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National Church Planting Network  
Scoping Research  
February 2022

# INTRODUCTION

This is a preliminary piece of research, commissioned by the National Church Planting Network (NCPN) Steering Group with support from the Church of England (CofE), Churches Together in England (CTE), Evangelical Alliance (EA) and City to City UK, to:

- gain more of a national picture of new church growth / church planting
- identify gaps and opportunities for shared understanding and support
- understand opportunities and challenges for the NPCN Steering Group to encourage, inspire, inform and cooperate around church planting

The scope of this research was 19 interviews focused on denominations and networks who responded to the invitation in time for inclusion. The aim of this initial sample was to include a range of church traditions and ethnicities. The majority of the sample had previously been invited to NCPN gatherings however others had not engaged with NCPN before. All interviews took place over Zoom in Autumn 2021, using the questions listed below, and their answers transcribed.

The denominations and networks represented in the interviews could be seen as 3 groups:

**1. Traditional Church** (as defined by CTE definition): Church of England, Methodist, Baptist Union, Apostolic, Assemblies of God (AOG), Elim Pentecostal, Church of the Nazarene

**2. Independent and Newer Churches** (term as used by Peter Brierley, some also members of CTE): Freedom Church International (FCI), Pioneer, Vineyard, and the New Ground, Regions Beyond and Commission spheres from the New Frontiers network, New Testament Church of God (NTCG), Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG)

**3. Networks:** Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC), Fellowship of Churches of Christ (FCC), Fresh Expressions, New Wine

There is also mention in the findings of some of those we were not yet able to interview: Acts 29, Church Revitalisation Trust (CRT), Salvation Army and Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP). Some are registered as one charity (e.g. Elim); others as multiple charities (e.g. Baptist). This is a factor when seeking to define a church and its connection to other churches. New Frontiers operates as 7 spheres, of whom 3

responded to our request. They are grouped in some responses and sometimes referred to as NFI.

The brief and questions, which were from the commissioning group alone, do not reflect a full picture of all that is happening in the formation of new Christian communities (as helpfully pointed out by Fresh Expressions), and the findings are a reflection only of what was shared by the interviewees, without any kind of wider literature review or external theological reflection. Many have new websites and strategies due to go live in spring 2022.

### This paper covers

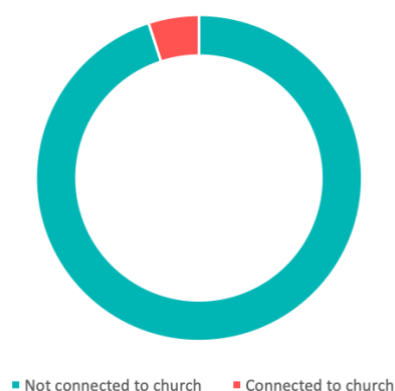
- 1 Context: the national picture
- 2 Synthesis of interviews: list of questions and summary of findings
- 3 Reflections: on the national church planting picture, on the journey of collaboration, on who is involved, and on the NCPN's role

# 1. Context: the national picture

This research is part of an ongoing conversation with the NCPN Steering Group to discern how they can best facilitate, support and develop a collaborative national initiative, reflecting similar processes in Europe, to see a significant growth of church planting in England. Various other research has been undertaken on the state of the national church including the most recent Changing Church survey by the EA. Here are some observations from existing research, commentary and interviews that relate specifically to the national church planting context in England in 2021.

## 1a. The reach of the existing church into the population is small

We asked Peter Brierley, Brierley Consulting, what he would currently estimate as the size of the UK church outreach need. He replied in an email that “Scripture Union have been saying “only 5% of British households have any connection with the church”, a figure which I supplied several years ago. That means 95% of households have no contact with the church (proportion right).”

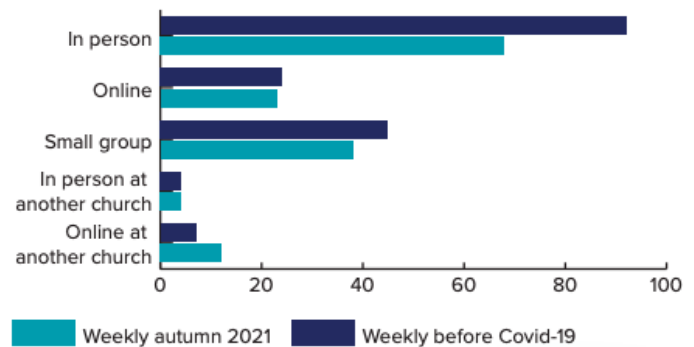


There are about 3 million people in church in 2020, pre-Covid. If forecast trends prove accurate, it could be 2.4 million by 2030, a rate of decline of -1.2% per annum. The proportion of English churchgoers who are Evangelical is estimated by Brierley to increase from 37% in 2000 to 52% in 2030. The current population of the UK is 67 million and predicted to increase to 70 million in 2030.

In the interview for this project, Bishop Ric Thorpe used the example of how the reach of the church is mapped in London by Anglican churches: “Deaneries based on boroughs roughly. We work with them to do a mapping exercise of their area, locate churches, other churches you know about, and work out who you are not reaching, with 3-4 metre maps. We identify estates or people groups they're not connecting with, write a long list, then shortlist what they'll do as a deanery. Anglicans are reaching 1.6% of the population. We think 8% of the population are attending church regularly. 92% is a long way to go. We need to play our part alongside other churches.”

## 1b. The church is in a time of change - and the evangelical church may be shifting in attendance patterns and practices

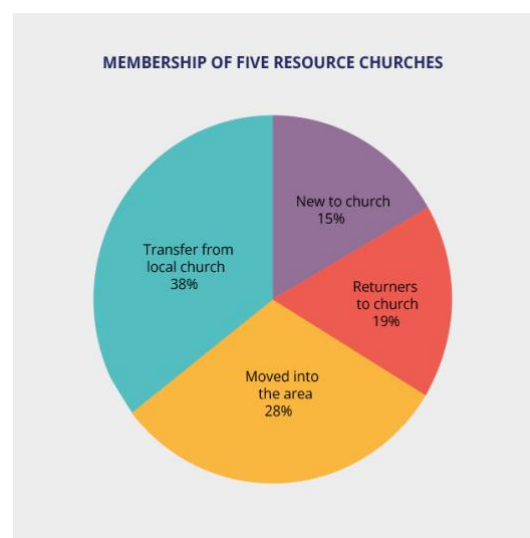
The recent EA Changing Church survey found that, where before Covid, 92% of individual respondents reported attending church weekly in person, this dropped to 68%, with monthly attendance increasing to 24%: “a large proportion have reduced the regularity of their in-person church attendance from weekly to once or twice a month.’ Research continues into the longevity of online church initiatives.



## 1c. The impact of movement of Christians to new church plants is significant on the church as a whole

The EA survey also found that 13% of church members said they are no longer attending the church that they attended before the pandemic. 11% are attending a different church (9% in person, 2% online) and 3% are not attending any church at all.

A 2016 Church Strategy and Development Unit unpublished paper analysed the membership of 5 resource churches and found that 38% members came from other churches, and 28% moved into the area: two-thirds in total (right). (Interestingly, Brierley observed the same two-thirds proportion of transfer/moving into the area in his study of larger churches in 2001.) Given the size of many resource churches, this proportion is significant. If, for example, a plant starts with 50 Christians in a strategic student centre with the support of local churches, and grows to 300 people in 5 years, these



proportions would suggest that up to 200 of these may otherwise have settled or stayed in other churches: equivalent to 25 people per church if there were, say, 8 churches in reasonable travelling distance. As context, the average size for what Brierley describes

as a 'mainstream evangelical' church is 76 (94 for charismatic evangelical). This illustrates the sensitivities sometimes needed in local ecumenical mission. Importantly, it has an impact on the leadership development and pipelines for other churches geographically near a new resource church.

## 1d. Church planting increases the size of the church and is a key strategy for many denominations

The research on resource church plants confirms that they do increase the size of the church, with a third of members being 'new to church' or 'returners to church', as opposed to just accounting for a migration of Christians. Although from a US context, Tim Keller writes [this](#): "Dozens of denominational studies have confirmed that the average new church gains most of its new members (60–80 percent) from the ranks of people who are not attending any worshiping body, while churches over 10-15 years of age gain 80–90 percent of new members by transfer from other congregations. This means the average new congregation will bring six to eight times more new people into the life of the body of Christ than an older congregation of the same size."

In the UK [these](#) are Ian Paul's observations from 2016: "Someone described to me recently the challenge facing the Church as trying to get the plug back in the bath before the water drains out completely. But what these city-centre resources churches appear to be doing is running a new bath next to the old one, and in time refilling the old bath from the new one. This not only offers a lesson in culture change for the national church, but perhaps offers one for the local church too. Is it easier and more fruitful to persuade life-long churchgoers to change deeply-held habits and outlooks—or to plant a new congregation alongside your existing ones, starting with a clean sheet, and then seeing how this might feed back into your existing congregations?"

This sentiment was echoed across other denominations and networks we interviewed. Church plants have been found to be the best way to reach new generations and people groups and have given existing congregations a sense of missional purpose and intention. This sense of possibility in church plants - for growth, acceleration, innovation, for the Holy Spirit to move - was expressed throughout these interviews. For those who have planted churches before there is a compulsion to plant again. Church planting continues to be a key strategy for an increasing number of denominations and networks.

## 1e. NCPN: exploring what could be done together

Despite the changes and disruptions from Covid, there is still much effort and activity towards church planting within denominations and networks.

This research aims to bring together a more detailed understanding of denomination's and network's church planting visions, strategies and plans. The questions in this survey necessitated a focus on individual denominations and networks, an inward view. It is easy to look at the shape of church planting across the country and first notice the differences in approach, ecclesiology, and language - and these were revealing. A collaborative approach might step back from this and see the whole in the light of the shared aim, purpose and context, which is to see more people come to encounter Jesus Christ in the nation. In the tunnel vision that is sometimes required to initiate, grow and measure each individual movement and gathering, it can be hard to step back and see each contribution in the light of the wider context. By presenting the findings thematically we hope to help present a current national picture of church planting and show the bigger Kingdom view.

There has been a desire to cooperate around church planting, to avoid duplication and to be more strategic together. However, there have been many questions that have arisen:

- What is the purpose of the NCPN?
- Who should be involved as part of the NCPN? Who should be on the Steering Group? Are there groups missing?
- What should the focus of the NCPN activities be?
- How can the NCPN play a role in seeing churches multiplied across the nation?

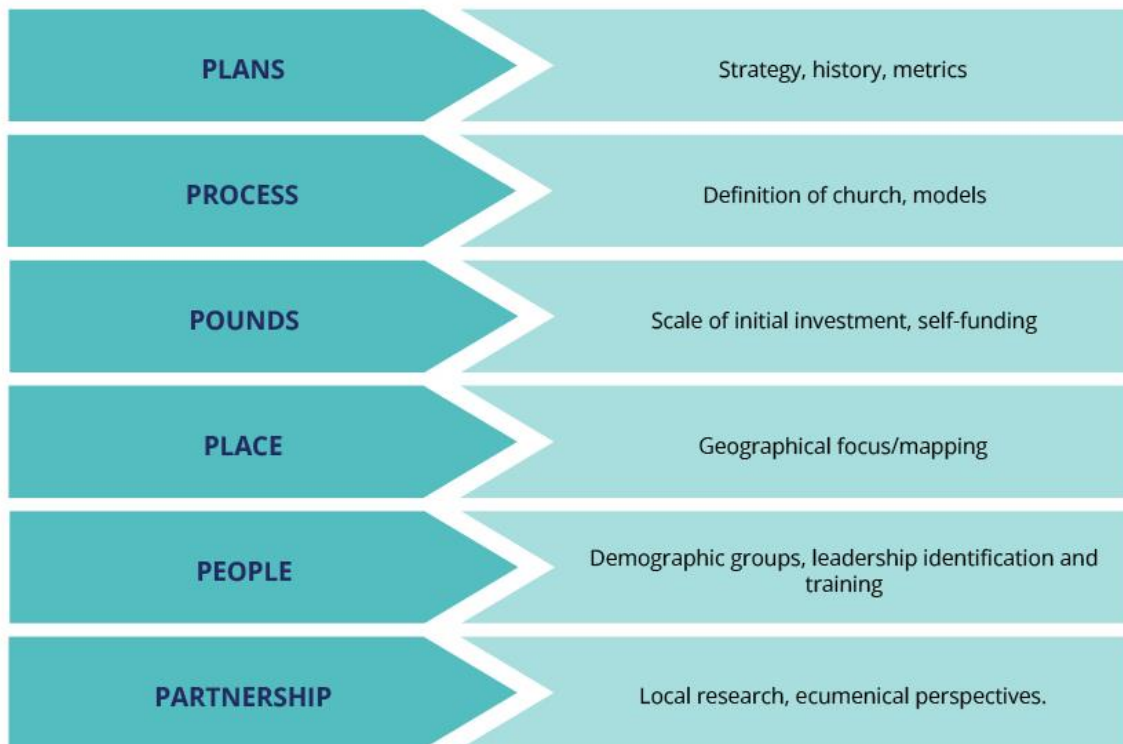
This research aims to help the NCPN Steering Group as they look to answer these questions and develop work around the three suggested areas: information and research, vision casting and raising awareness and mezzo-level/regional collaboration efforts.

# INTERVIEW SYNTHESIS

The interview responses have been grouped as follows, using the questions that were asked.

- In many cases these have been synthesised into groupings (imagine round tables) based on commonalities. This is for three reasons: to bring clarity, to highlight similarities in approach sometimes across theological differences, and also in some cases to preserve anonymity for particular quotes.
- The interviewees were speaking about their denomination/network but were not representing everything that happens in their church. They are personal perspectives from key people of influence and responsibility at a certain point in time, rather than a comprehensive reflection.
- The interviewees were assured that the full transcribed responses would be shared only with other interviewees and with the NCPN Steering Group and the report shared with them before being share publicly.
- The aim at this scale is to give a broad overview and to increase shared understanding, rather than a comprehensive view. There are gaps which can be explored at a later stage.

We found the questions, formulated with input from members of the steering group, fell into 6 'Ps':





## List of questions

### 1. PLANS

- 1A. When did your plans for church planting start being put together?
- 1B. What is your strategy for planting and multiplying churches? Any changes post pandemic?
- 1C. Have you stated any plans or targets publicly? Do you have any data you can share?
- 1D. What do you want to see happen? Why? By when?

### 2. PROCESS

- 2A. Do you have particular models of ways to do new church plants (e.g. a group going from another church)?
- 2B. For your denomination, what is a common definition of 'church' when it comes to new churches? What structure do you expect a new church to take?
- 2C. How do you measure / track church planting progress?
- 2D. How long do you think it takes to know whether a church has taken root?

### 3. POUNDS

- 3A. What money is needed to set up a new church ("start up package")?
- 3B. When do you expect it to be self-funding, if at all?

### 4. PLACE

- 4A. Where is your geographical focus?
- 4B. Any mapping? Where do you decide to plant?

### 5. PEOPLE

- 5A. What have been the predominant ethnic or demographic groups in your new churches in recent years?
- 5B. How much as a denomination do you talk about intercultural/multicultural church planting? There were also some comments on class.
- 5C. How do you identify and recruit new church leadership? Do you have criteria you use, formally or informally? If so, what is it, and is it stated anywhere?
- 5D. What training is offered or required?
- 5E. What kind of prayer support goes into new churches?

### 6. PARTNERSHIP

- 6A. What level of local research or connection would you expect with other churches in the area? There were also some collated comments on transfer between churches.
- 6B. What kind of training is offered for new churches, in terms of courses, events or networks? Which church planting resources do you use, e.g. Stewardship/CCX?
- 6C. Would a national network bringing together multi-denominations serve you? If so, what would it look like? How can it serve you?

## 2. Summary synthesis of interviews

### 1. PLANS

Key findings on strategy, history and planning:

- Denominations are at different points in their planning - which could be roughly characterised using John McGinley's phrase of 'from opportunistic, to intent, to strategic', with training and resourcing leaders as the key bridge between stages.
- This connection between strategy and training development means that creation of training resources becomes an act of defining identity in some cases. This might explain why sharing or borrowing training is low on the agenda.
- There was reference to a 'seven-year itch' on strategies: it may be helpful to think more in terms of a cycle than a linear path.
- Even where there is central oversight or aspiration, the drivers and initiators are usually either individuals - "apostolic entrepreneurial types" - or churches who have planted once and want to plant again. Both rely on a culture of multiplication and planting.

“

*The Holy Spirit kicked this thing off. The Holy Spirit is always a missionary Holy Spirit. How can we join in?*

”

#### 1A. WHEN DID YOUR PLANS FOR CHURCH PLANTING START BEING PUT TOGETHER?

Those we spoke to were at very different stages in their formulation of a strategy. They can be seen in five groups:

Group 1: longer standing strategies, asking 'how do we grow from here?': RCGC, Elim, Freedom Church International, FCC, New Frontiers spheres

Group 2: denominations with more recently articulated strategies (roughly within last 7 years): Church of England, Methodist, Vineyard

Group 3: networks with more recently articulated strategies (roughly within last 7 years): New Frontiers, FIEC, New Wine

Group 4: may not use the phrase 'church planting strategy' at all: FX, Baptist

Group 5: strategy in development: Pioneer, AOG, NTCG, Apostolic

“

*It should be evangelism first, then strategy. We need to change a mindset so we think evangelism and mission is first, then church is there to facilitate that.*

”

## 1B. WHAT IS YOUR STRATEGY FOR PLANTING AND MULTIPLYING CHURCHES? ANY CHANGES POST PANDEMIC?

Some of the answers to this question were drawn out in other responses. The pandemic wasn't spoken of in terms of changing strategy, but a number acknowledged that it has slowed traditional church planting, but accelerated the practice, breadth and quantity of online training. There were a small number of mentions of online congregations. Some expressed that the need for pastoral care post-pandemic, both for church leaders and those in their congregations, means it can be hard to talk about targets with people already feeling overstretched. Answers reflected five approaches:

- 1 Relational flexible approach: FCC, Baptist, New Frontiers
- 2 Shared identity, shared movement: RCCG, FIEC
- 3 Pioneer initiated: FCC, Baptist, Methodist, Elim, NTCG
- 4 Attractional growth aided by media and incentives for personal invites
- 5 There are different interpretations of pioneering language

“

*Many existing churches are stuck in their ways. Maybe there's no point trying to change with that level of resistance, so instead we create a new model, new energy.*

”

“

*Planting revives the church itself, and creates an impetus. It has always been the driving force for the growth of the church.*

”

## 1C. HAVE YOU STATED ANY PLANS OR TARGETS PUBLICLY? DO YOU HAVE ANY DATA YOU CAN SHARE?

Answers fell into four themes with some overlap:

- 1 Yes: targets are planned: (RCCG, Commission, Regions Beyond, AOG, Pioneer, CofE, CRT)
- 2 Questioning whether targets or plans (NTCG, Vineyard, Regions Beyond, FCI)
- 3 Exploring different kinds of metrics (Methodist, FX)
- 4 We don't really do numbers like that (FIEC, FX, FCC, Methodist, Baptist)

## 1D. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE HAPPEN? WHY? BY WHEN?

Answers fell into six groups, from national vision, to changing culture within churches, to one expressing a specific contribution (Pioneer expressed distinctives and was the only female leader interviewed).

- 1 Big vision for outreach
- 2 Healthy churches
- 3 Vision for planting in the local church
- 4 Plants planting
- 5 Quicker multiplication: lots of smaller churches
- 6 Route for women church planters

“

*Whilst any church has the possibility, the reality is that those who have planted or been planted are most likely to plant again: generations of churches.*

”

In all groups there is some version of a process where mission and ministry plans are formulated, with varying levels of vision, metrics and, as one put it, ‘the shape of whatever they thought when they started on journey’, then broken down into detail and targets, presented for funding, and supported through regional relationships.

“

*We want to see gospel witness in those areas. It might not necessarily mean a church.*

”

“

*Church planting: it's a nice idea. Pretty brutal, but we can't do anything else.*

”

## 2. PROCESS

### Key findings on definition of church models, tracking and sustainability

These conversations depended on a nuanced understanding of models of church planting, so inevitably the language used differed between groups, and in some cases led into broader conversation about definition of terms. There was clearly consensus on the central role of the Holy Spirit, but different understanding of what 'church' is. As one put it, 'before a church is [self-sustaining], the leader, depending on which book they've read, they might call it a fresh expression, missional community, small group, church plant...'

A reflection of language used in unscripted responses (by those who have, in most cases, written the strategies). These responses have not been compared with public website definitions or wider policies/documents.

#### Groups who used the phrase unprompted:

Revitalisation	CofE, New Wine (of whom 80% are CofE), FIEC
Resource church	CofE, New Wine (of whom 80% are CofE), Baptist (in some cases)
Multiplication	Vineyard, RCCG, Pioneer
Multi-site	New Frontiers, AOG
'Mother' church	Elim, FIEC, RCCG, Nazarene (not liked much by New Frontiers, Baptist)
Pioneer	New Wine, Methodist, Pioneer, Elim, FX, Baptist, Vineyard
Apostolic	Elim, Apostolic, New Frontiers, FCC
Holy Spirit	Elim, Pioneer, Vineyard, New Wine, FX, Apostolic, RCCG
Missional Communities	CofE, New Wine, Baptist, Pioneer, FX

#### 2A. DO YOU HAVE PARTICULAR MODELS OF WAYS TO DO NEW CHURCH PLANTS (E.G. A GROUP GOING FROM ANOTHER CHURCH)?

Most answered using common terms, many saying they use multiple models (CofE, Vineyard, NTCG, FIEC), some immediately bringing case studies as illustrations (Baptist, New Wine, NFI). Others began with stories (Methodist, FCC, Pioneer, FX).

“

*Some say there are 7 models I don't really care [because it's just about planting churches]*

”

Bishop Ric in his answer summarised the models as follows:

“There are three large groupings: church planters, fresh expression leaders, missional community leaders. Each has a model which is distinctive but they do overlap. Fresh Expressions would say revitalisation is one end of the spectrum. Church planting starts with church in mind with a leader and group who start worshipping or doing mission, then start gathering. Missional communities are more gathering - somewhere in the middle.”

RCCG's summary of the models they use is similar:

- Sometimes house cells who are close geographically grow, leadership emerges, leadership is discerned, the leading of the Holy Spirit is there. House fellowship may metamorphose into a church.
- Another model is a two by two approach: an intentionality of going to a new place, seeing if a church could be set up here.
- Also the model of the mother church birthing the church which is maybe the most traditional model. Where leadership is discerned because they've been trained through service and apprenticeship and leadership development programmes, there is a felt need that there is a geography that would benefit from the presence of the RCCG, a group would be sent out to go out there.

With much overlap, answers to these questions have been presented under these three themes:

- 1 The catalyst is an individual or a fresh expression ('Start incarnationally, evolve organically, look for opportunity'): described by Commission, New Wine, Pioneer, RCCG, Methodist
- 2 The catalyst is a team ('lay-led commissioned', 'mother church birthing', 'under the umbrella'): described by FIEC, Nazarene, Baptist, FCC, Vineyard, Apostolic Nigeria
- 3 The catalyst is strategy for multi-site and revitalisation (described by New Wine, FCI, New Frontiers)

## 2B. FOR YOUR DENOMINATION, WHAT IS A COMMON DEFINITION OF 'CHURCH' WHEN IT COMES TO NEW CHURCHES? WHAT STRUCTURE DO YOU EXPECT A NEW CHURCH TO TAKE?

Not all have had this conversation. Some draw a distinction between church (gathering, often in a home) and the parallel process of recognition, either by moderators or charity

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commission. Where this is the case, the official recognition is spoken of as less important.

The answers were broad, but comments have been grouped together around size, governance, leadership, and activity, with differences between groups based on strategy/form. Some would say a church needs to self-replicate at 50, others that it needs 70 for stability. Some CRT plants start with a far greater number and would expect it to grow further for a sufficient critical mass to plant successfully.

Quotes are grouped as follows:

1. On minimum size: either 'wherever 2 or 3 are gathered', 12 or 20, with some pragmatic observations from those originating in house church
2. On governance: either less important than leadership, or required for recognition
3. On leadership: process from leader to mission, to worship, to church
4. On activity: either stable, covenanted, sacramental worship, or innovative and evolving, defined by non-Christian having a sense of community

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*“It’s a dance around what God is saying to individuals, how we support that, as well as what we’re doing as a network.”*

“  
*The important thing is to allow the Holy Spirit to create spaces for community for people. If those spaces - spiritual spaces, for want or a phrase, facilitated by the Holy Spirit - then if they evolve or transform into more identifiable pictures of churches, so be it. (RCCG)*

## 2C. HOW DO YOU MEASURE / TRACK CHURCH PLANTING PROGRESS?

Larger denominations have regional structures for oversight, smaller ones rely on individual mentoring relationships (“Continual conversation with apostolic types who are planting. You can see early when it’s not working.”, “We are relationally based rather than structurally based.”)

Answers can be grouped as follows:

- 1 Using metrics, often driven by finance (CofE, AOG, Baptist Home Mission)
- 2 Raising challenge of conversion growth vs attendees (New Wine, Baptist)
- 3 Raising challenge of what to track and how (Pioneer, FIEC)

#### 4 Using a three-fold approach: personal relationship structure, gathering stories and annual returns/limited metrics.

## 2D. HOW LONG DO YOU THINK IT TAKES TO KNOW WHETHER A CHURCH HAS TAKEN ROOT?

There was a wide range of answers to this question, including rejection of the premise. Answers got the closest to touching on the reasons for church plant 'failure' (although this word would also be disputed). They group as follows:

- 1 Some gatherings are meant to be temporary, or the time is not right
- 2 "You know very quickly" (FIEC, Vineyard)
- 3 "Three - five years" (FCC, NFI, AOG, Pioneer, Elim)

“

*We get hung up on whether church can stand on own two feet and be grown up, but purpose is people finding faith.*

”

These key questions offered in five interviews are useful for knowing how a church plant is doing.

“If this community went through a crisis next month, would it survive as a church?”

“[One definition of church] comes from the person who is taking part. That doesn't solely rest with an institution. Does someone who is not a Christian say, 'this is my Christian community?'”

“Anything with fewer than 50 people is very fragile. One marriage can blow it up. Sustainability is key. Is it self-sustaining?”

“We look for viability but can be differently defined depending on context. 12 young Africans, probably viable, 12 old white pensioners who've never led anyone to Christ, probably not. Can they lead themselves? Can they support themselves? Can they have an imagination around replicating themselves?”

“If the church disappeared tomorrow, would anyone notice? That's when you know when you're established in a community. You could have some churches who don't have that. There has got to be leadership and enough people with a missional heart.”



## 3. POUNDS

### Key findings on money, salary and property

- Outside the Church of England, roles are not full-time salaried ('bi-vocational', 'tentmaking' '1-2 days a week max), and grants are minimal (mainly for start-up equipment, £3-10k).
- Many new churches no longer have a place to meet due to Covid.
- As one said, 'the bottleneck is not money, it's leadership'. But a lack of intentional discussion around the financial aspects of becoming a church planter could contribute to this bottleneck. As one put it, "maybe a better model would be to mobilise a group to start something else, but then who would want to leave their location to go elsewhere without being full time pastor or missionary? We don't have resources to fund that".
- Options were presented as tithing, tentmaking (full/part time employment) and social enterprise. The only hint at a missionary support-raising model came from those talking about fundraising from mother and partner churches.
- Comments about money were about practicalities and process, rather than discipleship or training. The 'by faith' language you would perhaps hear from missionaries wasn't used.

### 3A. WHAT MONEY/PACKAGE IS NEEDED TO SET UP A NEW CHURCH?

Answers indicated the following:

1. Resource church model receives significantly more funding than anywhere else
2. New Frontiers is perceived as being 'resource heavy' but funding depends on sphere and location
3. Three years of initial seed funding - sometimes tapered - is offered (answers from Methodist, FIEC, Baptist, Nazarene)
4. Buildings can be a barrier to growth, either if not available or enabling inertia over innovation
5. Many have a central startup fund of up to £10k, usually less (answers from Elim, FX, FIEC, Pioneer, Nazarene, New Wine, Vineyard)
6. Some are loans, not grants (AOG, FCC)
7. New churches may need to fundraise from their mother church and other local churches, and create new networks for funding (NFI, NTCG, Apostolic)
8. 'Resource Light' churches are the norm (answers from FCC, RCCG, FCI)
9. Bi-vocational is the default, either almost always (FCC, RCCG, FCI, Elim, Vineyard) or a mixture (AOG, New Wine, FIEC, FX)

Bi-vocational leadership was presented as for three main reasons: income, wider connections ('mission in everyday life rather than setting people apart as those who do ministry - everyone doing ministry, not hiring someone to do it') and because a church planter may not need more than 1-2 days a week at the start.

### 3B. WHEN DO YOU EXPECT IT TO BE SELF FUNDING, IF AT ALL?

It is recognised that in some areas this won't be viable, but that you can usually tell by 3 years, and in some cases, it might take 5 years, up to 10. From the answers, there are an increasing number of churches relying on social enterprise and 'tentmaking' for income streams not reliant on tithing. There is a hope for 'redistribution of wealth' and churches being supported from other places. Church planters raising funds for their own support or on behalf wasn't explicitly raised.

## 4. PLACE

### Key findings on geography

- Urban and suburban areas are the focus, with only a small number of organisations addressing rural outreach ('because there's less resource, it requires more creativity').
- Where mapping takes place, it is patchy, and is not directive: the initiative is still more likely to come from individuals.

#### 4A. WHERE IS YOUR GEOGRAPHICAL FOCUS?

Many of these denominations are scattered all over England, the UK and Europe in some cases with frequent change. It will require a full census to get a full picture. Answers as given are in the full report, and some websites hold more information. For all, there is the sense that some are in places where the leadership might have expected or hoped for a plant ('a glint in the apostle's eye'), and others which have been more opportunistic.

#### 4B. ANY MAPPING? WHERE DO YOU DECIDE TO PLANT?

Those for whom this is a work in progress/not yet there include Methodist, Vineyard, FIEC, Nazarene. Answers fell into 6 clear groups which reflect the different foci within networks/denominations. The Baptists mentioned specific topical areas (e.g. new housing), and there are other networks/denominations where mapping may depend on demographic groups, e.g. Salvation Army reaching Roma people.

1. Focus on strategic cities (FCI, FCC, AOG)
2. Focus on suburban/towns (Pioneer)
3. Rural awareness (FX, Methodist, CRT)
4. 'The next town along' (New Ground, FIEC)
5. Where there isn't a church like us (Vineyard, RCCG, New Wine, Elim) / "Where there isn't a gospel witness" (FIEC)
6. Where the movement/apostolic team feel led (New Frontiers, NTCG, Baptist)

“

*"There has been very little mapping of the UK. Where are the unreached groups? Most are on the estates. I looked at the CCX estates course but didn't like the speaking to camera - if we're going to do video training it does need to look more interesting. Discussions and questions, teaching and stories are good. The Church of England's vision is great."*

”

## 5. PEOPLE

### Some findings on diversity, recruitment and training

- Where new churches rely on leaders to identify and recommend new potential leaders, the likelihood of diversity is reduced.
- Retaining and attracting Christians (referred to by more than one as ‘rearranging deckchairs on Titanic’) can detract from outward-facing mission.
- The language of ‘sheep-stealing’ and the pain, even when planned, of ‘giving away our best’ takes a toll on church leaders.
- Leadership succession is a gap. There are key areas to explore around what prevents people wanting to become leaders and church planters.
- Discipleship is a shared challenge, but with common language.
- Practitioners most want to hear from other practitioners.
- The growth of diaspora churches is under the radar and unaccounted for among some groups.

#### 5A. ‘WHAT HAVE BEEN THE PREDOMINANT ETHNIC OR DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS IN YOUR NEW CHURCHES IN RECENT YEARS?’

1. Majority black, but... (RCCG, NTCG, FCI)
2. Majority dependent on ethnicity of leader (AOG, Elim, FCC)
3. Majority white, but... (CofE, FIEC, NFI)
4. ‘We have some churches who are already operating and are beacons, not necessarily as articulated narrative’ (RCCG, Salvation Army, Baptist)

“

*If you go to a church planting conference everyone looks the same.*

”

#### 5B. ‘HOW MUCH AS A DENOMINATION DO YOU TALK ABOUT INTERCULTURAL/MULTICULTURAL CHURCH PLANTING?’

Answers were in one of four groups:

1. “Not as much as we could’ (CofE, New Wine, Baptist, NFI, FX, Pioneer)
2. Depends on the leader (Vineyard, AOG, Commission, Regions Beyond, NTCG, Elim)
3. “All the time!” (NTCG, FCC, RCCG)
4. For those who have been speaking about it more, expressing the inherent challenges (FCI, FIEC, Nazarene, NFI Commission, Apostolic Nigeria)

“

*Different services for multiple language groups can be a very effective way of reaching entirely new communities in the same building*

”

## Comments on class

Three denominations - Elim, Methodist and Nazarene, heard the question about demographics and answered in terms of class rather than race. Elim noted that Pentecostalism was traditionally a working class movement - now more middle class - and it's a mix. One new plant in Wolverhampton, "a really working class city," is led by "a taekwondo sensee and drug addict, who went to prison, came out, went into Life Central, gave life to Jesus." One of the New Frontiers spheres also spoke about planting into estates, and as a result they and the Nazarenes have been linked into the estates network.

“

*I hear the Church of England say the average age of church planter is 36 and you reach people 10 years younger and 5 years older. This stacks up for us. The church ages and seasons over time. More recently we have talked about intentionally raising or reaching*

”

### 5C. 'HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY AND RECRUIT NEW CHURCH LEADERSHIP? DO YOU HAVE A CRITERIA YOU USE, FORMALLY OR INFORMALLY? IF SO, WHAT IS IT, AND IS IT STATED ANYWHERE?'

In most cases the responsibility for identifying church planters is within the local church, described in the same way that we would identify any leader: 'volunteers who take initiative', 'seeing who in the congregation shows commitment, availability and at least leadership potential'. FCC and NFI mentioned events where, say at mealtimes, 'we begin to hear their dreams and we can see who are the apostolic types', or 'you sometimes identify someone in that setting, then talk to their church leader'. Locally one spoke of meeting 'to see what's bubbling in a local community of practice - so we can run training where they discover people are doing something incredible.'

Fresh Expressions run 'who me' events, nationally, advertised through partners and social media: 'we are beginning to see some who have left mainline denominations but still church but not institution. We will run nationally and equip people to use the Godsend material which we think is pretty simple to use.'

Next steps after identification for different networks could include:

- In Pentecostal context, promotion to a deacon role for greater responsibility (Apostolic)
- Interview to take part in online training programme (often weekends, monthly)
- Connected to a regional leader for coaching/mentoring or a local cohort
- Discernment process towards ordination into a traditional denomination

“

*The leadership is the critical thing. The bottleneck is not finance, it's leaders.*

”

## Questions churches are asking at this stage:

There are some public tools describing a criteria or discernment process. For example, Acts 29 list their [core competencies](#) and have an assessment conference. Vineyard have a [paper](#) and a [process](#) using materials from the States as part of their 'Multiply' programme. For the Apostolic Church of Nigeria, the UK is a mission field, with a superintendent who works hand in hand with a prophet so that decisions on church planting always have prophetic input.

In the answers given, three key themes emerged:

1. Denominational 'fit' (answers from Pioneer, Elim, Vineyard, FIEC)
2. Specific evangelistic gifting (answers from Baptist, NFI)
3. Calling (answers from Pioneer, Vineyard, NTCG, FX)

These are the shared challenges raised in answers, which could be explored further:

- 1 What happens when you don't have a clear discernment process? (Elim, Vineyard, Pioneer, New Wine, FIEC)
- 2 How do we balance pastoral care and a drive to mission? (Methodist, FX, Pioneer, New Wine)
- 3 How do we meet the challenge of succession? (Pioneer, Elim, NFI, Vineyard)

### 5D. 'WHAT TRAINING IS OFFERED OR REQUIRED?'

There are materials online outlining details of programmes, and a minority of groups distinguish between training for church planters and training for church leaders towards ordination, authorisation or recognition.

There was an intentionality expressed about the concept of training, but not necessarily on the subjects that church planters would specifically need to cover and how training could use wider resources (see section 6B).

“

*In Western society we want to fill people with knowledge, but I think it's through hands and walking it. I'd rather we move away from that, and say practical experience is as important for delivering contextual Christian communities.*

”

For the majority where church planters are bi-vocational and volunteers, the church leadership process can take far longer (up to 20 years to become a full RCGC pastor). For those offering residential training there are an increasing number of options more suitable for those in a pioneering context. These elements are options in some form for all respondents:

1. Residential degree level qualification
2. Part-time degree level qualification
3. Part time certificate/accreditation
4. Online structured course, often weekly/monthly with occasional residentials
5. Access to online modules/app content

Question 6BD covers where training draws on external content. The interesting question to explore is whether creation of training resources is a core central responsibility (in which case it can become central to formulating identity and strategy), or something which can be signposted and outsourced (which relies on a broad view of what is available).

“  
*We get criticised for over emphasising church planting over building church. That balance is a tightrope. You want to serve leaders well but also drive our mission forward. It all comes down to Romans 1 - I want to impart spiritual gifts to make you strong but my heart is going to Spain. Come and care, also work together to get to the next place. Holding both in tension. if you let one take one over you grind to a halt.*

”

## 5E. 'WHAT KIND OF PRAYER SUPPORT GOES INTO NEW CHURCHES?'

Answers to this question majored on either

- expressing the extent to which prayer is a core value of the denomination/network (“Very much so - sometimes 12 hours non-stop - this month we had 21 days of prayer and fasting”);
- describing efforts to increase its prominence (e.g. 24-7 Prayer have worked with the Church of England and had a day a week secondment with the Methodists);
- acknowledging the regular patterns of prayer (often weekly online) where church planting has a presence.

There was a Baptist connection made with a missionary model where focused support could be gathered around one initiative. Fresh Expressions are exploring ways of developing prayer through their website.

There was also a question about mentoring, which drew the same answers to this one, and was related to answers around training and tracking progress. Prayer is more frequently seen as part of the broader mentoring and relational support structures. There may be scope for some imagination around new ways of focusing prayer support around new church planting initiatives.

## 6. PARTNERSHIP

### Some findings on research and ecumenical working

The challenges faced by pioneer-led churches are very different to those started by a team from a resource church. There is very little common ground between them, but much between those who take a “pioneer-led” approach. Therefore, any learning communities may be most productive if they are based around locality, shared approaches, rather than churchmanship, denomination, or ecclesiology.

It is subtleties in language which leads conversation around new churches towards either collaboration or suspicion. Therefore, there is a need to clearly identify the vocabulary in this area which is contested (i.e. used with different meanings and implications by different groups); vocabulary which is used to communicate ‘tribal’ identity; and vocabulary where we can all agree and meet.

Groups below have been suggested based on commonality in answers. If these were roundtables there would be a shared understanding in these areas and greater opportunity to sharpen and improve existing practice. Practitioners want to speak to practitioners.

#### 6A. ‘WHAT LEVEL OF LOCAL RESEARCH OR CONNECTION WOULD YOU EXPECT E.G. WITH OTHER CHURCHES IN THE AREA?’

Open answers were either in terms of demographics, church leaders from the same network, church leaders from other networks or ecumenical mission.

They answered in terms of one of the following:

1. Demographics (CofE, RCCG, New Ground, FCC, FIEC)
2. Church leaders from same network (NFI, FX)
3. Church leaders from other networks (Pioneer, New Ground, Vineyard, AOG, FX, Apostolic)
4. Ecumenical mission (Regions Beyond, NTCG, Apostolic Nigeria)

There were also some collated comments on transfer of Christians between churches.

“

*Around church planting there seems to be much more not worrying about theology. We want to reach people with the gospel. They've got to be evangelical but there's no way we can do it by ourselves - we've got to do it together.*

”



## 6B. 'WHAT KIND OF TRAINING IS OFFERED FOR NEW CHURCHES, IN TERMS OF COURSES, EVENTS OR NETWORKS? WHICH CHURCH PLANTING RESOURCES DO YOU USE, E.G. STEWARDSHIP/CCX?'

Almost all are keen to say they bring in other input, trainers, and speakers, and some referenced national or regional training as the place for this. Some groups offering training weren't mentioned (M4 Europe, City to City, Plant from London Seminary, Engage), which isn't to say they aren't being accessed.

Of those who specified their answers could potentially be grouped as follows e.g. for roundtables, but there is lots of overlap:

Group 1: Some overlap on CCX, Stewardship Exponential (CofE, Apostolic, New Frontiers, Pioneer, FCC, New Wine)

Group 2: Some overlap on CMS, Forge (Baptist, Methodist, Nazarene, FX)

Group 3: Range of mission agencies (NTCG, AOG, FIEC)

Group 4: FCI, RCCG (EA, Christian Councils)

“

*We would see CCX as more church planting, which from my understanding would start with worship as the first thing, and for me that's something different*

”

## 6C. 'WOULD A NATIONAL NETWORK BRINGING TOGETHER MULTI-DENOMINATIONS SERVE YOU? IF SO WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE? HOW CAN IT SERVE YOU?'

These answers have been grouped, mixed and in some cases anonymised within the group.

- 1 Keen to be connected (New Wine, Pioneer, New Frontiers spheres)
- 2 Probing the purpose (Methodist, Nazarene, FX, Baptist, FCC)
- 3 Willing, with reservations (Elim, Vineyard, Apostolic, AOG, FIEC)
- 4 Top leadership there, not yet locally? (FCI, RCCG)

“

*Churches Together or fraternals can be that it is all about being unified - for me, it's boring, BUT if we can encourage mission together and support and help resource one another...*

”

Transcript answers and quotes in this structure are in the full version attached.

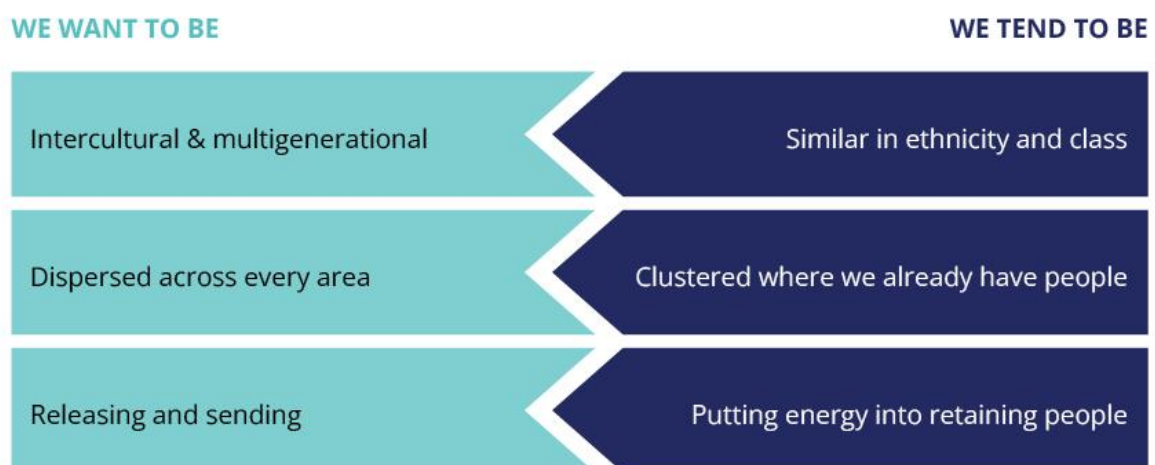
# 3. Reflections

## 3a. On the national church planting picture

The presentation of a national church planting picture is challenging. There are differences in theological perspectives, understanding of terminology and language, attitude towards use of metrics, history, personality, ecclesiology and governance. Church planting is happening all over the country in all kinds of ways and changing constantly. However, bringing together this information in the form of qualitative interviews can be of value by providing a different perspective of the breadth, and a better understanding of the opportunities that a national initiative can achieve.

The small sample we spoke to seemed to value the opportunity to speak for an hour about these issues, and in some cases it helped them articulate their vision and priorities. They were all curious to see what others might say. Interviewing denominations and networks independently but presenting the picture as a whole helps each to see more of the whole picture: how they are similar, different and how they could work together? The groupings and themes that emerged within answers brought together denominations who may not normally be seen in the same category. There is a shared desire to see more followers of Christ, in more churches, in more parts of the country, led by the Holy Spirit.

We heard in the interviews a gap between what they aspire to seeing, and their praxis, or inclination. These are not right or wrongs, but are creative tensions shared by many:



This list could possibly be extended. Bishop Ric's identified six barriers to church planting specifically for resource churches in the Church of England: resistance to change, personnel issues, lack of church-planting strategy, lack of finances, the complexity of buildings and mission in difficult places. These are all reflected in these answers. It was hard to determine areas of duplication with these types of interviews at any level of detail, but at a training level this is undoubtedly there.

### 3b. On the journey of collaboration

As one of the interviewees stated and we all know, relationships develop at the level of trust. Growing trust can also lead to engagement and collaboration. A few people mentioned their trust for Bishop Ric from their experience of learning communities.

One of our reflections is the difference between individual practitioners and working together in mission. This could be seen as below:



Not everyone wishes to get to the co-missioner stage. Some, through working with others are happy to understand the national picture but nevertheless crack on and do

their own thing independently without the inevitable complexity of collaboration. There are also examples of intentional integrated working together.

This journey process could be helpful for the NCPN Steering Group to discuss some of the following questions as the responses will depend on which stage or stages the NCPN is looking to best serve and the role it will play for each stage.

- What is the purpose of the NCPN? For example, bringing people around a common vision, with learning communities for those at the collaboration level.
- What should the focus of the NCPN activities be? For example, for those at the practitioner level, roundtables could be based on some of the common ground and groupings found from the answer themes here.
- How can the NCPN play a role in seeing churches multiplied across the nation?

The responses to questions around partnership revealed four approaches to a national initiative: those keen to be connected, those questioning the purpose, those willing but with reservations, and those where the top leadership's ecumenism is not necessarily reflected locally.

Groups based on locality and shared approaches could produce more application than necessarily grouping around churchmanship, denomination or ecclesiology. These reflections will help aid discussions on how the NCPN Steering Group continues to build on the existing network and gatherings, the format of future gatherings, who is to be involved and the best way of communicating the vision for NCPN.

### 3c. On who is involved

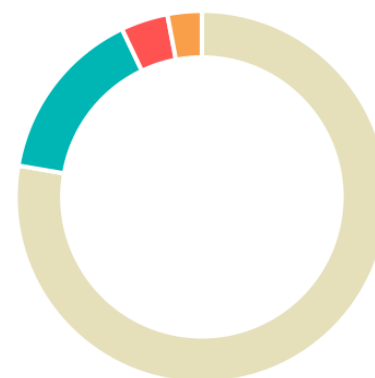
The graphs below show the sample interviewed (red and yellow) as a proportion of the 52 members of Churches Together in England listed on its website (blue), and the 228 denominations listed in Peter Brierley's 2021 Church Statistics (brown).

Even without comparing those two lists in detail, it is clear that these interviews represent a small proportion of the full number of networks and denominations. Another, far harder, approach would be to estimate and compare the membership sizes of each denomination or network to gain a sense of representation.

These reflections may aid discussions on who should be involved as part of the NCPN and on the steering group, whether there are groups missing, and whether we are seeking representation per denomination from across the breadth of the church, or per size/influence, or specifically evangelical influence. An up to date church census would help understand the national picture more accurately in some of these aspects.



■ CTE list not interviewed  
■ CTE interviewed  
■ Non-CTE interviewed



■ Brierley list not interviewed ■ CTE list not interviewed  
■ CTE interviewed ■ Non-CTE interviewed

### 3d. On NCPN's role in collaboration

When we are considering greater collaboration, for example at a mezzo level, some reflections:

#### Mutual recognition could bring greater mutual appreciation

- The NCPN could help people on the journey from practitioner to co-missioner, from competition and critique to acknowledgement and recognition of different contributions. This can be through the design of the gatherings to facilitate this and to intentionally convene groups together for relationship and trust building.
- The national church planting picture can help to facilitate conversations as it is presented in a way where denominations and networks can identify how they are similar and different to others and how they fit into the bigger picture.

### There is not yet - but could be - confirmation and ownership of a united vision for a preferable future

- Theological and missional agreement would give a sense, as one put it, of 'travelling in the same direction'. What are the core fundamentals we seek to see for collaboration?
- If everyone had a vision of every type of church being in every type of place there is an opportunity to see each other's distinctives as a contribution rather than a threat.

### The language we use can corner people where actually there is consensus - so it requires care

- It is subtleties in language which lead conversations around new churches towards either collaboration or suspicion. There is a need to clearly identify the vocabulary in this area which is contested (i.e. used with different meanings and implications by different groups); vocabulary which is used to communicate 'tribal' identity; and vocabulary where we can all agree and meet. Thankfully, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit seem to be where we meet.
- For those who are wanting to collaborate, including the NCPN, there is a need to lose any naivety around language. Some phrases will mean we corner others, and hamper meaningful communication. This is sometimes about perception (e.g. 'kingdom vision', 'gospel witness', 'pioneer led', 'accountability'). The table under section 2 in the Interview Synthesis could be part of this.

## Conclusion

Although limited, this scoping research has been helpful to understand the various approaches both to the practical and strategic aspects of church planting. It has given opportunity for a safe neutral space where participants can articulate their approach. It has revealed areas of common ground, themes and similarities even where theological and ecclesiological differences are significant. Those in the steering committee will each be struck by different areas in the full synthesis of interviews with the various quotes and groupings. These may be worth exploring. This initial scoping research could be developed and extended in many ways:

- by extending the interviewees to the full list of those who have been involved in NCPN previously, or to other groups not represented at all at this stage
- by comparing public website resources, e.g. on training, vision and strategy
- once the full synthesis only has been shared with interviewees, to arrange follow up conversations for any personal reflections and developments in their plans since we spoke
- A more granular picture through a full church census that can help stir the need for church planting

It has been a privilege to reflect on these issues through the lens of these conversations. The harvest is plentiful and the workers are few - so we pray that it proves useful as we work together for the extension of God's Kingdom.

Caroline Millar, Laura Treneer, February 2022



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND



CHURCHES  
TOGETHER  
IN ENGLAND



CITY to CITY  
UNITED KINGDOM

evangelical alliance  
together making Jesus known

