



## Fresh expressions of Church in Gloucester Diocese

This research looks at fresh expressions of Church in the Dioceses of Gloucester from 1992-2012. It is sponsored by both Church Army and the Church Commissioners, towards a national report appearing early in 2014. We honour the request of the sponsoring bodies that little or no detailed comparison is made with named other dioceses already surveyed.

By December 2013 all of the 67 leads provided had been contacted. Data from all those that qualified was gathered and then analysed. Usually there was a phone call with the leader of the fresh expression of Church (fxC) but if needed with the incumbent who knew the story well. As with other dioceses, there are signs of encouragement and of vulnerability. The diocesan leadership will have to decide how the information is shared, policy is informed, and what further work needs to be done. In some areas of analysis broad comparison is made with data collected from other dioceses.

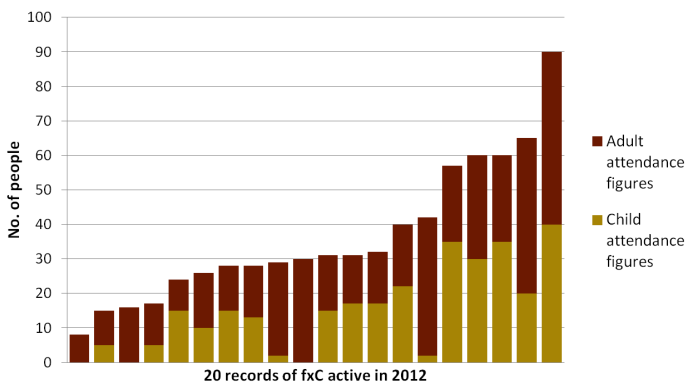
### Some Headlines

#### Attendance figures: 729 people

##### How many attend?

The total attendance, from the 20 live cases in 2012, from the 23 fxC begun and analysed, is 729, being 431 adults and 298 children, resulting from 197 adults and 53 children sent. This nearly 2 fold return is worth highlighting. It will be rare that a parish can show this kind of progress.

##### Child and adult attendance

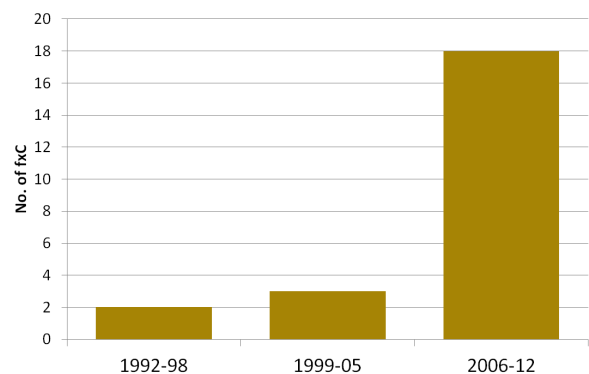


However in computing the impact of these numbers it must be born in mind that 48% of the fxC meet weekly, 17% fortnightly and 35% monthly. Monthly gathering is a very useful starting place, not to be despised, but it can be a weak end point.

#### A growing trend

18 were begun between 2006 and 2012, whereas only 3 between 1999 and 2005, and 2 from 1992-98, showing a clear recent increase in the rate at which this trend has been happening. Both the 1992-98 examples have since died, one after 4 years and the other after 12, although another example outside this research period but well known to the diocese, begun in 1991, is still going. The figures show Gloucester is like other dioceses in seeing this growth since *Mission-shaped Church* was published in 2004.

#### When were fxC started?



#### What variety of types of fxC are there?

We listed 20 different kinds of fxC to select from; of which 15 were represented. Because fxC often multiple classify themselves figures here can be misleading.

- Perhaps the simplest way to put it is that only 18% are in the *Messy Church* stable, with Alt. Worship and Network churches being the next most common choices
- 72% are deliberately All Age and for families, not mainly for children
- 26% draw only adults
- 2.6% seem to focus on children alone

We are grateful that this research is funded, in part by Church Army and in part by the Church Commissioners. Both work with the Church of England in areas of need and opportunity.

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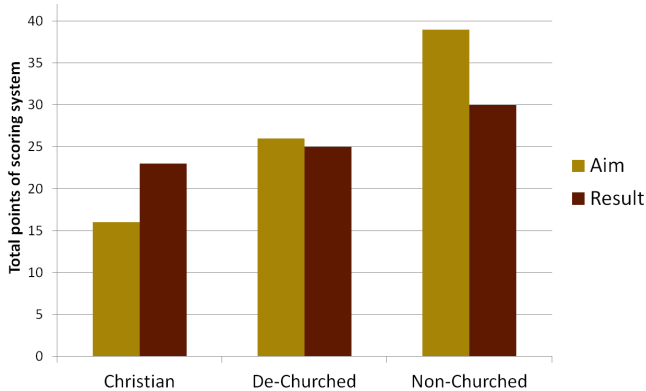
## Two Missiological factors

### Christians, De-churched or Non-churched

We asked the leader of each fxC what was the main group they intended to reach: Christians, De-churched or Non-churched (the categories employed in *Mission-shaped Church*). Then we asked them to compare this intention with what happened.

The scoring offered on a scale of 0-3 is simple if not crude. Scoring 0 meant not true, 1 a minority reality, 2 the majority reason, and 3 the only or over-riding factor. This simplicity was chosen because the research depth was limited by what the local leaders could be expected to know. There were stories of surprises and disappointment, with some aspirations that were never met. The graph below scores the totals for intention and also for result across the 3 groups. We add that this is but the impression of the leaders, not a precise percentage.

Leaders' view of the Mission Task



The graph shows an overall picture of fresh expressions of Church aiming lower than elsewhere for Christians yet still drawing more than they aimed for, though only as a minority of the whole picture. They attracted 4% less de-churched than they tried for and a quarter less non-churched than they hoped for. The Christian proportion is 5% higher than elsewhere, the de-churched lower than the 35% average, and the non-churched as little lower. Once again it is less clear why this may be.

Overall the Christians present are less than three in ten of attenders. It is worth bearing in mind that this includes the team members sent to begin the work and

they are a large part of that group. The de-churched are a third of the overall number and the non-churched nearly two fifths. The data here as elsewhere, runs in the face of the myth that the impact of fresh expressions of Church is only to attract overwhelming numbers of existing Christians.

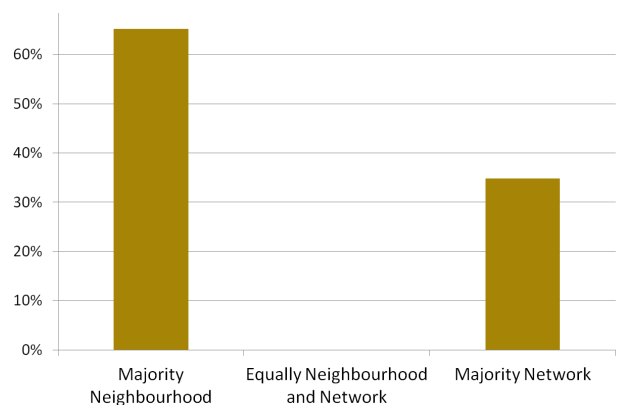
We have found some hints that different kinds of fresh expressions of Church connect better with different parts of this spectrum. But the sample size in one diocese is very small and data from ten surveyed dioceses will appear in our 2014 national report.

### Neighbourhood and Network

78% begun from parishes and their meeting place remained within the sending parish. Some argue that parish structures and their boundaries are all that is needed. However, it is also true that fresh expressions of Church drew people from a more complex picture than parish.

We asked each fxC leader what proportion of attendees came from a neighbourhood roughly coterminous with the parish, and what proportion came out of wider relational networks. 52% of the cases intended that no one would come from wider networks, and that was what happened. Yet only 4% expected network play a major role but 17% found that it did. Network as a major or over-riding factor was true in 35% of cases, only marginally less than the 37% average elsewhere. Here is steady evidence that network has a minor but significant part to play in Gloucester. It is some evidence that says both neighbourhood and network matter in the mission of a diocese and reliance on geographical parish alone will be an error.

### Neighbourhood or Network



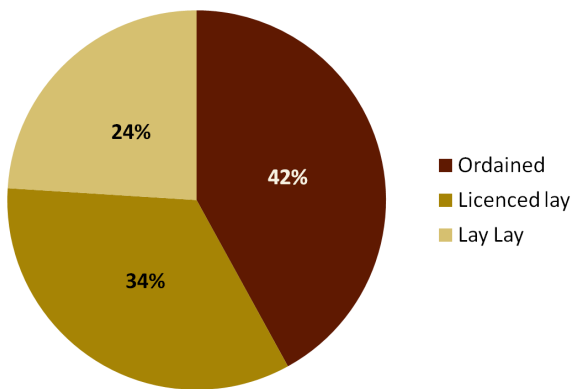
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## Two ecclesiological factors

### Leaders

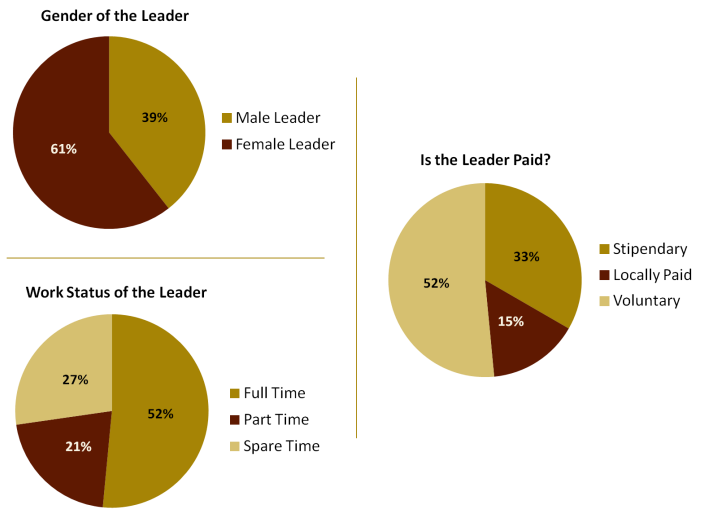
Leadership of fresh expressions of Church in Gloucester is 58% Lay and 42% Ordained, with the former including four Readers, a Church Army Evangelist and a number of licenced lay workers and ordinands. The lay average across the dioceses so far is only 52%. What is historically new, compared to other national figures collected from the 1980s and early 1990s, is the rise of the local lay person (here only 24%), whom we have dubbed 'lay-lay' without any other ecclesial badge or training. This is the lowest figure met as other dioceses reveal a range of 32-52%.

### Ecclesial status of the leader



We asked how many leaders had been through any fxC training. 6% had been on *Mission Shaped Ministry*, though 18% has studied a planting module and 30% had other forms of training such as for *Messy Church*. None had received consultancy but 12% brought previous planting experience. 27% had no training whatever and with another 21% it was not known.

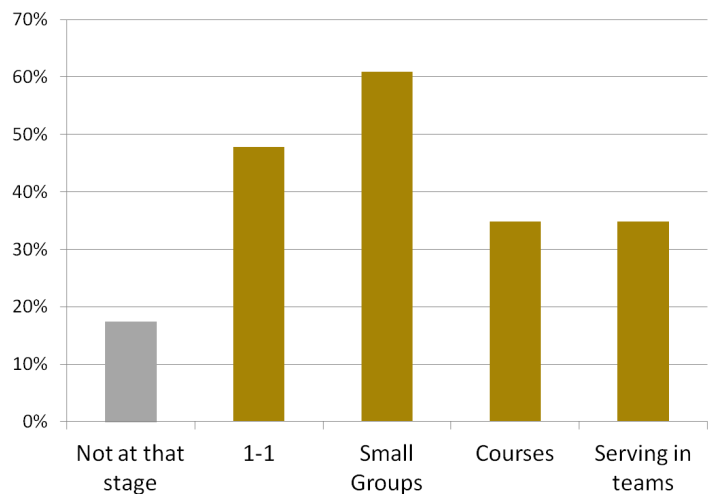
Because in some stories the leadership has changed over time there are more than 30 who have led. 39% of the leaders are male, 61% are female, the highest proportion seen. 52% are full time (not necessarily with all their time devoted to the fresh expression), 21% part time and 27% lead in their spare time. It is also apparent here, as nationally, that the most frequent combinations are men as full time and ordained, with lay women working part and spare time. Elsewhere we have found this is not solely attributable to women more commonly leading *Messy Churches*.



### Progress with discipleship

Leaders were asked if they mentored people 1-1, provided courses, ran groups, or drew people into working teams. 17% of cases did none of these, commendably lower than the 22% average. We also note that 10/23 of the Gloucester cases only began during or since 2009. As elsewhere, 1-1 work and small groups were the most common choices, Here are some indicators that fresh expressions of Church are not merely interested in attendance and are trying to form disciples, an area of growing concern in all churches.

### How do fxC Disciple people?



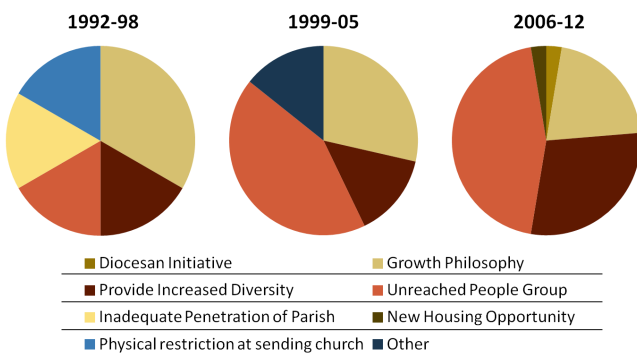
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## Other Data Collected

### Motives to begin fxC

Seven options (plus 'other') were offered and could be compared with similar national data from 1984-1997. What has become clear across the country is that it is less common now for planting initiatives to be a response to church buildings being full, or finding an *area* of a parish without easy access to a church. It is most likely to be due to *cultural* factors such as identifying a distinct people-group as unreached (41%), or the desire to provide increased diversity of ways of being church (25%). The sheer desire to grow was also strongly present (24%). All other motives were peripheral. This looks like evidence, in a traditional church going area, that there is growing awareness that something different is needed for the majority who do not attend.

### Motives for starting fxC

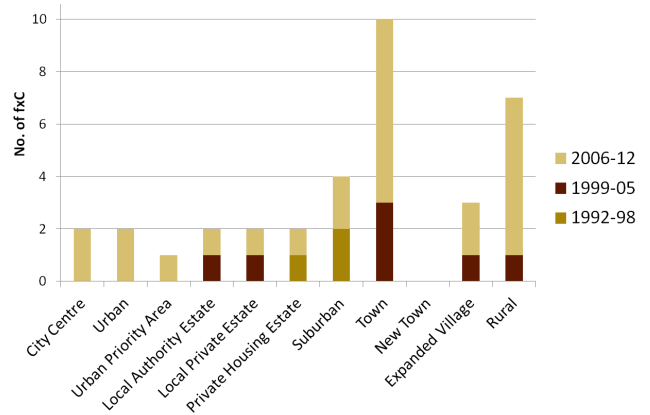


### Type of social/geographic area

Those interviewed from the fresh expressions selected from 11 possible urban to rural combinations. The spread was wide with no one dominant group. Perhaps the standout features are the 20% located in rural settings with another 9% in expanded villages, matched by another 29% in the towns. A further 11% served the suburbs, and 6% classed as City Centre. 15% were in a variety of social settings that the Church has historically deemed demanding, such as deprived urban and estate contexts and more demanding urban contexts. Only the diocese will know if this represents what is on the ground. For a diocese with a rural/urban mix, it does seem that the fxC can put down roots in all its contexts. Because so few were begun prior to 2006, it is a little tendentious to compare this to the scant

data from 1992-2005, but the standout feature is fxC reaching into the countryside. Earlier planting in Gloucester had been urban.

### What was the geographical area planted into?

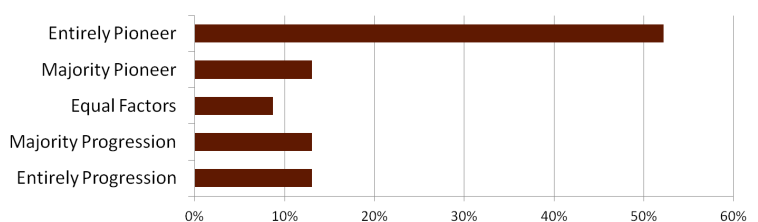


We also asked how typical those who came were of the area served. 78% of attenders were thought either mainly or totally typical. None served wide ethnic backgrounds, but 48% had a few and 48% were from one ethnic background. This variety we suspect reflects the diversity of settings within the diocese. We did not investigate the ethnic mix in the postcode areas served.

### Pioneer-progression features

Leaders were also asked to what extent they were responding to a context of church weakness or absence (pioneering), or alternatively were they building on its existing effective presence and strength (progression). Various combinations between the two could be selected, but the single largest group, 52%, felt they were entirely in a pioneering context. This may relate to the 41% serving an unreached people group. 74% considered pioneering was the majority or overall variable. People taking risks, by embarking on adventure in mission, is to be celebrated, as are cases of building on the good work and influence of the past.

### Pioneer and Progression



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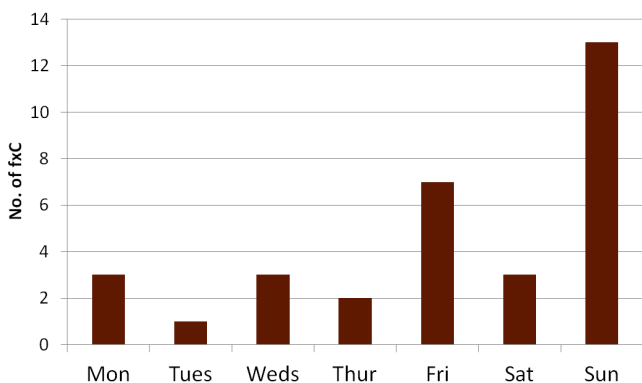
## What venues were used

46.4% of cases used an existing church, 25% used a church hall and 28.6% a secular venue. Thus the majority meet on church premises, and only a minority meet at some distance, culturally or geographically, from it. This may underline the need for a both/ and, not an either /or mentality and to be sensitive about choices made in context.

## When do they meet?

The examples are spread across the week, with some preference for Fridays, but 41% meet on a Sunday. 59% could be classified as in the week, including 9% on Saturday, giving Gloucester a fairly typical majority percentage of fxC not held on a Sunday. In general terms the range of choices may be evidence of a desire to fit with local cultural realities as well as facing social factors against meeting on Sunday, like sport, and divided or extended families. On the other hand onerous work schedules may mitigate the usefulness of holding midweek church.

Meeting days



48% of the fxC meet weekly. Meeting monthly, as a choice made, only started with the post 2006 data of fxC. 44% of this most recent set meet monthly. Overall that figure is 34.8% with weekly still the most common at 47.8%. Monthly can be a splendid place to start but a weak end point. The sustainability of this pattern will probably depend upon the internal dynamics to pursue forms of discipleship beyond the monthly meeting.

## What support did they have?

In 91% of cases support came from the sending parish, which links to the high percentage of cases whose meeting place was still within its boundaries. However in 2 cases the leaders had relocated, moving house to some distance away and were more like starting from scratch, the so called seed dynamic. Like most other dioceses surveyed none were transplants or grafts.

22% in effect served a deanery and all of these examples are in towns or the city, in which network often has a more prominent role.

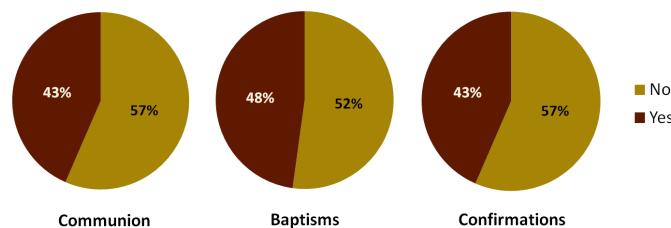
## Team size sent

As elsewhere most teams were small., 3-12 members was true in 78% of cases, above the 73% norm. 9% of teams were of 1 or 2 people, 4% were in the 13-19 size. Only 1 example had 20-49 team members. 1 begun in 1992 had a team of 50+. A stereotype, based on stories in London, of the large team sent out from a larger church to begin a transplant, does not generally apply in this diocese.

## The Sacraments

Our team do not think this is the best and certainly not the only measure of being church. But being dominical, the sacraments rightly demand inclusion, at some stage in the maturing of fresh expressions of Church. 43.5% of the 23 cases have had communion services, compared to a 38% average. In addition 47.8% have held baptisms again above the 34% average. 43.5% held confirmations. We do not know why this high set of figures occurs but note that there is wide difference nationally. We do know that the different kinds of fxC set a different value on this area, and it may be that they mature ecclesially at different rates, depending on the people and age group they work with.

Do fxC offer the Sacraments?

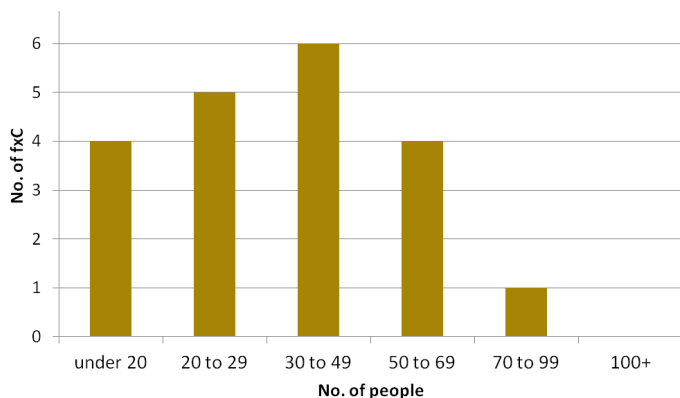


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## Patterns in attendance

A few things stand out from the attendance log. The fxC are considerably varied in size. The median size is 30.5, smaller than the diocesan mean of 54.6. But the fxC mean is 36.5 due to a few larger examples. The average thus far has been 44. The range of sizes is from 90 to 8. None are over 100, and one is 70-99. Four are 50-69, with six average between 30-49. Five are 20-29 and four less than 20, to make up the 20 still living in 2012.

Number of fxC by size



We routinely examine longitudinal attendance, and with over a fifth of these we are unable to tell what conclusions to draw, as we have no more than two years' worth of attendance figures. Of the remainder, 3 continue to grow in size, 9 seem to quickly plateau, 1 grew and then plateaued. In 2 cases the numbers fluctuate and 3 grew but later have shrunk, of which two later died. With such a small sample such figures must be taken lightly but it is noticeable that only a few, or 13%, have continued to grow in size over time.

With this small sample we cannot be confident what factors operate in determining which fxC expand, which plateau and which shrink. It might be prudent for the diocese to find out. Our experience suggests that factors tending to lead to a plateau include the following: limited capacity of lay spare time leaders, no suitable public buildings to grow into, lack of a relational fringe in a small congregation, reaching the natural unit size of either particular social groupings or a particular kind of fresh expression of Church, and the lack of vision or leadership resources to aid reproducing elsewhere. Our work at the national level across 11

dioceses has investigated this, across both missional and ecclesial variables. We hope it may be published in 2014.

## Wider church considerations

### Ecumenical partnerships

Five were undertaken in informal ecumenical co-operation and none was an LEP. 78% were solely Church of England initiatives, lower than elsewhere. The 'Anglican only' proportion is higher than that noticed among church plants 20 years ago. While beyond the scope of this data, perhaps each denomination is taking its own initiatives, although aware of one another and not in competition. It may be in some rural areas that only the Anglicans are left and in new housing areas to work ecumenically has strong advocacy.

### The influence of traditions

The traditions of Anglicanism are not evenly split in any diocese. Nor are the traditions usually in neat distinction, but are often combined. In these cases, figures do not sum to 100% and are given for cases owning a tradition in part or as a whole: evangelical 48%, Charismatic 39%, 48% Central, Catholic 17%. Thus all are represented to some degree, with the prevalence of 'Central' being the surprise to those who thought beginning fxC it was an Evangelical and Charismatic preserve.

### The fxC contribution to the diocese

Our criteria excluded 44 of the cases examined but the 34% minority, or 23, qualified. All but four are ongoing. If the fxC numbers are included in the 2011 AWA of 21200 then the 729 attendance at fxC is but 3.4% of the diocese. The diocese has 388 churches. If the 23 fxC are included in the diocese number of churches (which from the national returns looks unlikely) then fxC are 5.9% of the churches. Both of these are the lowest figures we have yet seen. It may mean the diocese in general still thinks fxC are not needed. Yet at present around 1/17 of the ecclesial bodies in the diocesan family are current, or recent, fresh expressions of Church. A wider critique is that fresh expressions of Church are only peripheral to the life of the Church of England. In this diocese that dismissal could have



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some justification, whereas the proportions of fxC vary across the other dioceses surveyed, from 8.4% to 30.2%.

## Overall

### Some characteristics of Gloucester Diocese

At 557 people per square mile, it is the second least populated diocese we have looked at, after Norwich with 483 people/sq. mile. In national terms of AWA it is average in attendance size, yet only three other dioceses of smaller size have more churches. This largely rural diocese, with some towns, serves a population that has increased by 7% from 2006-11, but its AWA has decreased by 7% in the same period. Nonetheless it is still third highest out of 43 in a league table of the percentage of population attending and the highest we have worked with. This paints a snapshot of traditional Anglican strength, now showing signs of waning.

### Ways in which the Gloucester fxC are typical

Gloucester results are in similar proportions to the average across the previous ten dioceses in relation to the following: the percentage of people thought to be characteristic of the area, those who are mainly or totally drawn from networks, the examples that don't meet on a Sunday, and those that meet weekly. We note that in both Norwich and Gloucester the female leaders most outnumber the males at 61% to 39% but do not know why.

### Encouragements in the Gloucester set of fxC

They have notably higher than average levels of sacramental practice. This may correlate to Gloucester having the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest proportion of examples that identify with the Catholic tradition. More of the fxC are taking some steps in discipleship, compared to the average.

There has been a clear story of many more fxC starting in the last six years, with a commendable ratio of two further people drawn into their life, for every one sent out. 78% of the fxC felt that the newcomers are typical of the context.

Three factors suggest some welcome pioneering. 74% of the fxC felt that they were in a pioneering situation

(average 62%), the most frequent motive (41%) that led them to start was identifying an unreached people group and their proportion of ordained pioneers is high.

It also has the following fxC leadership features that can be seen as positives. Gloucester has among the highest number of lay people, half of whom are not formally trained and recognised, who are leading fxC, and the majority of these are women. These are initiatives broadly welcomed in surrounding English society, although not always in the Church.

### Signs of vulnerability in the Gloucester fxC

They appear to be more marginal numerically to the life of the diocese and of smaller size than elsewhere yet what they bring amounts to half of offsetting recent diocesan AWA decline 2006-11. Their size may reflect that 29% of them occur in a rural or semi-rural setting. At them, there are slightly more Christians than average at the fxC and equally less de-churched people. The lay-lay figure is unusually low and most other dioceses are welcoming this surprising feature. The 66% exclusion rate reveals a depth of confusion around the meaning and application of the term fresh expression of Church which will not assist clarity, expectations or sustainability. Only 13% of them continue to grow in size and the 17% mortality rate is the highest yet seen.

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## Some Comments on Method and Future Work

### What was included and excluded

We note that 44 examples were agreed with the respondents should not be included. This was based on our preexisting ten criteria for assessing all cases. These results underline that a significant lack of clarity exists nationally around what counts as a fresh expression.

Those **excluded** are normally divided further into eight categories.

[A] Arch	6	Either steps toward, or onwards from, a fxC but not an fxC in itself
[D] Died	4	Died, or put down (data for these was included except for attendance)
[I] Infrequent	5	Meeting less than monthly, so unlikely to build a sense of community
[N] Not fxC	28	This category contained a variety of other things (see below)
[2] Double	2	Double entries in the data because of a name change over time.
[NY] Not Yet	0	Examples known to be planned, but not yet started
[L] Left	0	Left the Church of England and went independent
[X] eXcluded	3	Began prior to 1992 or post 2012 – all these were 2013 cases

The [N] group includes a mixture of categories: 9 re-badged existing services or events, 9 outreach projects to bring newcomers back to that local church, 6 new events for Christians and 3 that did not last at least 2 year (one of our criteria). All of these have some value, but are not fresh expressions of Church.

We have **included** church plants, for *Mission-shaped Church* listed them as one type of fresh expression of Church. We concur and have taken 1992-2012 as the

period of research. 1992 saw the setting in motion of the report *Breaking New Ground* that brought church planting to the attention of the wider Church of England. We also included in our analysis, 2 examples that died some years ago as its data contributes to the overall picture and longitudinal patterns from 1992-2012. But data from this case are not included in the current attendance figures.

### Further comments

The data took over 2 months to collect and 2 days to analyse. The time taken in gathering data, which would average 40 minutes per interview, and nearly achieving a 100% response rate, encourages us to assert that the data has an acceptable level of integrity.

Limitation includes the accuracy of perception of the leaders interviewed and only work with members could test this. The simplicity of the scoring also brings in modesty about figures derived.

Church Army's Research Unit has now completed this exercise with 10 other dioceses, applying the same criteria of inclusion, process in collection and analysis. Only by this will most substantive similarities and differences between dioceses appear. Headlines from such a report will be aired on January 16<sup>th</sup> 2014. .

The hope is that now that fresh expressions plants are being discovered and analysed, we will be able for the first time to have a more fully informed indication of their nature of their contribution to overall diocesan growth and decline and the part they play within the mixed economy.

Canon Dr George Lings  
2<sup>nd</sup> January 2014  
Church Army's Research Unit

### Produced by Church Army's Research Unit

We are a research team based at the Wilson Carlile Centre whose role is to discover, develop and communicate our findings in evangelism and mission to Church Army and the wider Church.

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