



PARTNERSHIP FOR MISSIONAL CHURCH

AN EVALUATION FOR
CHURCH MISSION SOCIETY

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Festival of Faiths at St Mary's Humberstone, Leicester Diocese

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FOREWORD

Canon Philip Mounstephen, Executive Leader, Church Mission Society

I'm delighted to commend this report for wider reading and learning across the Church. When we in Church Mission Society first came across Partnership for Missional Church we felt a deep resonance with its core values. They reflect deep convictions about mission that we have held ever since our foundation.

Chief amongst them are two beliefs. One is that in mission we must always follow God's lead and discern where he is already at work. That seems almost simplistic, and yet it is surprising how much mission activity boils down to our best ideas about what we might do, rather than listening patiently to God.

The second is that mission must always take our local context seriously, not simply rejecting what we find there, but discerning what is good and working with it for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

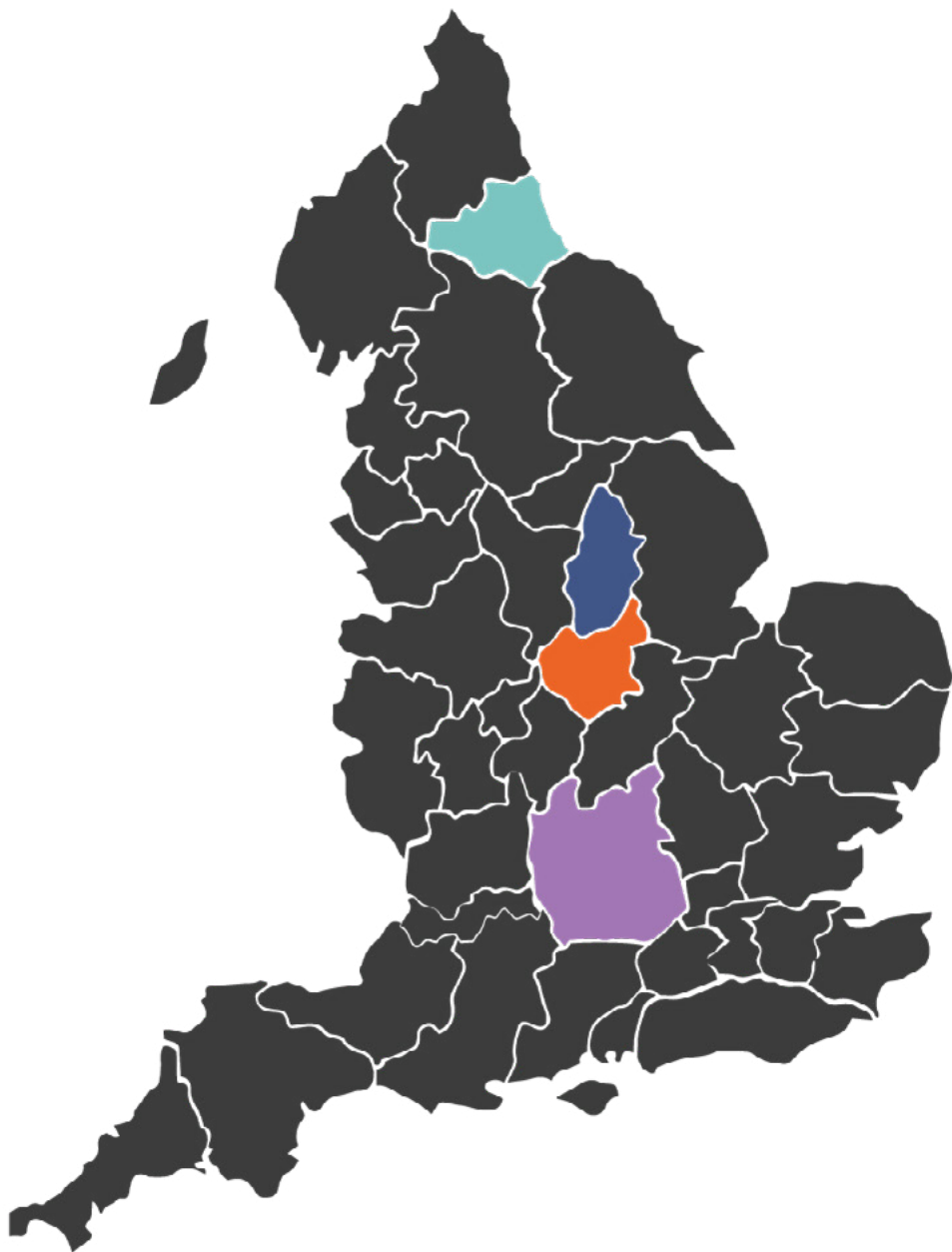
For me both those convictions are essential. And they are essential above all because they reflect something of the humility we see in Jesus, and which must be seen in his Church: a humility that seeks to follow the will of the living God; a humility that loves the local and the particular rather than lording over it.

It's for that reason that I believe that PMC has so much to offer the Church, and why it seems to be 'for such a time as this'. That's why we want to see its 'holy habits' practised as widely as possible, across England certainly, but beyond it too, and definitely not just in Anglican churches.

We offer it to the wider Church not as a quick-fix cure-all – but as a way of reconnecting with our God, and with the world to which he sends us that together we may all experience the healing and health of the Kingdom of God.

IMPACT IN BRIEF

PMC is a process for churches designed to help them connect with the activity of God, each other, their mission and their local area. It has run continuously in four dioceses and this evaluation explores the experiences and impact of PMC in those dioceses since 2011.



PMC OPERATES ACROSS ALL KINDS OF NEIGHBOURHOODS:



TOTAL CHURCHES: 82

82 churches have participated:

- 50 are currently involved
- 19 finished after completing the 3 year process and continue to learn
- 13 dropped out before the end of the process

Parishes represented include a similar number of affluent and more deprived communities; and a range of worshipping traditions across the Anglican spectrum. There are also small number of Methodist churches.

PMC encourages churches to experiment and learn

The progression for churches in PMC is that they spend one year on each of:

- Listening & Discovering Partners
- Experimenting
- Visioning for Embodiment

An optional fourth year 'Learning and Growing' is also available to churches.

A small group of church members is tasked with the responsibility of steering the congregation through PMC. It is an organic process that requires churches to take risks and work closely with the wider community; as well as taking their congregation on a journey that deepens their spirituality and helps envision their missional focus.

PMC strengthens lay involvement and discipleship

71% of respondents said that PMC had had a significant or very significant impact on their discipleship; only 10% said it had not changed, with the remainder reporting a slight increase.

76% of survey respondents had taken on new roles or responsibilities to those that had not (83:26 respondents).

“Because of PMC we are working on two axes - horizontally out to people in the community & vertically, deepening individual and corporate spirituality. There is more joy and movement of the Holy Spirit in services.”

PMC inspires churches to engage with their local community

90% of survey respondents said their church had started new partnerships; many had broadened or deepened existing ones.

72% of survey respondents said that they felt more confident in receiving hospitality than before the PMC process began.

“We don’t count success of PMC as dragging people into church but joining in with people outside.”

PMC fosters partnerships that can help share faith

72% of survey respondents said that PMC had a positive impact in growing partnerships outside of the church, with the majority reporting that faith is an explicit part of these relationships

Church observation:

“Church and community recognise each other far more fully; there has been a historical rift between church and secular community in this village and I strongly feel that in the last few years the barriers are going down and the two are growing closer together.”

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT PMC AND CMS

The partnership between the Church Mission Society (CMS) and Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) began in 2015, following a four-year period when it was available to churches in Southwell & Nottingham and Leicester dioceses. Currently, churches across four dioceses have participated in the process, co-ordinated by Canon Dr Nigel Rooms at CMS.

The aims of PMC connect closely with CMS’s conviction that all of God’s people are called to be part of God’s mission, bringing challenge, change, hope and freedom to the world. It provides a process by which individual congregations can develop a vision for their community in partnership with those outside the church. There is therefore a natural synergy between CMS as an organisation with a network across the Church of England, and the process of PMC.

Over many years, CMS has stressed that mission is the local participation of the people of God in his global mission, rather than something done by others ‘overseas’. The PMC process is a resource that enables churches not just to understand what mission is, but what their unique mission is in their specific context. CMS advocates that “all God’s people are called to be part of God’s mission” and PMC facilitates this.

HOW WE THINK ABOUT IMPACT

This evaluation explores areas where PMC is intentionally seeking to make a difference, based on the views of CMS and participating dioceses. Early in the design of this evaluation, the authors facilitated a discussion between CMS team members and participating dioceses to describe what good looks like. (A summary of the discussion’s outcome can be found at Appendix 1.) This gave rise to four areas that shape the findings of the report. These are:

- **Active learning** – the whole process is characterised by ongoing, active learning and experimentation. This is a crosscutting theme.
- **Church and community conversations** – the conversation within churches and with their surrounding communities should change in nature. PMC seeks to inspire and engage church members who can in turn engage with people within and beyond the church in inspiring ways.
- **Mission together** – the capacity and confidence of churches to engage in mission should grow. Lay and ordained leaders should feel empowered to participate.
- **Wider impact and integration** – PMC aspires to influence the wider interactions of local church, community and diocese. Ideally, its effects become mainstream and are integrated across this system, so the effect is more than the sum of its parts.

The last three bullet points are explored in the findings as separate sub-headed sections. Active learning and experimentation, as a cross-cutting theme, is covered within these.

CONTEXT

WHAT IS PMC?

PMC is a theological process designed to take churches on a spiritual journey in which they discover what God is doing in their context and what God’s “preferred and promised future” is for that church and community. Developed originally by Revd Prof Pat Keifert and Church Innovations,¹ PMC has been used by churches of widely differing denominations on three continents for nearly four decades. Research conducted with churches in the US that had engaged with the whole PMC process revealed that its impact included: growth in worship attendance; new disciples; lay leadership; and partnerships outside the church community.²

PMC is not a “programme” that a church can pick up for a quick-fix, it is a three year process designed to help churches engage in new missional ways with their congregations and the communities they serve. The process is designed to help churches engage with their local context. This was part of the appeal for CMS, because it tapped into their deep-rooted understanding of mission as both contextual and cross-cultural.

Each year (“phase”) of the process has a distinct theme and builds upon the discoveries and skills developed in the previous year.

- **Phase One: Listening & Discovering Partners**
Churches ‘arrive where they actually are’ in their communities by interviewing, looking at their historical timeline and examining the demographics of the people nearby.
- **Phase Two: Experimenting**
After discerning an ‘adaptive challenge’ in their community a church team experiments with new community partners to address the common concern with Christian faith at the heart of the intervention.
- **Phase Three: Visioning for Embodiment**
Churches create five documents which set out their local vision of God’s preferred and promised future for them and which will hold them accountable over the next 3-5 years.
- **Phase Four: Learning and Growing (Optional)**
Churches continue to meet together on an occasional basis to share learning and growth in being missional in all they are and do.

Churches form a steering team and, later, the experimenting ‘Missional Innovation Team’ (MIT), who form the core team to guide the congregation through the process. Three times a year these groups meet with other churches engaging with PMC in local clusters of 12-15 churches for a large group event.



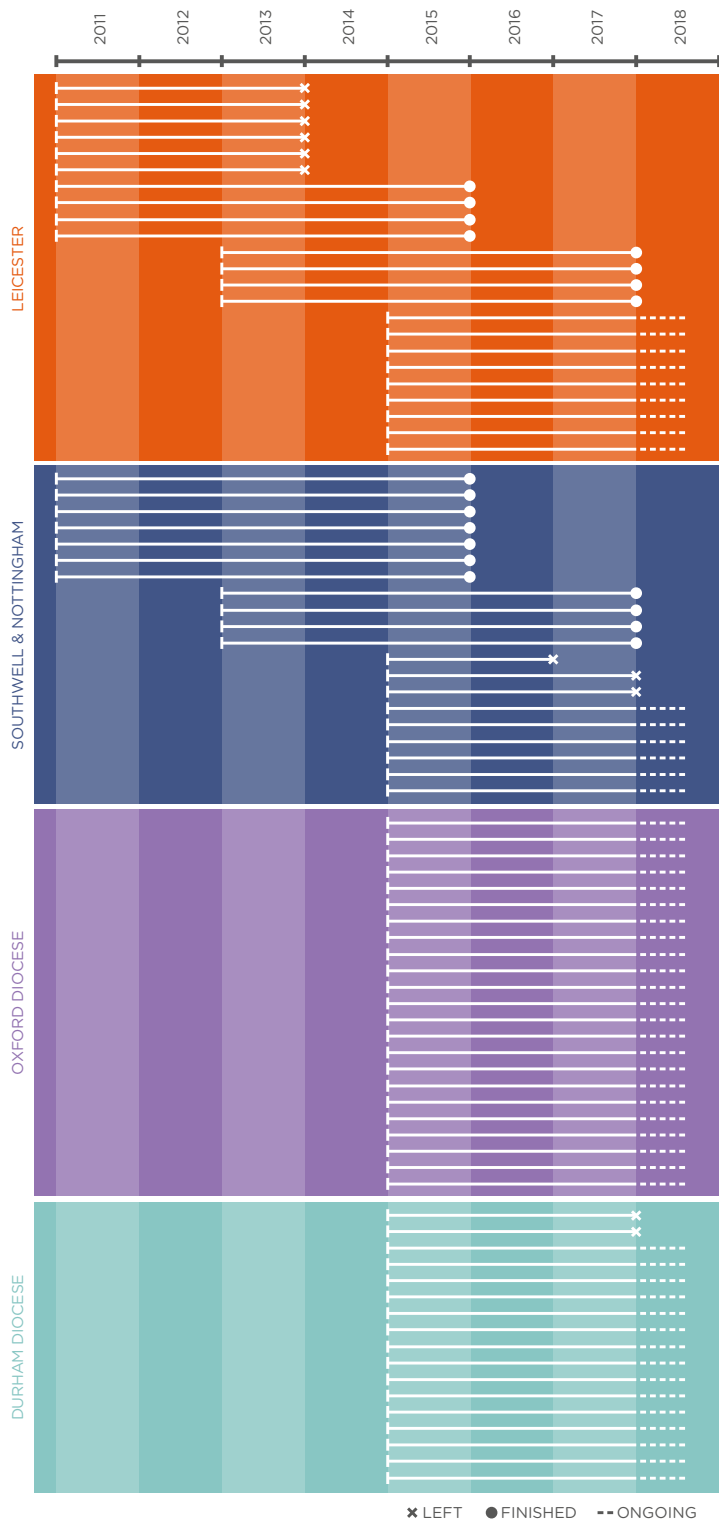
St Paul’s and St Nick’s (Oxford Diocese) adaptive challenge. Challenges are captured as text on the paper clouds.

CONTEXT

WHERE IS PMC BEING USED?

Since 2011, 82 churches in four dioceses have participated in PMC.⁶ This was not under the auspices of CMS until 2015 but there has been continuity of people training and facilitating the process. All of the dioceses now perceive themselves to have a relationship with CMS through PMC.

The flows into and out from the process are shown in the diagram.



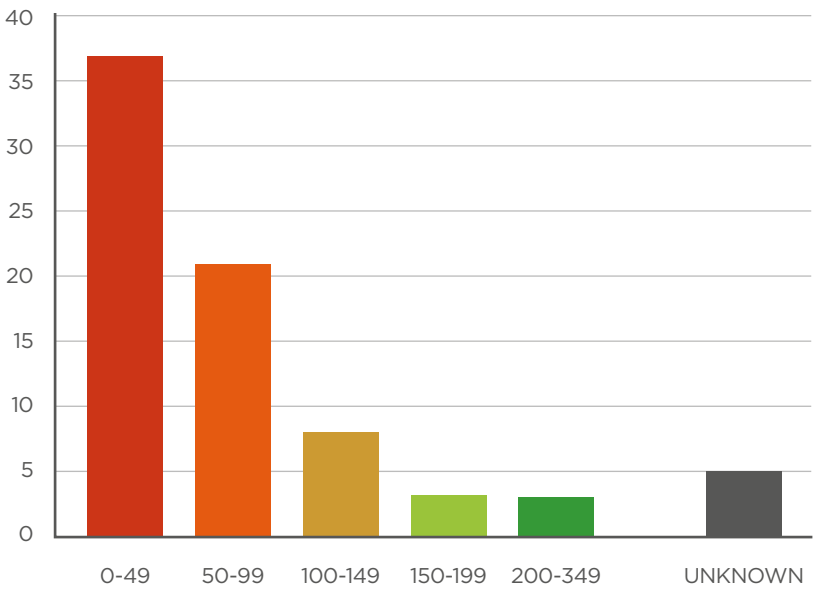
It is clear from the diagram that there is an increasing volume of churches involved across four dioceses, an increase from the original two.

- 50 are currently involved on an ongoing basis, with most of these in Oxford.
- 19 (from Leicester and Southwell and Nottingham dioceses) finished after completing the 3 year process and continue to learn and apply the practices and principles they now inhabit. This is 23% of participating churches.
- 13 (16%) dropped out before the end of the process. The reasons for this are discussed more in the findings, under Church and Community Conversations.

Considering all of these participating churches together shows that there is considerable variety amongst them and the communities they serve.

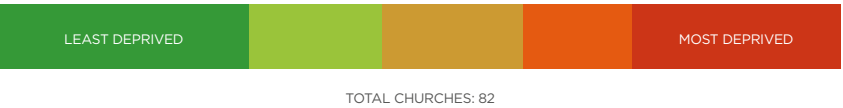
The churches vary in size and tradition. Participating churches are overwhelmingly Anglican, although four Methodist churches have also been involved. The range of Anglican churches comes from across the spectrum of more evangelical and more catholic expressions, as was confirmed by the survey.⁷ In terms of their size, usual Sunday attendance from the centrally collected Anglican Statistics for Mission was used to show the range (see chart).

Usual Sunday attendance



Just under half (48%) have a Sunday attendance of under 50. The remainder are spread from 50 to 350, although with a steep drop off after 100; the majority (75%) of churches involved in PMC have a usual Sunday attendance of less than one hundred. This pattern was consistent across the four dioceses.

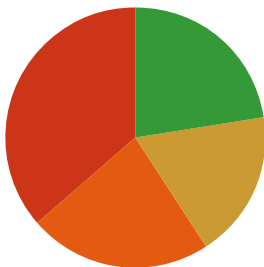
At the level of the communities they serve, we see variation from more homogenous to more ethnically diverse local populations. In Durham, 97% of the population in PMC parishes is white compared to 82.5% in more multicultural Leicester. It is also the case that PMC is serving both affluent and poorer neighbourhoods. The chart below uses the nationally produced Indices of Mass Deprivation (IMD) for the parishes served by PMC and categorises them by quintile.



This shows that, with 21 churches in the least deprived quintile of the IMD, and 20 in the most, PMC is operating in very different contexts.

CONTEXT

DIOCESAN PROFILES

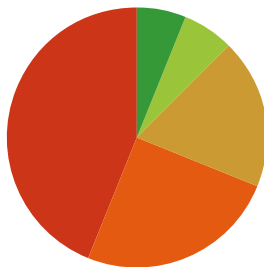


SOUTHWELL & NOTTINGHAM

19 churches in PMC over seven years

Larger average Sunday attendance of 69

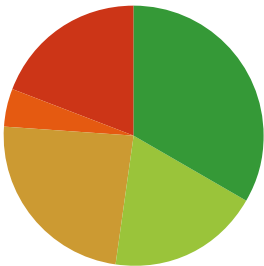
It has the second most ethnically diverse parishes and the most even spread in terms of affluence/deprivation.



DURHAM DIOCESE

16 churches in PMC, all joining in 2015. Smaller average Sunday attendance of 65

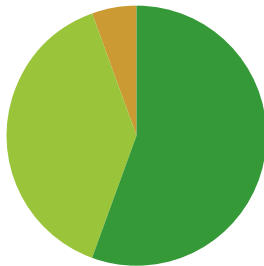
Most of the churches are in former coal mining areas. Durham is the least ethnically diverse of the dioceses and has the highest proportion of parishes in the bottom quintile of the IMD.



LEICESTER

24 churches in PMC, Leicester has the greatest number over the longest period. Smallest average Sunday attendance of 61

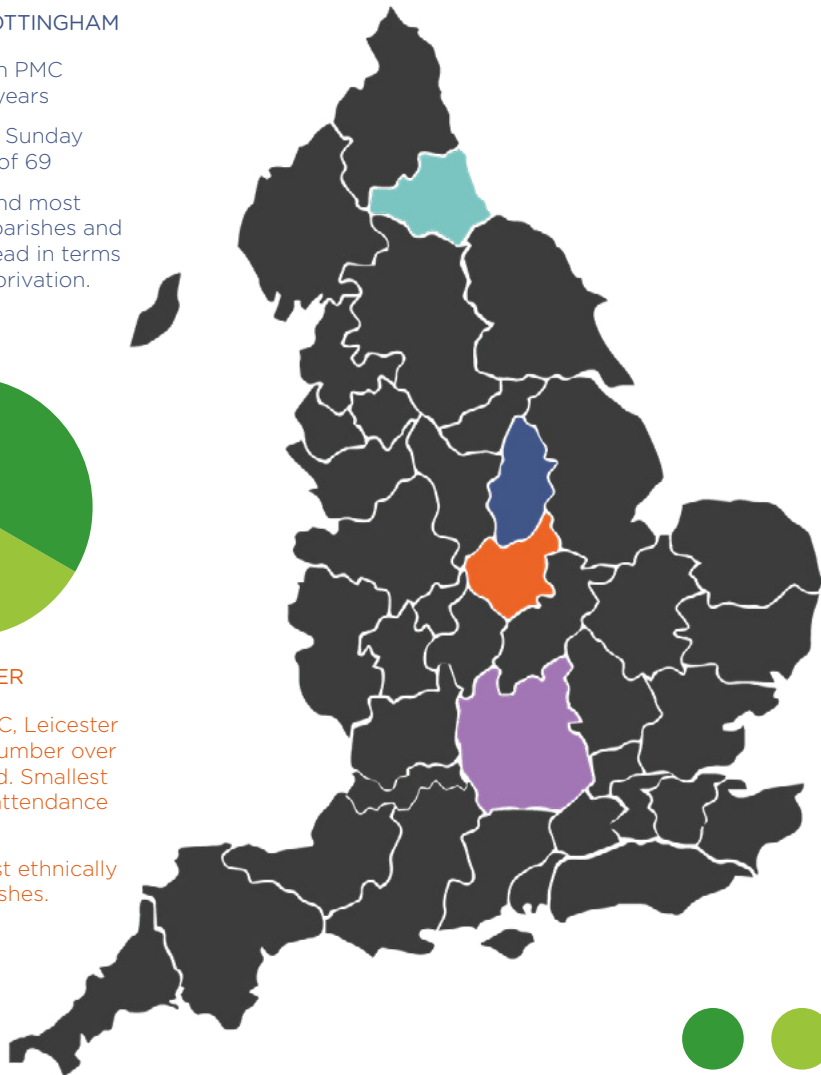
It also has the most ethnically diverse parishes.



OXFORD

22 churches in PMC, the largest single influx in 2015. Largest average Sunday attendance of 77.

Oxford has the most affluent parishes involved in PMC, in terms of their local context.



Please note that these profiles are based on the churches participating in PMC, rather than the whole diocese. Data on ethnicity and the Indices of Multiple Deprivation is based on the parishes that the churches are in. Statistics for Mission is the source for Sunday attendance, with an average based just on those churches participating in PMC.

See also <https://churchmissionsociety.org/whos-doing-partnership-missional-church> for a map showing the churches currently involved.



FINDINGS

CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Engaging with the process of PMC

The impact framework developed for PMC suggests that inspiration and engagement work alongside each other: “engagement works alongside inspiration, referring to the new risks and relationships that PMC encourages at all levels with the intention of forming Christian community.” The first step for any church beginning PMC is their engagement with the process. If this is not done effectively then it is impossible for inspiration to take place at any level.

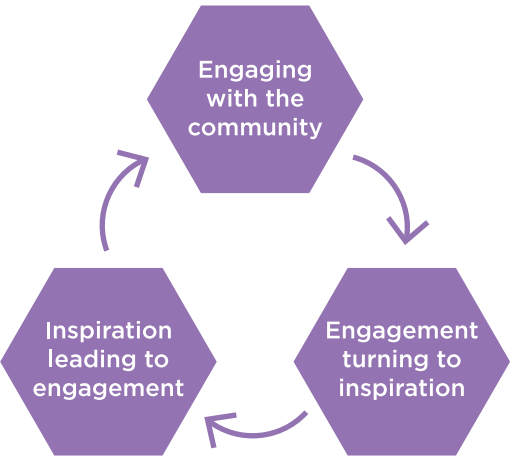
Participation numbers show that most are involved for the long term. 19 of the churches (from Leicester and Southwell and Nottingham dioceses) have completed more than five years with the process and a further 50 across the four dioceses are three years into the process. Where churches do drop out some do so very quickly – for example, a change of incumbent who had been driving the process and a benefice where only 4 out of 8 churches were willing to join in. These seem to have been driven by factors external to the process. Others stay involved longer, tolerating some frustrations.

One notable obstacle to engagement identified by participants was what they perceived as the ‘jargon’ used by the process. All four case studies reported issues with the language of the PMC process and had had to adapt it for their context. One participant reflected that they “loved the principles [of PMC] once they had got through the jargon!”. Others worked at finding ways of explaining terminology within their context, for example a church that used a blog to track its progress with PMC created their own translation of terms. While this is an area which could be improved upon, it can also be argued that by having to engage with the language in order to contextualise it, churches actually go deeper into the process than they might have otherwise.

Another issue identified was regarding the isolation felt by the steering group/MIT within their congregation as they got the process going. There is an aim that by the end of the three years, around 20% of a church’s congregation will have adopted its spiritual practices.⁸ This can take time and, as experienced by one case study, in a smaller church that 20% might not amount to many more people than those making up the core PMC team. In such cases, the support of the cluster has been invaluable.

The process appears to have been designed so as to facilitate long-term engagement. The fact that it is intentionally long-term and organic is helpful to churches who need the time to engage with the practices and questions involved in it. One case study highlighted the benefit of vision being the third phase of the process – churches appreciated not being made to do things too quickly. For churches who have not previously had much of a focus on mission, the process “gets mission on the agenda”, not just at one meeting but at every meeting, for a prolonged period of time. (And, when the three years are completed, it has a clear place on the agenda.) Another church highlighted the ongoing process as giving people plenty of time in which to ask questions about mission and the church.

Our research has revealed that there is a three-stage cyclical process in the early stages of PMC. The first step is for churches to engage with their community, guided by the PMC process. This in turn leads members of the steering team to be inspired when their efforts are seen to have impact. Inspiration again turns to engagement as others in the church and community can see the merits of the PMC process and the value of engaging with the wider community in new ways.



“This last Sunday we took over the sermon, I dressed up as Sherlock Holmes and interrupted the sermon to talk about being a detective and spotting God at work.”

(i) Engaging with the community

The tasks associated with the process encouraged churches not just to engage with the process itself, but to engage its community (both inside and outside the church) in new ways. The MIT experimenting in the second year has a particular focus upon engagement, which is explored below. For St Paul’s Wokingham (one of the case studies), the instruction from PMC to gather representatives of the local community together as part of a listening exercise was something that they would not have done had PMC not told them to. It was out of their comfort zone, but proved to be a risk that paid off and resulted in a new depth of relationship with local organisations. All the case studies highlighted the importance of the timeline events (looking back at what has taken place in the history of the church and community) and listening exercises that the first phases involved. A case study church in Nottingham reported that there was “joy in the room” at their timeline event, as well as a sense of relief at the end of the day that so many had taken part. A recurring theme was low expectations for these activities, but in the majority of cases this was unfounded. This is perhaps indicative of a lack of confidence amongst churches, a theme that will be returned to when exploring the empowerment that can occur through PMC.



Baby Jesus pebbles for new communities, from St Paul’s Wokingham, Oxford Diocese.

(ii) Engagement turning to inspiration

Our research has demonstrated that engagement with the process of PMC results in inspiration, which in turn causes further engagement. For example, several churches used time in their Sunday services to involve the congregation in PMC. Some had a slot in which members of the congregation could share where they had seen God at work in their week – in our Nottingham case study, they spent Lent 2017 asking their congregation to answer the question “where have you seen God at work?”. Initially, those who shared were members of the core team, but in time, others were inspired to share their experiences too. The Leicester case study reflected on the response to including Dwelling in the Word at PCC meetings – someone who had initially opposed this inclusion ended up wanting to read the Bible in meetings. One church reported that PMC resulted in “more joy and movement of the Holy Spirit in services”.

This inspiration is closely connected to the teaching and practice of the Holy Habits – data from the survey and case studies demonstrate significant engagement with them. Dwelling in the Word and Hospitality were the top two most helpful habits according to the survey. A separate question about receiving hospitality showed that 78/109 (72%) respondents were more confident in this now than at the start of PMC.

RECEIVING HOSPITALITY – BLIDWORTH & RAINWORTH, SOUTHWELL & NOTTINGHAM DIOCESE

A member of the congregation & steering group at Blidworth asked their local Co-op if they could put up a poster for a community event in the store. The Co-op asked some questions about what the event was, and offered their support. As a result, a summer tea party not only had scones and strawberries provided by the shop, but also had volunteers from amongst its staff. This was in part owing to the Co-op’s national strategy of partnering with local communities and has had a huge impact upon the church community. It has been challenging for the church to be asked “what do you need?” and to accept the Co-op’s gifts and support – but has developed into a very valuable relationship.



For some churches, the Holy Habits provided a context in which they could talk about what God was doing. One case study reported that it provided a structure for a focus upon mission and prompted dialogue. Another church explained how the habits had helped to liberate people, especially those who had come to believe over the years that they were ‘not clever’ enough for traditional forms of theological exploration. One case study spoke of the power of testimony in naming God at work in the world, where members of the congregation went from sharing in Sunday services to feeling able to share their testimony with those outside the church. It built confidence for individuals to have conversations that named God in secular contexts. In some cases, the structure of the Holy Habits revealed that churches had already been practising some of the habits naturally, but it helped to have a purpose to engaging with them more deeply. Although there was a great deal of positive feedback regarding the habits, this was an area in which jargon was identified by churches as an issue and others felt that some of the habits were “too academic”. It would appear that, where the language of the process is engaged with, PMC is more accessible to those who have a negative perception of their ability to “do theology”. Some churches found that it was hard to involve the whole congregation in them – it was easier to practise them in contexts like PCC and for those in the core team, but difficult on a larger scale. What has been harder to measure is the differing levels of impact the habits have had upon individuals within churches and their communities.

(iii) Inspiration leading to engagement

It is this inspiration that results in churches engaging with their local communities in new ways. According to our survey, the top three factors which inspired people to engage with the community in new and different ways were:

- Existing community relationships;
- Conversation/influence of other church members, and;
- The materials, training and support provided by PMC.

The case studies and free-text survey responses provided multiple examples of how people had been inspired to engage with the community. For example, the “cake bombing” of new housing estates in Wokingham – where church and community members deliver home-made cakes to homes. The churches involved said that they wouldn’t have had the nerve to draw together local community groups and leaders without the encouragement of the PMC process.

ST MARY’S CHURCH AND LOVE NORTON ADVENT CALENDAR TRAIL

In 2017, St Mary’s Church in Durham Diocese organised an advent calendar trail across the local neighbourhood. Children decorated advent windows that were displayed in local shops, with a new one lit each day. The first window was revealed by the mayor and the final one was at the church, with refreshments and carols. The event brought together local residents and businesses, and attracted the support of Stockton on Tees Borough Council.



FINDINGS

MISSION TOGETHER

Developing lay leadership

Our research has highlighted that empowerment of the laity is a significant outcome of PMC in the UK. This confirms a similar finding in the US research where there has been demonstrable development of lay leadership, and a deepening of discipleship amongst participants in the process.⁹ For example, amongst our survey respondents, 76% had taken on new roles or responsibilities to those that had not (83:26 respondents). When asked about the type of role taken on, survey feedback showed that these included:

- 37 directly linked to PMC, e.g. steering group, MIT, etc.
- 40 directly linked to the church – office holders, supporting administration, new groups, etc.
- 17 in the community – school governor, homeless initiative, etc.

The case study churches supported these findings – one commented that when they asked for new volunteers to be involved in PMC they were surprised that they actually got them! Their reflection was that the church was “leading where we’ve not before.”

What appears to be happening is that in addition to churches gaining confidence in mission, individuals are becoming more confident as they witness and are involved in successful initiatives via the PMC process. For example, in a church that developed a weekly sharing time for feeding back on PMC and hearing people’s stories of God at work, the individual who took on this task was out of his comfort zone. He had never spoken at the front of church before, but did so because risk taking seemed to him a key part of PMC. Originally, he was just going to do this as a one-off, but the church leaders wanted a weekly slot and he agreed to it. His reflection in the case study discussion was that PMC “attracts different sorts of people to do things.” In another case study, a woman became part of the MIT and as a result grew in confidence to take a more active role in the church. She now reads in services and as a result of accepting an invitation to attend a pastoral care course now has a role as a lay hospital chaplain. PMC opened up new opportunities for her, and because of her positive experience within the MIT, she felt able to take up these new roles.

Individuals’ growth in confidence is also likely to be closely linked with the growth in discipleship amongst members of PMC churches that our survey identified. 71% of respondents said that PMC had had a significant or very significant impact on their discipleship; only 10% said it had not changed, and the remainder reporting a slight increase. PMC is not primarily focused on individual discipleship but there are signs that PMC encourages collective and participatory acts and encourages higher individual involvement. One case study church highlighted the impact of their cluster’s spiritual discernment day upon their faith, both collectively and individually. A member of the congregation stated that “PMC’s been part of a big transformative experience for me”, because of the impact it had had upon their Bible reading and prayer life via the Holy Habits.

Changing leadership styles amongst clergy

There is also evidence, not only in a growth of lay leadership, but of a changing style of leadership amongst clergy. Two case studies went through the vacancy process while undertaking PMC. Although some churches who went into vacancy early in the process dropped out of PMC as a result; the two case studies where PMC had taken root found that PMC helped empower their laity. Both churches had been offered PMC by their diocesan leadership as something akin to a last chance and in both cases the laity has felt empowered by the process. In Stockton, the parish was encouraged to include more about the impact of PMC in their parish profile, and it was their reputation locally of being a missional church that resulted in their new incumbent applying for the role. The priest appointed said that he saw clear evidence of a church with a mission and significant lay involvement, but the extent of this still surprises him! He describes the role he has with the congregation as more episcopal style oversight – there is a huge team of lay people and no one is a passenger. In Leicester, the new appointment has created a new team ministry – meaning



that the laity still have a significant role to play in the church's leadership, but with added difficulties as the other churches have not done PMC. Elsewhere, clergy have identified themselves as more of a permission giver, with a "balcony view" (as one incumbent described it) of what is going on the parish, but not needing to be in control or involved in everything. One priest reflected that there has been a better use of people's skills since beginning PMC. Another felt that PMC had enabled the congregation to 'tap into an area of people on the fringe' of the church who now felt that they had their own voice. A case study formed of two churches within one team felt that undertaking the process jointly had brought the two congregations closer together in a way that nothing else had been able to – thus greatly increasing the capacity of what they could do.

ST WILFRID'S, WILFORD AND ST ANN WITH EMMANUEL, NOTTINGHAM¹⁰

"I've found the process tremendously difficult. On one level because it was really de-skilling. I know how to make events happen, I know how to organise people, I can do that. Leading people in spiritual practices that actually shape their missional living is kind of new."

Revd Phil Marsh, Vicar, St Wilfrid's

"We thought that we were a church for the community but when we started the process we discovered we were living in a cocoon."

Densel Davy, Reader, St Ann w Emmanuel

Capacity for mission: partnerships

Capacity for mission was also increased through partnerships with the community. Several churches reported that they were surprised by the positive response they received when they sought to build or deepen relationships. In Nottinghamshire, a case study's community group of people of peace was renamed by a member of the community as the "POP group". A non-church going member of this group was later heard to say "Strikes me that if you want to see the Promised Land, you've got to make it". This was affirmation to the churches that it "was ok to be blatantly Christian" and share this with the community because they would still get on board with the vision. The priest in this context observed that the church was "tapping into a sense of something bigger", even if the community didn't know exactly what this was, they were enthusiastic to join with the churches in their mission.

Many of the partnerships and initiatives mentioned above would not have occurred without significant risk taking. 75% of survey respondents felt that their church felt more confident in taking risks than prior to PMC. One case study reflected that when the church had taken risks that had worked out well, they were inspired to take on bigger and better risks – so risk taking in turn inspired confidence. Another church felt that risk taking was an act of trusting what God had given them in terms of gifts and resources. Not taking risks would mean that they didn't trust God to have equipped them to participate in the Missio Dei.

The PMC process provides many examples of instances where new connections have been formed, or where existing relationships have deepened. 90% of survey respondents said their church had started new partnerships; many had broadened or deepened existing ones. PMC was linked to changes in relationships by 72% of respondents, as well as having increased the churches' confidence in risk taking (75% of respondents). One church described the process as "something that makes you do something" – encouraging congregations to take risks that they might not have considered



House of Pain wrestlers at St Ann's Nottingham, Southwell and Nottingham Diocese



previously. An individual who became part of her church's steering group reflected that "people know me in the village now – I've lived here 20 years!", but it wasn't until PMC that she had become involved in her local community in new ways. Churches are also finding that now that relationships have developed between them and their community, community groups are approaching them for spiritual input. For example, one case study hosted a Christmas Tree event outside their church building – but it was a local youth group and school who requested that the story be told and carols sung. In Leicester, a 'festival of festivals' developed by a parish as part of its PMC process now receives council funding because of the impact it has upon inter-faith relationships in the community. (See breakout box.) Evangelism is not necessarily part of the conversation in these partnerships – one church reflected that it's not the right time to introduce this, but that both churches and community groups were clear that God was a key part of their joint mission statement. Nonetheless, as partnerships grow, there appears to be a greater spiritual depth in them. What appears to have evolved is a reimagining of evangelism as public witness. While not precluding the need for churches to engage in traditional forms of evangelism and discipleship, PMC provides a context in which God is talked about freely.

ST MARY'S HUMBERSTONE (LEICESTER) FESTIVAL OF FESTIVALS

St Mary's missional focus became the diversity of their local community. Their first idea was to celebrate this diversity through a "festival of seasons' greetings" – a day when members of different faiths could come together and share their ways of celebrating. Many people joined in and it was such a success that it has taken place in subsequent years, moving from the church building into the larger and neutral context of the local school. The school provides hospitality; various community groups join in with food, dancing and other activities. Not only has it increased religious and cultural understanding amongst the community, it has forged stronger relationships between faith groups – one result of which has been an inter-faith knitting group!

Learning by doing

PMC is intentionally an organic process, not an off-the-shelf programme. As a result, active learning is built into the structure of the process – for example, the reflection that takes place at cluster gatherings. It is a context in which experimentation and risk taking are encouraged. One case study has an excellent example of changing its direction, and seeing a very positive outcome. St Mary's Humberstone had originally thought their missional focus would be on children and families, but some way into the process they realised that this was too safe a vision that would not reach beyond people already connected to or on the fringe of church. It was also already under way, was not resonating with the congregation and was decreasing energy in the process. They looked again at their context (>65% people adhered to faiths other than Christian¹¹) and decided to focus on multi-faith and multi-ethnic relationships. Their congregation was initially critical and one steering group member commented that: "it wasn't about getting people on the pews, but the people on the pews thought it was!" However, it soon became clear to the steering group that this was the right focus because they stood to gain more by taking a risk and learning and adapting as a result. With hindsight, they feel that had they not had the confidence to change direction then they would not have made it through the PMC process. Their initiatives included the Festival of Festivals described above, as well as a 'Big Lunch' – all of which have resulted in new and deeper relationships within their community.



FINDINGS

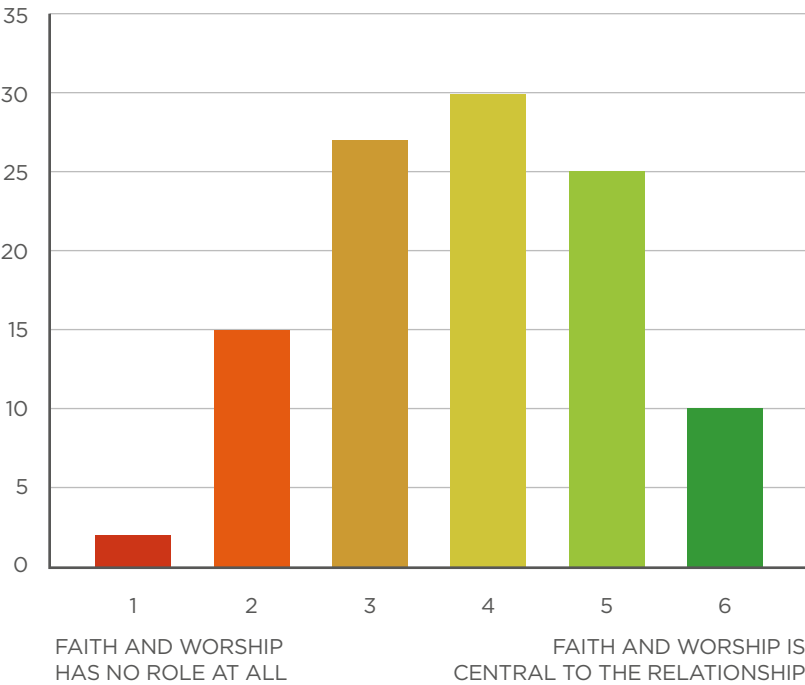
WIDER IMPACT AND INTEGRATION

This section considers the ripple effects of PMC in the context of a system, where local churches, communities and dioceses all interact. The social impact framework, developed by CMS and the dioceses with the authors, said that systemic change can be understood as a shift to “mission with”, rather than mission to. It was also closely related to changes in the culture and practice of church, its understanding of itself, its role and its interactions with the community and diocese.

Naming God – more public Christian witness

Where and how do churches talk about God? Based on responses to the survey, faith and worship are quite explicitly present in the majority of relationships with the community and external to the church. This is reflected in the graph.

Explicit or implicit role of faith in relationships



Very few responses are in the category where faith and worship have no role at all and, perhaps more importantly, the majority of responses (65) are in the 4-6 range, indicating a stronger and more explicit role in relationships. This was also borne out by examples; “On one of the first meetings of the extended MIT one of the church members described how apprehensive she was about beginning the meeting with Dwelling in the Word convinced that this would alienate those from the wider community with no explicit Christian faith. She was surprised to find that they both engaged and contributed insights which challenged her.”

In this case, one of the holy habits has served as a bridge for talking about faith in a context where it might usually have been seen as a barrier and perhaps not approached. Another respondent remarked that “In deciding on activities and events, it hasn’t always been the church members who have suggested Christian ideas.” This goes a stage further, showing that non-church community connections have sometimes been the ones to invite Christian faith into their interactions. Case study examples show that this can also be in the public sphere, with the “Love Norton” advent calendar and carol service bringing people and businesses together in the high street.



A further aspiration of PMC was that churches could and should come to reflect the make-up of the community. This is a longer term form of integration and the evidence is less clear, although some of the case studies and examples show signs of this happening. Some examples here are:

- Welcoming Iranian asylum seekers who went on to join the church
- A mothers and toddlers group with Christian content and exploration
- Wrestlers joining the church in St Ann’s Nottingham and the formation of an African choir that participates in worship – better reflecting the ethnic diversity of the congregation and local community.¹²

We can therefore say that PMC has helped participating churches to explicitly name God in the local community – faith has made its way outside the church and in some cases this has resulted in people responding to it. This complements the evidence of people reporting strengthened discipleship, as it is reflected in collective and individual behaviour. Given that this report has already identified increased levels of engagement and partnership, it follows that PMC has, in the majority of cases, led to a more public Christian witness and therefore evangelism. Significantly, there are signs that communities are positive about these interactions.

Changing understandings of self and other

There are signs that PMC has positively influenced the understandings of church and community of themselves and each other.

Participating churches have a clearer sense of their vision and purpose for their neighbourhood. This was evidenced in case studies such as St Peter’s Stockton, whose missional focus is embodied in their partnership with ‘Way Out’ to support street workers.

ST PETER’S STOCKTON AND WAY OUT

This church has developed a partnership with ‘Way Out’ – a charity working with at risk women. Located in a road where prostitution occurs, the church now hosts a drop-in for them once a fortnight. The nature of the partnership means that not all church members can be actively involved in the drop-in itself (all volunteers must be female), but the congregation provides food and toiletries and have learned more about an aspect of their community that they might previously have deliberately ignored. Regular PMC sessions in Sunday worship have helped the congregation understand and join in with the vision that has evolved for their community.

Survey responses also confirmed this: when asked if they were more aware of their church’s vision and purpose for their neighbourhood, 36% said that their awareness had grown to the extent that they can share it with others and a further 41% reported that it had grown significantly. Interestingly, churches valued vision being left until the third year of the process. It seems that vision has tended to emerge from experimentation and engagement, and perhaps is more deeply held as a result. Some churches in the case studies did not want to talk about vision until they had reached the third year, and this may have coloured the survey results.

“I now feel far more confident when sharing my faith within the mums and babies group I have helped to set up and to run. I feel that this group is, for many mums, THEIR church experience.”



In the process of this increased vision and purpose, there are signs that churches' understanding of themselves and their role has shifted. For example, one survey participant said that "I now feel far more confident when sharing my faith within the mums and babies group I have helped to set up and to run. I feel that this group is, for many mums, THEIR church experience." The boundaries of the church have, in this case, expanded to accommodate more people in a different way. The same person went on to say that "I used to feel that we were 'failing' in some way when they didn't move on to attending Sunday services for example. Now I am happier to extend their experience of the Christian faith through the group activities and interactions." This experience of feeling freer or even more relaxed in mission is not uncommon and seems to be connected to a broader understanding of mission brought about through PMC. This longer quote, taken from a survey response, illustrates this well and bears repeating in full:

"Due to the organic, open, relational, grass roots nature of PMC, there has been no sense of 'shifting our agenda' at any stage, no pressure to shoe horn in the anticipated reciprocity of 'getting people back into our church building' or asking for money! We have redefined what 'church' is and might be; yet because we have been upfront about who we are and whose we are, using the Luke 10 passage particularly (as part of MIT), the relationships have just grown (and conversations about faith followed naturally....) within this free space – without any feel of a 'process' or ulterior motive. We have genuinely let go and yet received far more than we could ever have imagined – and without having so much of the 'doing'. Thank you for opening our eyes to God's collective adventure, promised plan and purpose for our communities."

A further example also shows an effective, organic approach to mission, stimulated by PMC: "Some of our missional activity has been more by accident than through design. Over 18 months we have welcomed and supported about 30 Iranian asylum seekers – given and received hospitality and enabled them to explore faith leading to baptism." The hope that PMC would help churches shift towards 'mission with' rather than 'mission to' is supported by these examples. Although there are limits in how far the evaluation could go in seeking feedback from people outside of churches in the community (a few responded to the survey), the evidence of increased partnerships, observable in public interactions through the case studies, makes quotes like this one credible: "Church and community recognise each other far more fully; there has been a historical rift between church and secular community in this village and I strongly feel that in the last few years the barriers are going down and the two are growing closer together." In cases like this one, there are signs that people perceive the local church as a force for good. This extends to communities asking for help, inviting participation from churches in things that are important locally. For example, 'Stockton Soup' – a network of community organisations and grant funders – invited St Peter's to ask for support for their drop-in via its network. Similarly, "Using PMC principles [a curate I supervise] has developed a weekly soup kitchen. A lot of what she did was intuitive but the partnerships she has built and the generosity she has experienced are staggering, e.g. 20-30 volunteers – 20-25 from outside the church." Communities also came together at St Mary's Humberstone in Leicester, sharing and celebrating their different faiths and cultures in one space. This was a context where the church had previously felt stuck when it came to mission. This suggests deeper understanding and relationships between and across faiths, where this was previously seen as a divide.

Diocesan relationships

A final area to consider is PMC's influence on participating dioceses. This has to be understood as a two way flow between churches and the wider diocese. In all of the cases considered, the diocese chose to be involved and provided funding for the churches. Dioceses also seem to have provided a necessary urgency to some churches, particularly those that were struggling,



so that they participated. Although this suggests a pro-active approach, it seems that dioceses have sometimes led but in other cases have simply allowed space for the process. Both appear to have worked comparably well. It also seems that dioceses have adopted different modes at different points in time, for instance when bishops have changed.

Bishops have an important role to play in encouraging PMC as a process as well as spreading its practices. Several dioceses have examples of "Holy Habits" from PMC being used more widely, including by bishops, for instance in diocese-wide gathering of priests or laity. This suggests that at least some elements of PMC are gaining traction beyond the churches that have participated – an influence on the broader system. However, there was one example from a diocese that this more widespread use was not wholly positive, because the surface elements of a particular habit were adopted, but in a more top down way and without the participatory element that was seen to be a principle of how it should be used. There may be an opportunity here to provide some training or explanation for dioceses, to avoid a risk that flexibility could miss the point and so that the substance is embedded. This could go broader, to encourage an understanding of PMC as a process.

Times of transition are interesting for PMC. With a relatively long process, these are bound to happen, within participating churches and at diocesan level. Local ownership of PMC is generally high in participating churches and, as explained above, changes at diocesan level have tended to either be permissive, allowing it to keep going, or positive, with elements of PMC being adopted more widely. PMC also seems to have been valuable when churches have vacancies. Besides the empowerment of laity to make progress when they do not have ordained clergy noted above, PMC has served to attract candidates. In Durham, a local candidate was keen to apply and serve in a challenging context because they were enthused by and passionate about the mission and ministry that the church had developed. It may be that induction materials for new clergy could be helpful in fostering understanding where PMC is used in dioceses, particularly if it is different from what clergy have experienced before. In any case, there is evidence of changes in local churches brought about by PMC rippling into the broader dioceses as well as into local communities. Not only this, but it has worked in some of the most challenging contexts, although its application is not limited to these.



"Cake bombing" at St Paul's Wokingham, Oxford Diocese

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



PMC is best understood as a deep change process that is as much cultural as theological. It contributes to a broadening and deepening of relationships within churches and communities and brings faith into the public sphere in ways that churches would otherwise have struggled to achieve. The evidence here is that PMC is effective in a wide variety of geographic and demographic contexts. It is not fast, but in the view of the authors expecting such significant changes in mind sets and practices to happen rapidly is to miss the point. Also, although the evidence is still emerging from the majority of churches that are part way through the process, it seems that these deep changes become embedded in churches, lasting despite changes in clergy at the local and diocesan level. Ownership of the process in local churches is vital to the success of PMC; where it has not stuck, it may well be that this was not achieved. Yet the majority of churches have found value in the process, adapting it to their contexts and becoming more effective as neighbours and Christian witnesses in the process. There is welcome evidence that local church, rather than being a subset for a thin slice of the community, is becoming integral in holding bonds across boundaries. The recommendations that follow are intended to build on this positive impact for current and future stakeholders in PMC.

Based on feedback from participating groups, the evidence in the evaluation and the experience and observations of the authors, we have the following recommendations.

- **For churches involved or considering involvement**
 - **Bear in mind that PMC is a process to be adapted** – whilst it is important to learn and apply the principles, changing elements of the language to fit the local context is appropriate. In the latest version of PMC materials, this is intentionally encouraged at various points in the process and we recommend that churches make the most of this opportunity.
 - **Communicate with the congregation in multiple ways** – don't rely on just one. Reinforce the principles of PMC regularly, especially in Sunday worship.
 - **Meet up with others involved for encouragement** – particularly where the changes might begin with a relatively small, committed group; gatherings with teams from other churches have been found to be encouraging. This includes local support as well as the cluster process that brings churches together. We understand that “twinning” has been offered to PMC churches, but that take-up has been limited – perhaps the way in which this is offered could be revised to encourage take up. We are also aware of the success one diocese has had with an ‘area group’ providing localised support a layer down from the cluster. Therefore we recommend that the development of local support is encouraged when clusters are established and as churches begin PMC.
 - At conclusion of the PMC process, **develop a strategy and practice for continuing with the vision and principles**. For example, one church that had completed four years established a group described as “Missional Vision Enablers” to maintain a focus on the agreed mission. We understand that the materials include a fifth ‘vision’ document called the “Plan for Missional Formation”; but it would also be wise to draw upon the experiences of churches who are working through the practicalities of what PMC looks like once the three or four year process is over.
- **For CMS**
 - **Develop the user friendliness of PMC**. Our research has shown that it could be helpful to improve the existing materials to appeal to more learning styles – introducing a more visual “roadmap” to show the arc of the process and related content, for instance – and using less jargon to make it more accessible. This could be combined with strengthening the visual identity of PMC. We understand that CMS has already begun to implement such changes in its latest revision of materials for use in 2018 which is to be commended and encouraged going forward.
 - **Encourage reflection outside of clusters** – this is an opportunity to share ideas and good practices across dioceses. This could also help dioceses to stay on track with the process and introduces an extra level of learning, as they share with each other.



Adaptive challenge at Woosehill, Oxford Diocese. The signs on the board describe progress and challenges in implementing PMC.



- **Continue to collect data on churches** – more thorough and systematic story gathering will improve learning and build the significant body of evidence on the impact of PMC. The survey from this evaluation and data analysis could be used as a basis and repeated or built on over time.
- **Equip people in churches that have engaged well and progressed in PMC as future trainers**. This could make the most of collective experience, keeping representatives of these churches connected to PMC, at the same time as expanding the range of people who can work with other churches.
- **Provide training materials geared at clergy and diocesan staff that explain the process**, particularly for new people who have not participated in it. Ideally, these should be available at a variety of levels and lengths, including short briefings.
- **Consider organising gatherings after the end of the formal process**. It would be good to find a way to continue the energy of the cluster meetings beyond the four years of PMC. This could be organised by CMS as a learning community. In addition or alternatively, it could be more a case of sharing guidance when they finish the process and encouraging churches to organise their own meet ups. A network model and shared learning is in keeping with the spirit of the process and could be an effective way to strengthen the changes PMC encourages. For example, in the East Midlands there is an annual day for PMC churches, and ideas for gatherings are emerging from Oxford diocese as their first tranche of churches completes the process. We would recommend that CMS works in partnership with dioceses (or the relevant overseeing body) to find a suitable way forward, and that dioceses explore what would work best in their contexts.
- **For dioceses and the wider church**
 - **Buy in from the diocese (or relevant overseeing body – e.g. circuit or district in a Methodist context) is important for PMC to work well**, whether this looks more pro-active or is more about giving space to the process. Signalling that PMC is important sets a helpful tone.
 - **Train and brief people coming in** to understand PMC. Whilst CMS can help this by providing materials, this is in part the responsibility of dioceses. There is valuable internal learning and experience that should be communicated across the diocese. This can complement the adoption of practices (particularly the holy habits) and understanding of the process, so that PMC has a broader effect.
 - **Encourage involvement in learning clusters**. The solidarity and encouragement for churches trying something new – sometimes in difficult circumstances – was important. Although clusters do not have to come from a single diocese (there is an example of adjacent ones), reducing travel time is important in terms of the practicalities of people meeting up.
 - **Trust and respect the process and its local adoption** – there is a strong body of evidence that PMC strengthens discipleship and the sharing of faith in local communities. Incoming clergy and senior staff can benefit from recognising the value of PMC and respecting churches' engagement with it. Dioceses should consider this in transitions, including the recruitment and induction of clergy and senior management, in order to make the most of local energy from the laity.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Impact framework and the TI

In order to describe and understand the intended impact of PMC, members of the CMS team and representatives of the participating dioceses went through a workshop process to describe "what good looks like." This process, known as a TI assessment, was developed by the TI Group. It provided measures of impact and lines of enquiry for use in the different parts of the methodology.

The results of the workshop, based on ranking 56 possible indicators of transformation, provided these top five indicators. Participants were asked to contextualise these, including by writing imaginary emails, which provide the examples for "Good sounds like...", below. Please note that these are aspirational statements that came from workshop participants, not quotes from the research.

The relationship of the five indicators of transformation is shown in the diagram below:

Good looks like: active learning for PMC is adaptive and embraces failure. As people try things, they seek to learn from them. It was closely related to the ideas on other cards of recovery, "getting back on the horse" and flexibility.

Good sounds like: "At first I was very confused by things like listening to others had to say about the Bible. It wasn't what I was used to. I have my own views to talk about. Eventually, I came to appreciate listening to what my fellow worshippers heard in the Scriptures. Then the idea of talking to people I met outside the church suddenly became attractive. Since we learnt how to 'announce the kingdom', I have discovered far more people who are interested than I ever would have believed."
- an old hand at St XXX's

Good looks like: a shift to a more open system across the connections of local churches, delivery team, and diocese. This entails changes being diffused within church culture that are no longer captive to modernity and that recognise new expressions of church as valid and important.

Good sounds like: "It has been a revelation working with the church. They genuinely wanted to engage with the young people [with mental health needs] where they were. They were open to lots of new ideas and never judgmental. As a result of our shared networks we have lots of other partners involved now and the lives of young people in this community are being changed. I'm even tempted to visit the church next Sunday!"
- community representative

Good looks like: empowering members of the laity to shape and lead initiatives in the church was the primary initial interpretation of this, although this was expanded to encompass clergy, as able to share leadership and potentially find release from the need to be the principal manager or administrator within their church setting.

Good sounds like: "I am most struck by the significant increase in confidence that PMC releases within a laity who clearly grow in discipleship and maturity - a confidence in naming Jesus and building relationships within and beyond the church that is clearly drawing people into an encounter with Jesus and building Christian community."
- The ABC

A combined statement describing the relationships and intended impact is as follows:

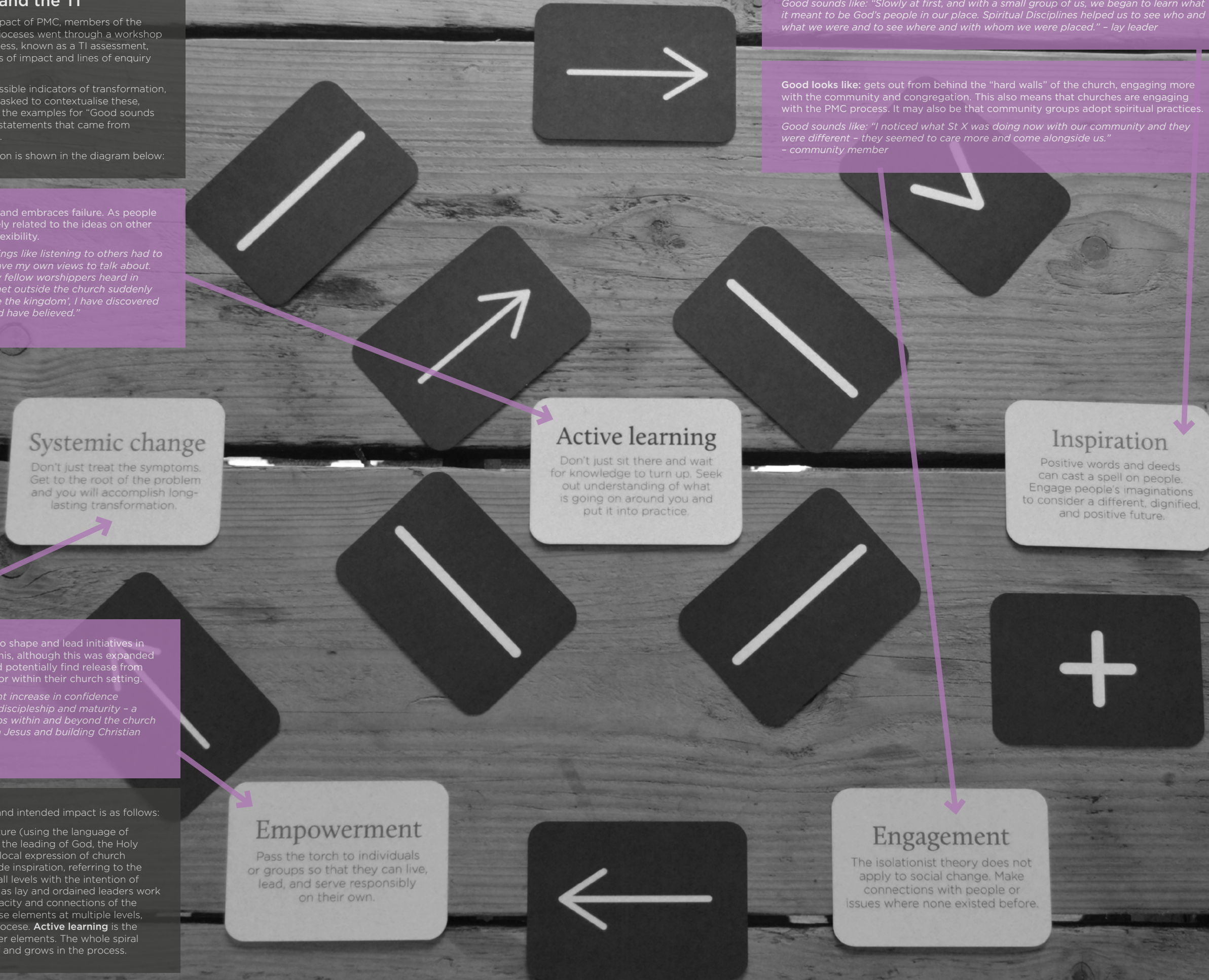
Inspiration refers to the discernment of a hopeful future (using the language of preferred and promised future), based on discerning the leading of God, the Holy Spirit and the conversation that emerges between a local expression of church and its local community. **Engagement** works alongside inspiration, referring to the new risks and relationships that PMC encourages at all levels with the intention of forming Christian community. **Empowerment** results as lay and ordained leaders work more confidently and collectively, increasing the capacity and connections of the church. **Systemic change** is the diffusion of all of these elements at multiple levels, including the local church, the community and the diocese. **Active learning** is the interconnected core that interacts with all of the other elements. The whole spiral could be understood as one that loops back on itself and grows in the process.

Good looks like: the Spirit of God is seen to be at work through the practices, such that people can speak of God together and in public in a way they could not before. More people join in and these practices are more widely adopted. God is an active verb.

Good sounds like: "Slowly at first, and with a small group of us, we began to learn what it meant to be God's people in our place. Spiritual Disciplines helped us to see who and what we were and to see where and with whom we were placed." - lay leader

Good looks like: gets out from behind the "hard walls" of the church, engaging more with the community and congregation. This also means that churches are engaging with the PMC process. It may also be that community groups adopt spiritual practices.

Good sounds like: "I noticed what St X was doing now with our community and they were different - they seemed to care more and come alongside us."
- community member



Appendix 2: Methodology – process, parishes, churches etc.

This evaluation is based on:

- A workshop with CMS and participating dioceses to describe the intended, hoped for impact of PMC;
- Desktop analysis of materials, including:
 - Briefing and training materials provided by CMS in advance of and during the PMC process;
 - Original interview data collected by churches during the PMC process;
 - CMS’s analysis of the PMC data, undertaken by facilitators and shared with the churches;
- Analysis of demographic data. The Research and Statistics unit of the Anglican church uses the Indices of Multiple Deprivation from the Office of National Statistics to map all parishes. PMC churches were then looked up by parish against this data set. For the small minority of Methodist churches, their postcodes were looked up against Anglican parishes, both for practicality and so that there would be consistency in the local geographic units;
- A survey which was sent to all participating churches, including those that had dropped out. The total number of responses was 109. The purpose was to get the voice of ordained clergy and laity. This means that some churches had multiple responses;
- Four in-depth case studies based on visits to a church or neighbouring churches in each diocese. These were run as workshops or focus groups, with participation from clergy and laity;
- An interim meeting with CMS and the dioceses to discuss interim findings and gather their views.

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.churchinnovations.org/>

² Rooms, Nigel, “Partnership for Missional Church”, Resourcing Mission Bulletin, October 2013, p5: http://www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing_Mission_Bulletin/Oct_2013/3_Partnership_for_Missional_Church.pdf

³ <http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/1826/archbishops-presidential-address-general-synod-york-july-2003>, accessed March 2018

⁴ Lings, George & The Church Army Research Unit, *The Day of Small Things: An analysis of fresh expressions of Church in 21 dioceses across the Church of England*, November 2016, p175

⁵ Archbishops’ Council, *Setting God’s People Free*, 2017

⁶ Prior to 2011 an experimental one-off cluster of PMC churches occurred between Bath & Wells Diocese and the SW Baptist Association. Data from these churches has not been included in this study.

⁷ Precise percentages are not available as the choice of tradition was not limited to one response and respondents from the same church sometimes chose different answers.

⁸ Rooms, Nigel, “Partnership for Missional Church”, Resourcing Mission Bulletin, October 2013, p4: http://www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing_Mission_Bulletin/Oct_2013/3_Partnership_for_Missional_Church.pdf

⁹ Rooms, Nigel, “Partnership for Missional Church”, Resourcing Mission Bulletin, October 2013, p5: http://www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing_Mission_Bulletin/Oct_2013/3_Partnership_for_Missional_Church.pdf

¹⁰ The impact of PMC upon these churches is further explored in a short film made by CMS: <https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/video-house-pain-house-god>

¹¹ According to ONS data for the parish.

¹² This is illustrated in the CMS film about the church’s experience of PMC. <https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/video-house-pain-house-god>



The Festival of Faiths at St Mary’s Humberstone, Leicester Diocese



**CHURCH
MISSION
SOCIETY**



*Christmas tree lighting at Blidworth
and Rainworth in Southwell and Nottingham Diocese*