www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk)

# INTRODUCTION

**What do we know about church growth?**

**Is the church growing?**

**Where is there particular growth?**

**What do we know about why some churches grow and some decline?**

**What factors are likely to be present in growing churches and declining churches?**

**What strategies appear to make no difference at all?**

Commissioned by the **Spending Plans Task Group**, which reports to the Archbishops' Council and the Board of the Church Commissioners, The Church Growth Research Programme has been addressing some of these questions along with many others in a comprehensive study of the factors relating to numerical church growth.

The programme, which ran for 18 months between 2011 and 2013, sought to investigate the factors influencing church growth within the context of the Church of England. It focussed on finding areas of ministry which are showing numerical growth – and finding out why.

The findings of the research provide rich and wide-ranging insights into church growth. Although they haven't provided full answers to every question, the research teams have provided a substantial body of evidence and have not only made a significant contribution to the field of church growth research but also provided a firm foundation for researching further some of the associations found. Our hope is that the findings will stimulate on-going discussion and research and that these will enable us, together, to take more steps forward on the journey towards evidence-based decision making in the Church of England.



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## DETAILS OF RESEARCH TEAMS

“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, **but God made it grow.** ”

1 Corinthians 3:6

# THE CONCEPT OF CHURCH GROWTH

**T**he focus of this research programme has been numerical church growth. In considering the wider concept of church growth, however, it is right to acknowledge the fact that numerical growth, while important, is only one aspect, as explained below.

The Church of England is the Established Church in England and has a responsibility to deploy licensed ministers with the care of souls over every part of the country and provide a place of worship accessible to every person.

The Church, in undertaking its mission, seeks to grow in the following ways:

- The holiness, transformation and commitment of her members (growth in depth) - both individuals and churches.
- Increased number of disciples of Jesus Christ (growth in numbers).
- The fruit of social righteousness and a

transformed society (growth in the outworking of our discipleship).

**It is God alone who gives the growth in the church (1 Corinthians 3: 5-9). So growth is not to be fulfilled for its own sake. It is only good growth when it comes through faithfulness to the gospel. Sometimes, in history, the Church has been faithful and not grown; and at other times, it has been unfaithful, but also proved to be relatively popular.**

God gives His Church gifts to undertake His mission and the Church needs to steward these gifts in order to shape and develop the effectiveness of the Church's work, and thus the extent to which it is growing (in terms of any of the dimensions and concepts set out above).

For more on the Theology of Church Growth or to access a document containing various extracts on the topic of 'The Church of England: Mission, Presence and Growth', go to [www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk)

## WHY RESEARCH?

The research programme was commissioned by the Spending Plans Task Group which reports to the Archbishops' Council and the Board of the Church Commissioners.

Ten reasons why the research was commissioned are set out below:

- 1 To find practical evidence to support mission
- 2 To understand better the identity and context of the Church of England in the 21st Century
- 3 To bring clarity to issues around church growth
- 4 To identify what is effective and why
- 5 To identify what is not effective and why
- 6 To support and share good practice
- 7 Because an understanding of how to effectively share the Good News of the Kingdom is important
- 8 Because church attendance is declining in the Church of England
- 9 To inform good stewardship and ensure that funds are spent effectively
- 10 To identify areas where further research is needed

It is hoped that the programme will stimulate on-going research into areas the researchers have identified as needing more work.

“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, **but God made it grow.** ”

1 Corinthians 3:6

# THE STRANDS OF THE RESEARCH

**T**he research was organised in three strands and three research teams with significant experience were carefully selected to carry it out.

*Details and photos of the teams are inside the back cover.*

1

## DATA ANALYSIS

Analysing existing data routinely collected by The Church of England from parishes and dioceses through annual returns, alongside data from other sources (including census statistics), the research team used appropriate statistical methods to shed light on which factors are associated with church growth and to explore what can be learned from data already held.

2

## CHURCH PROFILING

Keen to learn about what is successful on the ground through even more comprehensive data than provided by annual returns, the team also undertook a survey of churches to collect some rich data. This allowed the researchers to develop a profile of growing churches from a wide range of contexts and traditions and link this data with that already held. There were 1700 respondents.

3

## STRUCTURES: CATHEDRALS; FRESH EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH AND CHURCH PLANTING; AMALGAMATIONS AND TEAM MINISTRIES

Different researchers looked at:

- a) Growth amongst cathedrals and compared cathedral growth with other city centre or greater churches
- b) The impact of church planting/fresh expressions of Church on growth
- c) The effect of Team Ministry and Grouped Benefice structures

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# THE CHALLENGES OF THE RESEARCH

**This is the first time that a systematic multi-method study of factors relating to church growth has been undertaken within the context of the Church of England.**

There have been few attempts to study church growth in such a systematic way and so, from the beginning, the research teams acknowledged and were faced with some substantial challenges with availability and quality of data. In order to make sure that the data and subsequent results were as good as could be achieved, the Church of England Research and Statistics Unit worked with the teams

to prepare the data which the Church already holds centrally. The result is a much-improved data set which can be further analysed in the future.

To find out more about the programme, the research teams, the strands of work, methodology and timescales and to join the on-going discussion go to:

[www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk)



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“There is no single recipe for growth; there are no simple solutions to decline. The road to growth depends on the context, and what works in one place may not work in another. What seems crucial is that congregations are constantly engaged in reflection; churches cannot soar on autopilot. Growth is a product of good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favourable environment.”**

Professor David Voas, Data Analysis and Church Profiling strand

**F**rom a wealth of material we are now able to identify some clear themes and messages which run through the findings. The results are a mixture of what we expected to find alongside findings that have surprised us. There is much to encourage and to celebrate in

stories of life and growth as well as some serious challenges to be faced against a background of religious change in the UK and a trend of national decline in church attendance (statistics show a decline of 9% in all age average weekly attendance over the past decade).

“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, **but God made it grow.** ”

1 Corinthians 3:6

Certain churches stand out as having experienced significant growth. These include some parish churches, church plants and fresh expressions of Church (new worshipping and witnessing communities which seek especially to engage with non-churchgoers). Cathedrals are shown to have experienced overall growth in numbers over the last decade and especially in weekday attendance.

Researchers have concluded that, while there is no single recipe, there are common ingredients strongly associated\* with growth in churches of any size, place or context.

- Good leadership
- A clear mission and purpose
- Willingness to self-reflect, to change and adapt according to context
- Involvement of lay members
- Being intentional in prioritising growth
- Being intentional in chosen style of worship
- Being intentional in nurturing disciples

All of the above are linked to growing churches.

\*It is important to note that association does not establish causality. In other words, association by itself does not prove or disprove anything, and can only at best show that two things are mathematically related, whether or not they are causally related. Therefore a study can only establish that there is association, not proof of why there is association. Given the discovery of an association the next step may be to do further research to test whether, why and how these factors inter-relate.

Equally, some factors appear to be connected to decline. The increasingly urgent challenge to retain the younger generations in the church has been confirmed. A church with no children or under 16s is very likely to be in decline. Nearly a half of churches have fewer than five under 16s.

The strategy of grouping multiple churches together under one leader has in general had a detrimental effect on church growth. Multi-church amalgamations and teams are less likely to grow. Churches are more likely to grow when there is one leader for one community.

Style of worship and where a church places itself in terms of its theological tradition appear to have no significant link with growth, so long as there is consistency and clarity and the chosen style and tradition are wholeheartedly adopted.

We now have significantly more information and evidence - facts, figures and stories which are explored in this report, and which form a starting point for informed and on-going discussion and action.

Church leaders, decision makers and those in ministry are now better placed to reflect, discern and decide on the shapes of ministry to support a growing Church - one which continues to reach out to all people, bringing glory to God in the 21st Century and beyond.



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1 Corinthians 3:6

## 1

# “NO SINGLE RECIPE” FOR GROWTH

## WHICH FACTORS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH GROWTH?



“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, **but God made it grow.** ”

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**T**he findings of the church profiling survey together with evidence found elsewhere in this report from the other strands clearly point to the conclusion that there is “no single recipe for growth” but there are a number of “ingredients” which are linked to growth in parish churches and can be applied to any setting.

## CONTEXT

The socio-demographic context is important to numerical growth and the level of participation. Attendance is often highest as a proportion of the population in rural areas where growth is hard to achieve; growing churches are often found in cities where relatively few people are active Anglicans.

|                       | HIGH SHARE           | LOW SHARE   |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---|
| GOOD GROWTH POTENTIAL | MIDDLE CLASS SUBURBS | URBAN AREAS WITH MANY CHRISTIAN IMMIGRANTS                |
| POOR RECENT GROWTH    | RURAL VILLAGES       | TOWNS AND CITIES WITH STRUGGLING WHITE BRITISH POPULATION |

Fig.1 Growth/share matrix

Comparatively low attendance levels found in towns and cities are in part the legacy of urban decline that began many decades ago, though this is now potentially being reversed. Village churches have more people relative to population but are more likely to be facing decline. Growth is easier to find in areas with younger, urban, ethnic minority attenders.

It is acknowledged that making decisions about

the classification of settlements as “rural” or “urban” can be challenging. There are a number of ways of defining “urban” or “rural” which lead to different results; and due consideration should be given to this fact.

## LEADERSHIP



Alongside the church profiling survey, a **survey of clergy** was undertaken to look for links between behaviours and characteristics and to identify any particular clergy behaviour which drives growth.

The findings confirm that effective leadership leading to growth is a **combination of having specific qualities and skills with an intention to grow.**

The survey results show a strong correlation between those clergy who prioritise numerical growth and those clergy whose churches grew in numbers.

When asked a question about which type of growth was their **top** priority, **only 13%** selected numerical growth (the other options being spiritual growth/discipleship and social transformation); however this choice is **significantly associated with actual growth** recorded in the findings.

It should be noted that the researchers have recognised and given due consideration to the potential problems of attributing causality when reporting associations in these and other findings. This is particularly relevant where “self-reported” growth has been used alongside objective measurements.

When asked about strengths in motivating people, more than three quarters of clergy who say they are better than most people at motivating people, inspiring and generating enthusiasm to action, lead growing churches. Among those who admit to being less able in this respect, growth is reported by just over a third.

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The leadership qualities which stood out in the survey as being significant in relation to growth included:

- **Motivating**
- **Envisioning**
- **Innovating**

Other important elements of leadership behaviour which are likely to be associated with growth include:

- Having the ability to engage with outsiders and newcomers
- Being intentional about worship style and tradition
- Having a vision for growth and doing new things to make it happen
- Prioritising growth
- Being good at developing a vision and goals
- Abilities in training people for ministry and mission

When considering these findings, we should bear in mind that every individual has different qualities, characteristics and strengths, some of which may be particularly helpful in leading growing churches as seen above.

It has also been acknowledged that **calling** is important and, in seeking to follow a particular calling, it is true to say that some will be more suited to lead growth than others. Once again, however, “there is no single recipe for growth”.

## HAVING A CLEAR MISSION AND PURPOSE



Churches that say they have a clear mission and purpose are far more likely to report growth. Of those who report a clear sense of mission and purpose, 64% have grown compared to 25% that had declined. For those that stated that they did not have a sense of clear mission and purpose, 26% had grown and 52% had declined. For those who were unsure 41% had

grown and 35% had declined.

## BEING READY TO SELF-REFLECT AND LEARN CONTINUALLY

Alongside having a clear mission and purpose, the researchers found that,

**“Vitality comes with reflection and choice; the particular style is less important than the fact that it has been considered and embraced rather than adopted by default.”**

**Professor David Voas**

## BEING WILLING TO CHANGE AND ADAPT



For there to be growth, the existing congregation must be willing to change. The researchers commented:

**“At a minimum, the arrival of new people disrupts what might be a cosy club. In all probability there will need to be larger changes in the timing and type of worship, in how and when the building is used and crucially in shifting lay leadership towards younger and more recent members. Such changes are uncomfortable....”**

In response to a question about different types of worship, one respondent said:

**“The growth in these three churches is due to diversity and a willingness to change by the growth and development of Café Church as well as Traditional Evensong.”**

Again in relation to worship, researchers describe successful churches with a “let’s give it a go” mentality. These churches try different initiatives

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as experiments – if they work they invest in them, if they don't they drop them.

## ASSIGNING ROLES TO LAY PEOPLE AS WELL AS ORDAINED CLERGY



Lay leadership is important and the research shows that good quality lay leadership is linked to growth. There are high associations with growth and lay leadership and rotation (when there is change and refreshing of roles, rather than the same people always fulfilling the same roles), although in the survey 37% admitted that the same people tended to serve.

A church where volunteers are involved in leadership, and where roles are rotated regularly, is likely to be growing – especially where younger members and new members are included in lay leadership and service.

The results show that a church is more likely to decline if the number of volunteers is limited and roles are not rotated. This is particularly challenging for small congregations with fewer potential volunteers as rotation of roles in these circumstances may be difficult.

*The researchers asked: Do the same people tend to serve in volunteer leadership roles year after year or does your church rotate volunteer service among a larger number of people?*

*Of those who answered that the same people tend to serve, **8% reported growth.***

*Of those who said there was some rotation (tending to be among a limited number of people), **19% reported growth.***

*Of those who said there was a lot of rotation among people in volunteer leadership roles, **47% reported growth.***

*The majority of churches in the sample fall into the middle category and only 7% in the last.*

See also page 27: The rise of the “lay lay” leader.

## ACTIVELY ENGAGING CHILDREN & TEENAGERS



Growth is found where there is a high ratio of children to adults. Churches which offer programmes for children and teenagers are more likely to grow. **Three quarters** of churches that offer retreats, conferences or camps for youth report growth, **against half** among those who do not.

## ACTIVELY ENGAGING WITH THOSE WHO MIGHT NOT GO TO CHURCH/ARE OUTSIDE THE EXISTING COMMUNITY



Looking outward is central to mission and many growing churches are those which engage with their local community. In the survey, some programmes providing social services (including debt counselling, aid work and night shelters) along with some environmental projects were shown to have a positive impact on growth.

Some activities aimed at serving others showed no statistically significant effect on numerical growth; however these activities are clearly of value and linked to growth in social transformation.

Respondents were hopeful, although the research does not confirm whether or not this the case, that community engagement can help in increasing the visibility of the church and potentially lead to growth:

**“We are a church of community and for the community - we have excellent links within our community and believe that after considerable sowing we are heading into a period of reaping.”**

**“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”**

1 Corinthians 3:6

**“We are in an area of great poverty and of great transition, in any year people move out of the area.....but new people always move in and replace them. The church is seen as relevant in our area, and the services of the church are sought at times of need.”**

A third of churches surveyed said that they used Facebook or other social media on a regular basis. Of those that do, two thirds report growth versus half among those who don't, however this is almost certainly because they are a sign of young and dynamic leadership rather than because of their direct effects.

## GOOD WELCOMING AND FOLLOW UP FOR VISITORS



Many survey respondents from growing churches attributed growth to a welcoming atmosphere “belonging and caring”. People talked about the welcoming atmosphere or culture of the church. The most direct route to growth comes from members inviting and welcoming family, friends and acquaintances.

Making contact with potential new members after they attend services or activities is associated with growth and comments reflected the importance of building on-going relationships. These included: being made to feel part of the family; coffee times and chats; a greater desire to love and serve one another; working alongside one another on fundraising and other projects.

## COMMITTED TO NURTURING NEW AND EXISTING CHRISTIANS



Two thirds of churches which said they offered encouragement and support through specific discipleship courses or courses “preparing members to be a Christian witness in their daily lives” showed growth. In those which reported none or “some emphasis through preaching”, less than half were growing.

## VISION



“Vision for growth” was mentioned as a general reason for growth – reflecting the truth that growth is not mechanical but results from a deep reflection and commitment, a desire to experiment and a desire for renewal. Many respondents referred to prayer and some to The Holy Spirit as reasons for growth.

**“We have developed a strategic and detailed Mission Action Plan, based firmly on the Five Marks of Mission. All decisions made in the church are now done so in the light of the Five Marks and we have reference groups for each one to ensure that we remain holistically mission-focussed.”**

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## WHERE GROWTH IS FOUND

**T**he good news is that there are some churches which are growing (in the decade up to 2010, 18% of churches grew; 55% remained stable and 27% declined). And new ways are being found to reach those who might otherwise not go to church. Sometimes this will involve building on what is there already and being willing to change/adapt to changing trends and contexts; in other cases this has led to starting something new and fresh in different styles, timings and models of church.

A number of church case studies have been used in this report to highlight real life stories of numerical growth and encouragement. The case studies have been selected as they are exceptional examples of growth. They are not necessarily generalisable to all contexts and situations.



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# PARISH CHURCHES

CASE  
STUDY

## ST MARY, YAXLEY (SUFFOLK)

**Diocese:** St Edmundsbury & Ipswich

**Context:** Village parish church

**Growth:** 2009: aWa = 9; 2010: aWa = 35



When the Revd. Tiffer Robinson became assistant curate in 2009, two Sunday services a month were held at St Mary's. The church was in decline, despite its location in the middle of Yaxley, a thriving village community which included many young families.

Tiffer was keen to channel his ministry effectively. He saw an opportunity to turn the situation at St Mary's around if

he could be enabled to focus on this one church, rather than spreading his ministry thinly across the whole benefice. The proposal was supported by Tiffer's training incumbent, the benefice and the diocese.

A number of steps followed:

A weekly Sunday service at 10.30am was introduced, with a Sunday school, called the 10.30 Club. The launch of these was timed to coincide with Back to Church Sunday in 2010.

Tiffer visited everyone in Yaxley, inviting them to Back to Church Sunday and encouraging them to invite others - 58 adults and 17 children attended.

Meticulous planning took place. The new service included familiar elements for those coming back to church with an atmosphere of community and joy. An assembly at the local school promoted the 10.30 Club.

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# FRESH EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH

**F**resh expressions of Church are relatively new worshipping and witnessing communities that are reaching those who may have been previously unreached by the Church.

Given that these communities are newer than most other types of church mentioned in this report, some caution should be exercised in making direct comparisons when considering statistics, particularly when comparing data about the growth of fresh expressions of Church and growth in traditional congregational life.

There are at least 20 different recognisable types of fresh expressions of Church (fxC) including Messy Church, church based around drop in centres and churches in cafés and bars. They meet in a wide variety of venues - more than half (56%) not in churches - in a range of contexts and span all traditions of the Church of England.

|     | VENUES            | %     |
|-----|-------------------|-------|
| 194 | CHURCHES          | 37.5% |
| 33  | CHURCH AND HALL   | 6.4%  |
| 82  | CHURCH HALL       | 15.8% |
| 58  | MIXTURE OF VENUES | 11.2% |
| 15  | HOUSES            | 2.9%  |
| 136 | PUBLIC            | 26.3% |
| 518 | TOTAL             |       |

Fig.2: Table of venues used for fxC meeting

A fresh expression of Church seeks to be:

- **Missional:** to serve those outside church
- **Contextual:** to listen to people and enter their culture
- **Educational:** to make discipleship a priority
- **Ecclesial:** to form church

The research was carried out across ten representative dioceses.

In order to be classed as a fresh expression of Church, a group will meet a number of criteria:

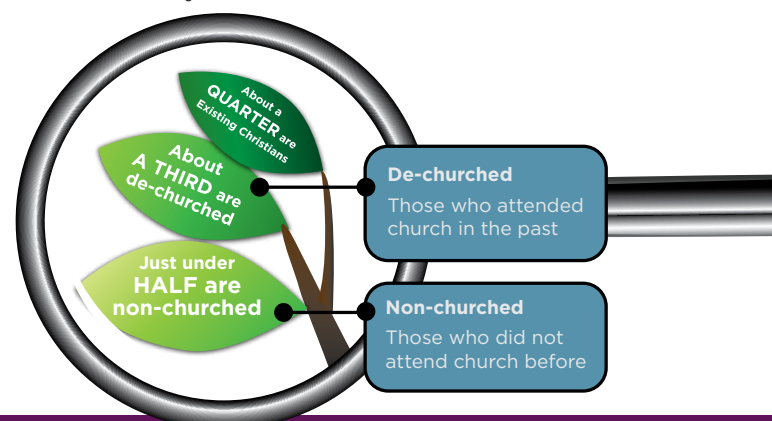
- It is something Christian and communal, new and further, not an existing group modified
- It has tried to engage with non-church goers
- It meets at least once a month
- It has (or is seeking to have) a name giving it an identity
- There is an intention to be Church (not a bridge to bring people back to “real church”)
- It is welcomed by the Bishop as part of the diocesan family
- There is some form of leadership recognised within and from outside
- The majority of members see it as their major expression of church
- There is an aspiration/aim to become “up/holy, in/one, out/apostolic, of/catholic”
- There is an intention (where it is appropriate to the context) to become self-financing, self-governing and self-reproducing

**“If the church closed down tomorrow, the fxC would probably just move into the village hall”.**

## WHO ATTENDS?

Fresh expressions of Church are attracting those who might not otherwise go to church.

When surveyed, their leaders estimate that:



“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, **but God made it grow.**”

1 Corinthians 3:6

And that:



Just under half of those coming are under 16

The number of attenders at the 477 fresh expressions of Church within ten dioceses is equivalent to adding the people of one new medium sized diocese (which is around 21,000)

**“God is completely new to them”** fxC leader

## DO FRESH EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH KEEP GROWING?

The researchers measured growth over the lifetime of the fresh expression of Church as long as it was equal to or greater than three years (the period measured ranged from three years in some cases to 20 years in others). The results show that:

**66%** carry on growing or maintain growth

**25%** did grow but are now shrinking

**9%** fluctuate in attendance over the years

Of these, **10%** have died

**“It is a very difficult place to do mission, despite valiant efforts at times”** fxC leader

Other key facts:



Over half (52%) are run by lay people



Most of these lay people haven't had any formal training for this role



40% have no “church badge” and may be doing this in their spare time



Fresh expressions of Church are equally likely to be run by women as by men

The average size of a fresh expression of Church is 44 people

82% were totally or mainly typical of the background area or context

78% of fresh expressions of Church have taken steps to encourage discipleship

Four times as many per year are being started now, compared with 2003. In 2012, the most recent figures show that around 80 were started; this compares with around 20 in 2003

Over 80% of fresh expressions of Church are either child or all age focussed:

7% are child focussed

74% are aimed at all ages

19% are aimed at adults only

**“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”**

1 Corinthians 3:6



**“I’ve seen kids express their faith more and more as they’ve come.”** fxC leader

**“Mum, Sunday is your church but Messy Church is mine.”** Overheard at Messy Church

About fresh expressions of Church....

**“The whole phenomenon is best understood as a large varied collection of small things.....Small is a relative term and here we mean in contrast to the average congregation in dioceses. This factor puts the enterprise of starting a fresh expression of Church within the range of many more existing congregations.”**

Church Army’s Research Unit.

**CASE  
STUDY**

## ST LUKE’S IN THE HIGH STREET

**Diocese:** Chelmsford

**Context:** Fresh expression of Church

**Growth:** 2007 = 4-10; 2013 = 25



Revd Frances Shoesmith is a Team Vicar and Pioneer Minister in the parish of Walthamstow and has responsibility for St Luke’s in the High Street.

St Luke’s doesn’t have a building but instead meets in a variety of places. On Sunday mornings people gather for ‘Bible, Breakfast and Chat’ in a local café and also at the Farmers’ Market where St Luke’s has a stall for hot drinks and cake, space and time to chat.

Frances explains: “We are a growing, but very fluid, community because the people coming in are quite broken. It really has been a case of ‘seeing what God is doing and joining in’.

The ‘Bible, Breakfast, and Chat’ sessions at first attracted between four and 10 people but we now often have around 25 attending. Many now come to other activities and also benefit from the joint parish Sunday evening

service, a space to receive and be refreshed after lots of giving out on a Sunday morning. I believe that makes us a real example of the mixed economy at work, a fresh expression co-dependent with the Team Ministry.”

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# CHURCH PLANTS

Ann's Tottenham.

## CO-MISSION MODEL

This planting model used by Co-Mission is based on networks and within that clusters so that poorer churches are supported by ones with more resources. The model is based on lay-leadership. The plant group consists of around 25 adults with up to 20 children.

## NETWORK CHURCHES/ MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

Missional Communities (MCs) are found in both network churches and parish churches. St Thomas' Church Philadelphia, Sheffield has 48 MCs. They consider that all their MCs are church plants operating with the church's values of "freedom to fail and have a go". Examples of MCs are one modelled on a monastic rhythm, one in a local street focussing on neighbours, on a poorer estate where the leaders lived and led worship in their home.

## CELL MODEL

Cells, in some cases, meet alongside parish church as part of the parish's ministry, some not. Cells can be based on a locality or a common interest or demography. They will often follow a set pattern of process and values. Often the cell was seen as the central expression of church as opposed to the Sunday assemblies.

## ANGLO-CATHOLIC MODEL

A model based around the catholic understanding of presence and sacrament as the heart of mission. Those visited were planted and supported by parish churches in their own parishes. This model is still being developed and there is on-going reflection about what planting means in an Anglo-Catholic context.

**A** qualitative study of 27 church plants was carried out and further demonstrates through examples that church growth is possible. A central source of data was interviews and conversations, listening to stories and the way people told them. The researchers also analysed a range of documents and visited the plants, attending worship and other activities. Given that a considerable amount of work went into exploring the different and emerging models of church planting, we have chosen to include some detail of these in the following sections.

Church plants meet in a variety of venues and locations. There are a number of successful planting models which work well across a variety of contexts. Some meet in a church building, while others have a more network approach like Missional Communities.

## CHURCH PLANTING MODELS:

### HOLY TRINITY BROMPTON (HTB) MODEL AND THE ST HELEN'S BISHOPSGATE (SHB) MODEL

These models take a team of people (10 - 200) to a small congregation, or in some cases where there is no congregation. The planting teams normally include a range of leaders. Seed capital is normally given to the plants but it is expected that the plant will be self-supporting within three to five years.

### MINSTER MODEL

A central church provides collegial support to a team of church leaders based in that church or in attached churches over a geographical area e.g. St

“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, **but God made it grow.** ”

1 Corinthians 3:6

## CHARACTERISTICS OF GROWING CHURCH PLANTS

Researchers commented on the entrepreneurial and innovative approaches evident in church plants.

There was frequent mention of **concepts** such as “freedom to fail and have a go”, permission giving, experimentation, low control and high accountability, being on a journey. The risk taking and permission to fail are all part of a mind-set that allows for experimentation with current models and imagining and developing new ones.

Common **values** in church planting include:

- Being relational and incarnational

- The importance of welcome and hospitality
- The importance of lay people
- Inclusion of local people
- Volunteerism
- Importance of groups
- Involvement with young families
- Attempting to be a healing presence

**The support of the diocese is seen to be crucial** and a clear planting policy is helpful. It is apparent that some plants can be very successfully self-supporting; in some areas they will never be. Church plants are beginning to take place across all traditions and are becoming increasingly sensitive to context..

### CASE STUDY

## ST FRANCIS, DALGARNO WAY

**Diocese:** London

**Context:** Urban Church Plant/fresh expression of Church

**Growth:** 2010 aWa = 12; 2012 aWa = 50+



**St Francis' Church was commissioned in the 1930s as a mission chapel for the Dalgarno estate. After an initial period of flourishing it ended up being closed for many years. In 2004 a small team was sent from St Helen's, Kensington to try to revitalise the church and the congregation grew to around 25. However, decline followed again in 2009 and there was a sense of losing hope.**

In 2010, after discussions initiated by the Bishop of Kensington with Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) and St Helen's church, HTB curate, Azariah France-Williams and his wife Anna were sent along with two other couples, to plant a new community Church.

Since then congregation has grown from around 12 to 40-50 people; 80% live within walking distance of the church and a third are from the Dalgarno Estate. The church is in one of the most deprived wards in England; densely populated, ethnically diverse and with high rates of long-term unemployment.

Azariah identifies a number of factors that have led to growth; learning about the demographics, making organisational systems fit for purpose, identifying values, developing leadership, community outreach and opportunities to explore faith.

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, **but God made it grow.**”

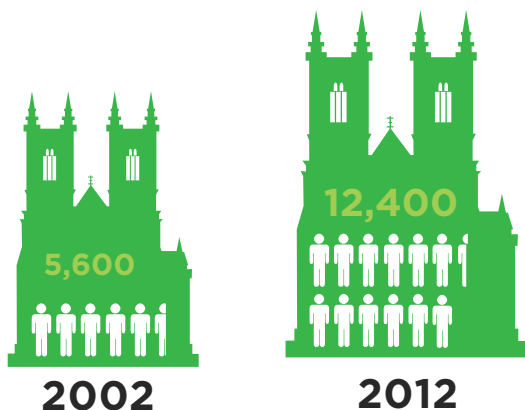
1 Corinthians 3:6

# CATHEDRALS AND GREATER CHURCHES

**“This is the place where I first encountered God. This place allowed me to explore God without pressure or judgement.”** From worshipper survey

A questionnaire was sent to all English cathedral deans designed to understand better the range of acts of worship and the factors which encourage and hinder growth. The response rate was 86% (36/42). This was followed up by consultation days with clergy and lay members of 23 Cathedrals. Worshipper surveys were carried out at 4 English cathedrals

The research team looked at cathedral service attendance, make up of cathedral congregations and what draws worshippers in. They found that there is overall growth in numbers worshipping in cathedrals – a trend which has continued since the Millennium.



- Overall **weekly** attendance (based on 42 cathedrals) grew by 35% between 2002 and 2012
- Especially significant is that **weekday** attendance has more than doubled in ten years (from 5,600 in 2002 to 12,400 in 2012)

The rise in weekday attendance is linked to social shifts including the change in religious significance of Sunday in society, and the wider choice of activities now available on Sundays including Sunday shopping and sport.

**“The availability of accessible worship in open cathedrals throughout the week is attracting spiritual pilgrims at times that are more convenient to contemporary lifestyles.”** Lynda Barley, Canon Pastor of Truro Cathedral and Priest-in-Charge of Tresillian and Lamorran with Merther and St Michael, Penkevill

Growth was also shown when cathedrals were divided by Province, however growth is not evenly distributed:

There are 29 cathedrals in the Southern Province of Canterbury and 13 cathedrals in the Northern Province of York.

Sunday services appear static but weekday attendance for children and adults has increased by 13% in Canterbury since 2007 and by 19% in York.

There is an overall growth rate of 8% over the last 6 years and this reflects many comments made by deans in the survey about their experiences of quite modest yet persistent growth:

**“The path to growth is as much about incremental steps as it is about grand visions of reform.”**

When asked about reasons contributing to growing services, the Deans' comments clustered around several key themes:

- Quality of worship – the liturgical tradition and user friendly service sheets
- Quality of music – especially at choral evensong and in congregational worship

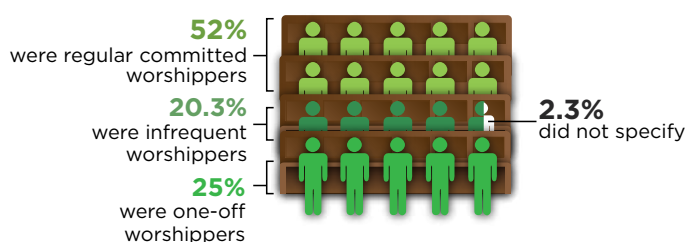
**“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”**

1 Corinthians 3:6

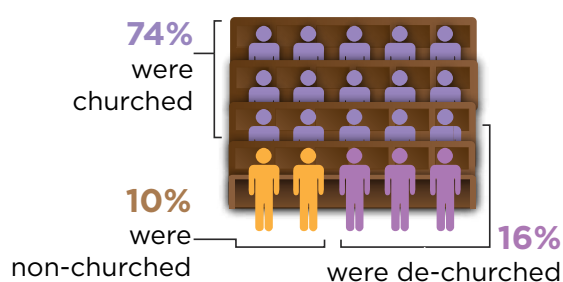
- Quality of preaching - confidence in the Gospel and teaching
- Embodying generous hospitality - welcome, friendly atmosphere, personal feel
- Cultivating a sense of community - fellowship, young families, students, dedicated leadership
- Exploring new patterns - new services, different styles, valuing diversity, greater informality, convenient service times, improving publicity
- Providing spiritual openness - intentionality, inclusivity, prayer, pastoral care, reflective space, anonymity
- Emphasis on families and young people

## WHO ATTENDS?

Worshippers across four cathedrals were asked to describe their involvement in the cathedral:



Those who had joined in the last five years were asked to describe their situation when they first joined:



Churches: transferring from another church or joining the cathedral whilst continuing to worship at another church.

Over 50% of respondents consider the cathedral to be their “home church”

## CATHEDRAL ATTENDANCE: MOTIVATING FACTORS

When asked what the highest motivating factors for attending were, the top three factors were:



The lowest motivating factors were: desire for anonymity and desire to avoid parish involvement.

“A place of peace to worship and pray after a busy day at work”

## WHY ARE CATHEDRALS GROWING?

Key aspects of growth identified:

- Cultivating Missional Intentionality
- “Cathedrals are about mission. To miss this is to misunderstand the task. Both traditional and new aspects of cathedral ministry are missional.”

Dean of Gloucester

- Initiating new services and congregations
- Enriching the quality of worship
- Improving welcome and hospitality
- Engaging culture and the arts
- Promoting spiritual openness, inclusivity and diversity in membership and outreach
- Increasing the civic profile
- Developing educational programmes
- Prioritising discipleship and Christian nurture

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”

1 Corinthians 3:6



# WAKEFIELD CATHEDRAL

**Diocese:** Wakefield

**Context:** Cathedral

**Growth:** 20% increase in attendance over last five years

Attendance at Wakefield Cathedral worship showed signs of growth from the late 1990s. A new clergy staff team with Provost George Nairn-Briggs (later Dean) focussed on mission and growth and in 1999 and 2000 a mission audit involved the whole cathedral community as well as the city and diocese. It built on the progress being made in

strengthening the cathedral's rich worshipping life, its programme of education and nurture and plans for the renovation and reordering of the cathedral building.

There were further steps forward when Jonathan Greener became Dean in 2007. Initiatives such as the appointment of new lay staff in education and outreach; the strengthening of the ministry of welcome; the launch of a weekday fresh expression and Project 2013, the development of a more spacious nave complete with a Labyrinth, have resulted in continued growth.

Specifically, attendance at regular cathedral services has grown by 20% over the last five years with particular growth in weekday services alongside increased numbers of visitors.

A survey of worshippers in 2013 revealed a warm appreciation for a



developing cathedral life: "Relaxed place to worship, positive contemplative atmosphere, friendly and supportive staff and congregation."

“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, **but God made it grow.** ”

1 Corinthians 3:6

**“The statistics show people of all ages are increasingly drawn to cathedrals for worship, to attend educational and civic events and to volunteer to ensure our cathedrals are open to all those who are drawn to visit and worship.”**

**Dr Bev Botting, Head of Research and Statistics at the Archbishops' Council.**

**“It inspires me and so does the worship and clergy. An important beacon in the city centre. It’s a church any fallen away seeker will come to – a refuge for lost sheep.”**

**From worshipper survey**

## GREATER CHURCHES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY AND FINDINGS

Alongside the 42 Cathedrals studied, research was also undertaken with 46 other churches (36 from the Greater Churches Network together with other churches with a similar cathedral type ministry, some of whom have become part of the Greater Churches Network in 2013).

The greater churches are a diverse collection of churches, offering cathedral type ministry in context, ministry and mission, for example through their historic buildings, civic profile and their role as resourcing churches in their diocese.

Questionnaires were sent to the incumbents of these churches, and a qualitative consultation was arranged with 11 of these, bringing together clergy from all parts of the country.

The researchers showed comparisons with cathedrals, but also revealed more about the emerging significance of these churches in the Church of England and the particular contribution of the Greater Churches Network and the emergence of new urban minsters – churches with a public cathedral-like ministry at the

heart of cities and towns.

- In less than ten years the Greater Churches Network has expanded from 24 to 41 (five of these have joined in the last year).
- Not all of the Greater Churches are growing in the same way but of 24 respondents:
  - 50% have grown over the last five years
  - 37% have remained stable
  - 8% have declined

## FACTS ABOUT GREATER CHURCHES:

Greater Churches are very diverse. Some are in struggling contexts, others in grand buildings. Some are isolated and far from traffic flows, while others are in the middle of bustle and activity and even more strategically located than their diocesan cathedrals.

Since 1993, 15 new urban minsters have emerged – these churches are positioned to take a significant role in the Church of England. Those involved in leading new minsters comment on the opportunities this new status opens for mission and ministry in their own communities.

The researchers comment that **“greater churches play a significant role in their dioceses. They often are and could be seen as resourcing communities for nearby churches and parishes. They maintain a strong public and civic profile, and regularly welcome large volumes of visitors through their doors. More significantly these churches are recognised as being centres of worship and mission in their dioceses and localities.”**

The following growth factors emerged from the greater churches qualitative consultations:

- Initiating new services and congregations
- Increasing civic profile
- Improving welcome and hospitality
- Developing educational programmes
- Cultivating mission intentionality
- Promoting inclusion and diversity in worship, membership and outreach

**“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”**

1 Corinthians 3:6

# 3

## “NO SIMPLE SOLUTIONS” TO DECLINE

### WHICH FACTORS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH DECLINE?

**T**wo major findings of the research give some insight into church decline.

#### 1 DECLINING NUMBERS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

##### THE CHALLENGE TO RETAIN THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS

The church is declining because generations of church-goers are not being replaced and because the church is not keeping young people in their teens and into young adulthood.

| AGE   | AFFILIATED | ATTENDING MONTHLY OR MORE OFTEN |
|-------|------------|---------------------------------|
| 16-19 | 8.2        | 2.2                             |
| 20-24 | 7.6        | 1.4                             |
| 25-29 | 10.3       | 1.7                             |
| 30-39 | 14.8       | 3.1                             |
| 40-49 | 23.5       | 4.0                             |
| 50-59 | 30.0       | 4.1                             |
| 60-69 | 41.9       | 8.3                             |
| 70-79 | 49.2       | 10.6                            |
| 80+   | 53.5       | 13.8                            |

Fig. 3: UK Household longitudinal study 'Understanding Society' 2009-2011 Anglicans (self-identified and active) as a percentage of the population, by age group

National surveys show that the large decline in church attendance has not happened because many adults have stopped going to church. It is because more and more adults never start attending in the first place. Evidence from the European Values Study shows that among Anglicans who say that religion is very important in their lives, only 36% listed religious faith as an especially important quality that children can be encouraged to learn at home, compared to good manners (94%) or tolerance and respect (83%).

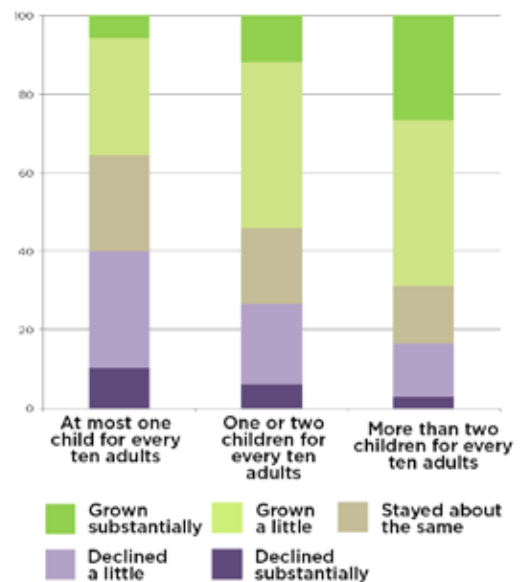
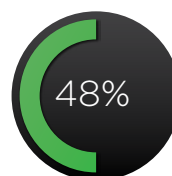


Fig.4: Churches with young people are twice as likely to be growing



Nearly half (48%) our churches have fewer than 5 under 16s.

“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ”

1 Corinthians 3:6



In nearly half of our churches there are fewer than five under 16s. On the positive side, the research highlights that churches where there is a high ratio of children to adults are twice as likely to be growing;

There is an urgent need to focus on children, young people and their parents and a challenge to identify how the church can best invest in people, programmes and strategies which will encourage young people actively to continue exploring faith.

## STAFFING & PROGRAMMES

Research shows that the best youth programmes are likely to involve new ways of building community and these require a considerable amount of time and effort.

The teams measured the association between growth and employing a children's/youth worker

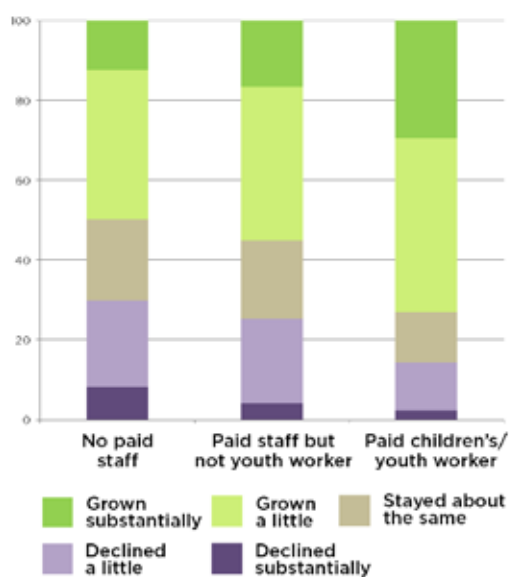


Fig.5: Churches who employ a Youth Worker

and found a positive association. Those who employ a youth worker are only half as likely to be declining as those who employ another type of paid worker.

It is clear that engaging young people around adolescence and early adulthood is crucial. Evidence shows that those who belong in their 20s will probably stay for the rest of their lives – but if they don't, it will be hard to bring them in.

Recognising the possible “chicken and egg” element (i.e. parents may only come to a church with provision for children, but the amount of provision is influenced by how many children there are), the parish survey asked churches about a number of staff and programmes and looked at which shows the largest influence on the ratio of children to adults and church growth.

They found that **all** the items connected to children and youth showed a correlation with the child:adult ratio.

Those which also showed a link with church growth were:

- Worship services designed for children
- Youth programmes
- Camps and retreats
- A church school

There is a particularly strong association between growth and youth programmes. Youth retreats, conferences or camps were offered by 21% of churches in the sample and of these, exactly **three quarters report growth**, versus exactly half among the others.

Survey respondents recognised the importance of attracting young families to church. If a church is appealing to children then the hope is that parents may attend and children may continue to come.

Respondents mentioned:

- Family services, commonly once a month
- Child-focussed special services helping to attract parents who wouldn't normally go to church
- Making children and families feel welcome in the main service
- Sunday school/children's corner during services



“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, **but God made it grow.**”

1 Corinthians 3:6

- Attention to timing and worship style
- Messy church

Cathedral congregations tend to have an older demographic but are finding new ways to respond.

Three cathedrals in the survey have actively developed new strategies for engaging with children, young people and their families. This is alongside their involvement with many young people through cathedral choirs.

**Wakefield** appointed a new “community missionary” in 2012 whose responsibilities included establishing a programme of outreach and Christian nurture for young people and families.

**Southwell** has recently created a new post and appointed a new member of staff who will lead its education team and serve as the new chaplain to the large comprehensive school.

**Gloucester Cathedral** has re-introduced children’s work including the development of a weekly “messy cathedral” and a monthly pre-school service.

In a child worshipper survey, conducted in four cathedrals, children were asked what they liked about cathedrals. They said:

**“Everything. Children’s Church and everyone is friendly. Christingle, Christmas, Harvest Festival. I was christened here and it was amazing.” (Age 6)**

**“We get communion and get to see other friends and have drinks and biscuits.” (Age 7)**

**“You get a chance to learn and discover new things and you can worship with others to be closer to God.” (Age 12)**

## 2 THE EFFECT OF AMALGAMATIONS



**CHURCHES ARE MORE LIKELY TO GROW WHEN THERE IS ONE LEADER FOR ONE COMMUNITY**

The term “amalgamations” refers to where two or more churches are grouped together under an incumbent – however that structure is named. Most amalgamations are benefices but pluralities and any other informal process whereby churches are grouped together are also covered by the term “amalgamations”.

**T**he findings show that single church units under one leader are more likely to grow than when churches are grouped together.

Analysing data across a range of congregation size categories shows that amalgamations of churches are more likely to decline. Moreover, the larger the number of churches in the amalgamation the more likely they are to decline. This is exacerbated when amalgamations have more churches.

For Team Ministries there is no evidence that there is more numerical growth than for amalgamations. Team ministries are less likely to grow than non-teams and perform markedly worse than churches with their own incumbent.

The research team used five different categories of church size, based on attendance in 2006: 0-14; 15-29; 30-49; 50-99, 100+ in order to make accurate comparisons between different amalgamations.

**“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ”**

1 Corinthians 3:6

## BETWEEN 2006 AND 2011:

- Small churches (0-14 and 15-29) exhibit the most positive growth trends
- The mean values for the amount of growth decline as the size of church increases above 30

There is a strong negative trend between the more churches amalgamated together and the likelihood of decline (across all categories of church size)

In the larger church size categories (50-99; 100+) single church units still have the highest attendance and performed considerably better in terms of percentage change year on year than amalgamations of any size. Although it should be noted that

larger churches from 50 to 300 tend to decline, but very large churches, 300+, have been growing, albeit there are not very many of them.

Amalgamations and team ministries constitute 8,400 of the Church of England's 12,500 parishes (2011 data).

In 2011 (most recent statistics), 71% of the Church of England's parishes were in multi-parish teams or benefices.

In 1960 the figure was only 17%.

Source: Facts and figures about the Church of England. Prepared by the Statistical Unit of the Central Board of Finance of the Church of England, published 1962.

## CASE STUDY

# RADFORD PARISH OF ALL SOULS AND ST PETER

**Diocese:** Southwell and Nottingham

**Context:** Urban Parish Churches

**Growth:** 2006 = 15; 2011 = 80+



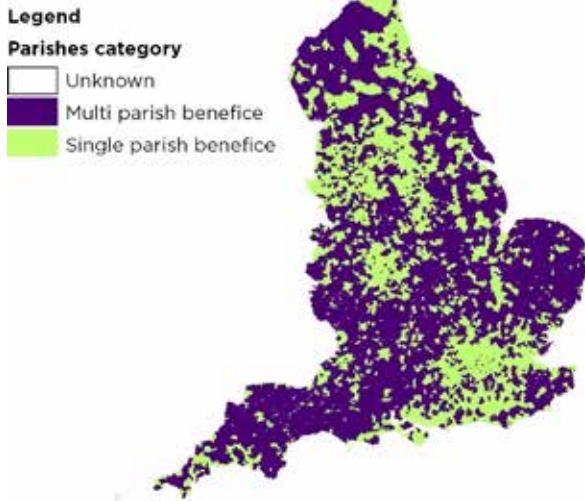
Carolyn and Mark Gilmore were appointed as the lay ministers of Radford parish in 2006, after a five-year vacancy had seen the average congregation fall to about 15. The parish has two church buildings, All Souls and St Peters, which are complementary to each other, a traditional church and a community building suitable for more social outreach type projects.

Carolyn and Mark work alongside the Children's and Families Worker, Rachel, who is the only other paid

employee of the parish. Her work is considered key to the future and continued growth of the church as she engages with those families on the fringe of church as well as those who have never encountered church before. The parish staff team are also actively involved with the local primary schools. The social cohesion between schools and the church is very encouraging with Muslim and Sikh children and families regularly visiting the church. There is also a growing Messy Church. Today the parish sees around 80 regular weekly attendees to its three forms of church; St Peter's, All Souls and their Messy Church.

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, **but God made it grow.**”

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**Fig.6:** Map showing distribution of amalgamations.

**“One vicar spoke of how she used to give much time to preparing people for baptism and confirmation saying ‘...for me one of the sadnesses is of going from having two parishes to having five and suddenly feeling I can’t do any of this anymore.’“**

For clergy running these large amalgamations there is evidence to show that in many cases (with a few exceptions) their job becomes increasingly focussed on the burden of administration and buildings, and the task of sustaining Sunday worship; all of which can detract from other activities which have an association with growth.

Results from the Experiences of Ministry Survey 2011 showed that stipendiary ministers spend 8.7 hours per week on administration and organisation. Evidence from the Church Growth Research (2013) suggests that this figure has increased and especially where there is an amalgamation.

## TEAMS: A COMPARISON

Team Ministries were studied alongside amalgamations, the difference being that teams group parishes under the care of a team rector plus one or more team vicars and other staff lay and ordained. There are currently 493 team ministries operating across the Church of England. Six dioceses have over one third of the active teams in the Church of

England but many dioceses have very few.

Some conclusions can be drawn as follows:

There is no evidence to suggest that team ministries show more numerical growth than non-team ministries.

Research on team ministries was less clear-cut than for amalgamations. But analysis of Sunday attendance, weekday attendance and electoral roll figures shows that teams are less likely to grow than non-teams. However, team ministries grew markedly less compared to churches consisting of an incumbent with a single church.

As for amalgamations we know that churches in team ministries can and do grow. A number of lay and ordained leaders from teams were positive about these structures, and there are examples where teams and amalgamations thrive. The figures suggest, however, that groupings like these tend usually to impact negatively on numerical growth.

The findings from studying both teams and amalgamations, lend weight to the conclusion that the larger the number of churches amalgamated, the more it declines.

## VOCATION

The research team suggests that even with the fixed or declining pool of clergy, it is not inevitable that the ratio of parishes/churches per clergy person will have to rise.

One of the reasons for fewer ordinands is that many churches are not nurturing vocations. The fact that only one third put forward candidates for ordination in the past decade (up to 2011) is noteworthy.

## THE RISE OF THE “LAY LAY” LEADER

There is, research suggests, a large pool of ministry untapped – those who might be ordained; lay leaders as well as the “lay lay” leaders; people running churches without formal ecclesial training or “church badge”. The team researching fresh expressions of Church also clearly identified this.

**“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ”**

1 Corinthians 3:6

**“It cannot be emphasised too strongly that this data is not offered as a criticism of benefices and parishes comprising more than one church, especially those with many churches. In this study we have been continually struck by the quality and commitment of ministry in multi-church settings. Rather the data is offered as an indicator of how structures can help release or repress missional activity overall.”**

Revd. Dr David Goodhew, Amalgamations and Team Ministries sub-strand



## OTHER FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO DECLINE

### BURDENSOME BUILDINGS

Buildings can be a hindrance or a help to church growth. The researchers report that roughly one half (47%) of incumbents in the survey considered building maintenance to be a significant burden.

**“The incumbent spent almost a year fundraising for a major building project which seriously hampered his ability to focus on mission”**

However buildings are also in many cases an asset, helping and enhancing mission; e.g. centrally placed buildings and greater churches and cathedrals.

Improving buildings can have a positive effect on growth, **“The recently reordered building gives us a more friendly space for worship and also makes it more usable during the week, so our contacts through weekday activities have grown.”**

**“...the new centre is used for Messy Church, after-school club etc. We are reaching a much wider group of folk than when I came 21 years ago.”**

Worship may also become more comfortable with better heating, for example, or by using chairs instead of pews.

### “STAGNATION”

There is evidence to show that doing things by default and not by choice leads to decline.

The survey responses on worship provide an example, and the researchers state that it is not so much the particular style of worship which is important, but rather the fact that it was chosen rather than inherited. Decline may come about because of **“a degree of stagnation in the approach, variety, vitality and inclusiveness of our worship.”**

In contrast, they conclude that **“Vitality comes with reflection and choice...”**

### CLERGY CHARACTERISTICS WHICH ARE NEGATIVELY ASSOCIATED WITH GROWTH

It has already been established from the findings that effective leadership leading to growth is a combination of having specific qualities and skills with an intention to grow.

Some characteristics were identified in the survey as being less helpful in the context of leading a growing church. These included “empathising” “persisting” and “managing”. While clearly not negative qualities, the researchers noted that those with these characteristics may not have strengths in being flexible and pushing people in new directions.

**“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ”**

1 Corinthians 3:6



Once again, it is appropriate to mention **calling** and that in seeking to follow a calling, some will be more suited to lead growth than others.

## MEMBERS UNWILLING TO CHANGE OR GET INVOLVED AND EVERYTHING LEFT TO THE ORDAINED MINISTER

Just as willingness to change and adapt was associated with growth, the survey findings point to evidence that unwillingness to change by congregations leads to decline.

The findings show that lay attitudes to stability and change are important. However, it is recognised that, for some, changes are uncomfortable. These are likely to include the timing and type of worship; how and when the building is used and, crucially, moving lay leadership on to involve a greater number and mix of people – young and old; more recent as well as long-standing members.

In the survey responses, unwillingness to change was often given as a reason for church decline:

**“The church does want to grow but only if the new people keep everything the same.”**

Similarly, the research underlines the importance of lay members being active in assuming responsibilities, if a church is to grow, rather than leaving everything to the ordained minister. Where this does not happen, there is likely to be decline.

**“The church was in decline and has not changed much. No willing adult to support the work with children, no Sunday school, no change allowed to the service. The choir refuse to attend all age worship and don’t like contemporary stuff. PCC same people year after year. Apathetic, uninvolved, the congregation want to come and be fed go home and forget church until next week. Very few willing and even fewer able to work for growth.”**

## FACTORS WHICH HAVE NO SIGNIFICANT ASSOCIATION WITH GROWTH OR DECLINE



**F**inally there are some factors which do not appear in research terms to make a significant difference to growth or decline. These include:

- Theological tradition
- The gender, ethnicity or marital status of leader

An electronic version of this report can be found at:

[www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report)

Any future revisions will be published here.

**“ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ”**

1 Corinthians 3:6

## DATA ANALYSIS AND CHURCH PROFILING



PROF DAVID VOAS

The data analysis strand was undertaken by a team from the **Institute for Economic and Social Studies at The University of Essex**, led by **Professor David Voas**.

As part of the research programme the research team undertook a careful analysis of the full range of data that is collected by the central church as well as other existing data sets (such as that on deprivation). The researchers then tested a range of hypotheses around church growth. They looked at the effect of particular factors whilst attempting to 'control' statistically for a range of other factors and interventions and so attempting to overcome the challenge of distinguishing between correlation and causation.

**The University of Essex** also undertook the profiling strand of the research programme with **Professor Voas** leading.

This strand involved a survey of 1,700 churches plus some in-depth follow up interviews. Churches were invited to take part following a careful sampling process to ensure that a wide range of contexts were considered. The surveys collected a range of data enabling profiling of the factors associated with growing churches.

## CATHEDRALS, AMALGAMATIONS OF BENEFICES AND FRESH EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH/CHURCH PLANTING



REVD DR DAVID  
GOODHEW



REVD CANON DR  
GEORGE LINGS



DR CATHY  
ROSS



REVD DAVID  
DADSWELL



REVD CANON  
JOHN HOLMES

A team from **Cranmer Hall, St John's College, Durham** led by the **Revd. Dr David Goodhew** (Director of Ministerial Practice at Cranmer Hall) led the research strand on Cathedrals, Amalgamations of Benefices and Fresh Expressions of Church.

They worked in collaboration with Church Army's Research Unit (led by the **Revd. Canon Dr George Lings**) who also undertook a wide ranging study of Fresh Expressions of Church/Church Planting.

A team from OxCEPT (The Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology) at Ripon College, Cuddesdon carried out an in-depth study of church plants, led by **Dr Cathy Ross** (Director of OxCEPT) with **Revd. David Dadswell**.

The OxCEPT team considered a range of different types of plants from a range of traditions both in London and the rest of England. They sought to establish what kinds of plants - their type and context, and leadership and practice - deliver numerical church growth, how, and the reasons why.

The researchers took an inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary approach consisting of an in-depth engagement with a range of practitioners, theorists and congregations in order to deepen our understanding of church planting.

The Cathedrals and Greater Churches sub-strand was led by **Revd. Canon John Holmes**. This work involved examining growth in cathedral attendance using a combination of statistical analysis of attendance figures, qualitative work to build a profile of cathedral congregations and weeklong worshipper surveys at four cathedrals across the country to gain an understanding of cathedral growth in recent years. Comparative work with greater churches provided an opportunity to evaluate cathedral growth in the light of other churches with a cathedral-like ministry.

*All of these sub-strands used a range of quantitative and qualitative research methods which included looking at existing data as well as carrying out surveys and interviews.*



## Church Growth What we will never know

With all these hypotheses there needs to be a proper humility and caution. As we have already observed, the ways of God are not always easy to fathom or chart, least of all predict.

On the TV quiz show *QI* there is one answer that appears in every show: “Nobody knows!”. Any wise student of church growth should always acknowledge the mystery of God’s loving action in the world and admit that there are times when we really don’t know why this cathedral or church has grown in this way at this time.

But then God is God and we are not.

**Revd Canon John Holmes, Cathedrals report**

*Saviour Christ, in whose way of love lies the secret of all life and the hope of all people, we pray for quiet courage to match this hour. We did not choose to be born or to live in such an age; but let its problems challenge us, its discoveries exhilarate us, its injustices anger us, its possibilities inspire us and its vigour renew us for your kingdom's sake.*

AMEN

(Anglican Cycle of Prayer 1998)

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