

Church planting models to provide food-for-thought in the Diocese in Europe

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Introduction

The purpose of this little study is to explain shortly some of the church planting models in use in The Church of England. The purpose of this study is not to seek a single-solution outcome or to make recommendations about the models to be chosen.

Church planting and the methods to be chosen are not the goal in themselves. Their function is to find different models to enable the existing communities to flourish while also creating the potential for new communities to emerge. It is helpful to consider a few things before speaking about the models as such.

Purpose of Models

Church planting models are tools to guide the process, not exact representations. They help label and describe certain practices.

While different models exist and the terminology used might not have much common, it is important to find out and name the common nominators.

Considerations

Choose a model that fits you and the cultural environment best. It's beneficial to borrow strengths from other models. In the Diocese in Europe, cultural environment (including history and society's view on establishing new communities), legal requirements, geography, and climate all play a role. While local existing communities often have the most valuable information, they might also be the ones most afraid of any change. Transparency is key, especially as the Church communities in the Diocese in Europe are very scattered.

Shared Values

All models should lead people to mission and incorporate shared values, regardless of their specific emphasis. The Church of England believes that it is part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. How does the local church planting project relate to this? How does it fulfill the vision and strategy of the Diocese and that of The Church of England?

Some Models

The Church of England has experimented with several models of church planting to expand its reach and engage with communities in diverse ways. There are different ways of grouping the models in use. One helpful way might be the following:

Revitalisation of Existing Chaplaincy Churches

This involves planting a team from one chaplaincy/location/congregation into another to rejuvenate and grow the existing church community. This is usually done by resourcing an existing church by giving financial and HR support to start something new in the area.

Bishop's Mission Order

This allows for the establishment of a new congregation within an existing Chaplaincy, often with a specific mission focus. The direction of travel for BMOs is often more loosely defined than in the next model.

Chaplaincy Church Planting

A chaplaincy church plants a new congregation within its own area (city, country, etc.), often to reach different demographics or areas. The intention might not be for these to be independent in any short or mid-term future.

Missional Communities

These are small, community-focused groups that serve their local area and develop a style of worship that emerges organically from their activities. There are several interesting new monastic communities emerging in the Church of England.

Additional Models

There are other models like the “parachute drop” method (or mission station model), where a church planter and their family move to a new location to start a church from scratch. Also, the daughter congregation model, where an existing church provides resources and leadership to start a new church.

For Consideration

Make sure you understand what you are doing and why. Strategy!

Literature Suggestion

Stefan Paas: Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience (2016)

The book examines church planting in Western secular societies, focusing on establishing communities in areas where established Christian culture is diminishing.

Paas works to understand the reasons behind secularization and how these trends impact Christianity and its place in public life. His critique of the attitude that secular society is hostile to religious communities seems to be somewhat correct, especially as young men seem to be increasingly interested in questions of faith.

He also expresses critical views on church planting models that rely on American evangelical frameworks as these are often culturally alien in a European setting. An interesting example of

this is Latvia where Missouri Synod had a strong presence some years ago. Apparently, the co-operation with the local church was not satisfactory to both parties and LCMS seem to have withdrawn. Paas emphasizes the importance of being less “selling” and focusing on adapting to the local culture.

Motivation – Vision and Strategy

Every strategy needs a vision. The outspoken vision is to make new disciples. Planting churches is a vehicle to fulfill this vision. In a way, church planting is about invasion; church plants are bound to break the existing status quo. Thus planting can easily be seen as a difficult or hostile act by the existing communities. One of the key questions is to decide if there is an ecclesiological model we wish to use or if our ecclesiological model is whatever supports and enables making new disciples. The question is if we wish to make new “Anglican” disciples or do we aim to make disciples of Christ who might then choose to be Anglicans?

Innovation – “See, I am doing a new thing!” (Isaiah 43.19)

In many ways, church planting is about Fresh Expressions. Unless we are aiming to do church planting in a totally new geographical area, it makes little sense to replicate the existing ministries. For example, the Sheffield diocese has seen the most growth through new innovations (café church, Messy Church to name some).

The focus is not on creating structures and organizations but on inviting people. This means that there need to be adequate resources in place as well as support and patience from the “central management” (chaplaincy, deanery, archdeaconry, and DBF) in getting things in place. Lay leadership is vital – not necessarily so much as licensed lay ministry – to make sure there is continuity and understanding of how the community is growing and which is the trajectory of travel.

The existing Diocesan lay learning course could be very beneficial in nourishing lay leaders.

Church-wide funding

The Church of England has several funding schemes designed to support church planting, revitalization, and growth. These initiatives aim to strengthen existing congregations, establish new worshipping communities, and reach people who may not otherwise engage with church life. The primary funding sources include the **Strategic Development Fund (SDF)**, **Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment (SMMI)**, and various diocesan-level grants. These schemes align with the Church’s broader vision to be a growing, confident, and outward-facing presence in society.

One of the most significant funding mechanisms in recent years has been the **Strategic Development Fund**, which provided targeted financial support for large-scale church growth projects. This fund, administered by the Archbishops’ Council, supported diocesan initiatives that demonstrated clear plans for numerical and spiritual growth. Projects funded through SDF often included church plants, leadership development programs, and innovative mission

initiatives in both urban and rural settings. While SDF has now concluded, its impact continues through projects that were launched under its framework.

A key successor to the SDF is the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment (SMMI) fund. This scheme continues the Church's commitment to growth but with a broader focus, including investment in lay and ordained ministry, social action initiatives, and the long-term sustainability of church communities. SMMI provides funding for dioceses based on strategic priorities, encouraging mission-focused approaches that engage diverse populations and address contemporary challenges in evangelism and discipleship. In the Diocese in Europe, it is not difficult to argue that we are diverse and that there's a lack of Anglican/English language ministries. The question is how to create effective ways reach out and collect people together and whether they identify as Anglicans, or something else.

Alongside these national schemes, dioceses often have their own funding programs to support church planting and growth at a more local level. Our own diocese should probably carry a review of our own funding mechanisms. These funds may be used to seed new congregations, train church leaders, or develop creative outreach initiatives. Often, diocesan funding is required to match the funding from the central church. Many dioceses also partner with external organizations and philanthropic donors to enhance church growth efforts. This multi-tiered approach ensures that financial support is available for both large-scale projects and grassroots mission work, enabling churches to flourish in a wide range of contexts.

Through these funding mechanisms, the Church of England continues to invest in the future, equipping communities to share the gospel, serve their neighbourhoods, and develop sustainable models of ministry. While funding structures may evolve over time, the overarching commitment remains the same: to foster growth, renewal, and a thriving presence of the Church across the country.

Securing funding from any of the existing sources requires a clear and well-structured proposal. Based on the experience of the Diocese of Sheffield and other dioceses in the Church of England, the following key factors contribute to a successful bid:

Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/vision-strategy/funding-strategic-mission-and-ministry>

Diocesan Investment Programme; <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/vision-strategy/funding-strategic-mission-and-ministry/diocesan-investment-programme>

Recent Funding Initiatives: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/topics/strategic-mission-and-ministry-investment-smmi>

For a diocesan perspective on how national funding is applied locally, the Diocese of Winchester outlines their engagement with these funding schemes.

<https://winchester.anglican.org/national-church-funding-projects/>

Making Disciples as an Outcome of Church Planting

Church planting should not be an end in itself but a means to grow the number of disciples. The proposal must demonstrate how a new or revitalized ministry will lead people into Christian discipleship. A clear and measurable pathway to discipleship should be included in any proposal to the Church Commissioners.

Defining Discipleship Clearly

A successful bid must articulate a clear definition of what constitutes a disciple. The distinction between a "seeker" or "visitor" and a disciple must be well-defined, providing measurable outcomes. This helps in setting realistic expectations for the growth of a newly planted or revitalized church community.

Revitalizing Ineffective Church Presence

Funding is not exclusively available for new church plants. It can also be sought to revitalize existing but struggling chaplaincies. Identifying areas with ineffective church presence and proposing ways to re-engage local communities can be an effective strategy for securing resources.

Mapping Out Growth Areas

Church Commissioners respond well to data-driven approaches. Mapping out white spaces on a diocesan map—areas with little or no existing Anglican presence—can make a strong case for investment. This geographical analysis should be supported by demographic insights and growth potential.

Leadership and Support Structures

Good leadership is crucial for the success of a church plant or revitalization project. Church Commissioners look for well-led and well-supported teams. Leadership teams must be equipped with both clergy and lay leaders who are adequately trained and supported at the diocesan level.

Building Evidence for Growth

Proposals must demonstrate an understanding of the local geography and the capacity of the sending church to provide adequate support. Evidence-based approaches, including past successes, growth trends, and leadership readiness, should be included in any funding application.

Investing in Areas of Growth

Church Commissioners prioritize funding where there is demonstrable motivation for growth. The willingness of a chaplaincy or diocesan body to invest its own resources—financial and human—into church planting or revitalization signals commitment.

Central Support (Diocese)

Successful church planting initiatives require significant central support at the diocesan level. Funding from the Church Commissioners is often contingent on a structured, well-supported diocesan plan with the following components:

Financial Investment and Staffing

A standard funding model includes significant investment in staffing. For example, in previous cases in Sheffield, grants of around £3.5 million have been used to establish three new churches with full teams, including:

- A vicar
- An assistant minister
- A church manager
- A youth worker

A realistic and sustainable funding model should be proposed. Typically, applying for funding includes securing:

- A full-time clergy position
- A half-time children's worker
- A half-time administrator

Recognizing that church planting involves significant organizational change, a plan must be in place to support these transitions.

Diocesan-Level Oversight and Encouragement

A dedicated diocesan team should be in place to support church planters and leaders. This includes:

- A team for ongoing encouragement and oversight
- A dedicated diocesan budget manager
- Support structures for managing church buildings and financial resources

Financial Contribution from the Diocese

Most successful bids include a financial contribution from the diocese itself. A standard expectation is that at least 15% of the funding should come from the diocese, demonstrating commitment and shared responsibility.

External Collaboration and Learning

Church planting efforts benefit from collaboration with experienced leaders. Key organizations to engage with include:

- Head of Strategy for Church Planting
- Lead Bishop for Church Planting
- Vineyard Nordic

- Myriad UK

Regular meetings and experience-sharing gatherings, such as those led by Ric Thorpe, provide valuable learning opportunities.

Local Church: Growing New Things

Church planting and revitalization require local adaptation and innovation. A successful approach includes:

Expanding Worship and Mission Opportunities

- New worship services at different times beyond Sunday mornings
- Offering alternative worship styles to reach different demographics
- Encouraging Fresh Expressions of Church that reflect local needs

Community Engagement and Friendship First

- Establishing social initiatives such as coffee mornings for the elderly
- Supporting parent-and-toddler groups, a model widely used across the UK
- Creating opportunities for people to explore faith in informal settings

Pathways to Discipleship

- Offering Alpha, Pilgrim, Lay Discipleship course, or other courses
- Providing clear mission pathways to support seekers in their faith journey

Small-Scale Funding for Local Initiatives

Microfunding programs (like Small Sparks in the Diocese of Sheffield) provide small grants (e.g., £50,000 in total in the diocesan level) to help local churches launch new ministries. Funding applications are kept simple, with approvals granted in as little as two weeks. (“I need a new CD- player”, “Streaming camera is broken” etc).

Collaboration and Networking

Annual London-based meetings gather organizations involved in church planting across Europe to share insights and best practices might be beneficial for furthering our efforts. European Collaboration (EC) provides further opportunities for networking and knowledge sharing.

Conclusion

Church planting and revitalization are not just about increasing the number of church communities but about making disciples and transforming lives. The Diocese in Europe has a unique context that requires thoughtful, strategic, and well-supported church planting efforts. By leveraging central support, diocesan investment, and strong leadership, church planting

can be a vehicle for growth and renewal, ensuring a sustainable Anglican presence in diverse European contexts.