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To the edges

Partnership for Missional Church:

A 2022 Review for CMS

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for the Curiosity Society

Partnership for Missional Church:
A 2022 Review for CMS

For more information about PMC visit:
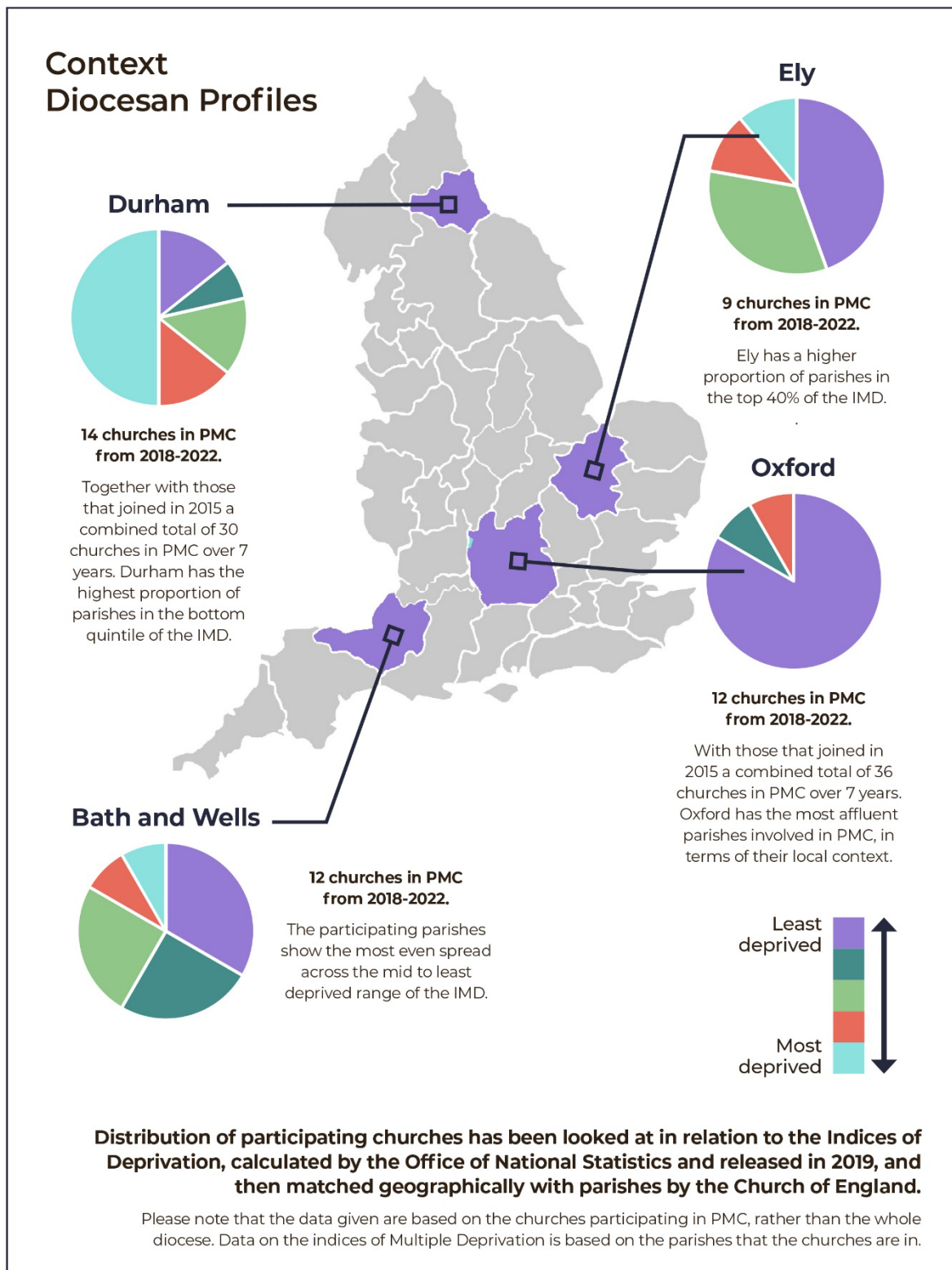**churchmissionsociety.org/pmc**

A. Introduction

Context

◆ This document is an independent review of the Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) process as supported by the Church Mission Society.

◆ It has been undertaken by Liz Clutterbuck and Andy Schofield, who conducted the original five-year evaluation of PMC in 2017-2018, on behalf of Curiosity Society. It represents an update on this report and intentionally uses the same format and methodology. (See previous report click here)

◆ This review relates to 47 churches participating from four dioceses. Two dioceses were involved at the time of the earlier evaluation: Durham and Oxford. These have been joined by two new dioceses, Bath and Wells, and Ely.

◆ Churches participated for three years, between 2018 and 2022. Oxford started first and so were the first to complete the process, in late 2021; Ely were the last to finish at the end of May 2022, with the others in between these dates.

◆ The distribution of participating churches has been looked at in relation to the Indices of Deprivation, calculated by the Office of National Statistics and released in 2019, and then matched geographically with parishes by the Church of England. This is shown in the graph below.

Deprivation by diocese - percentage of churches by IMD quintile
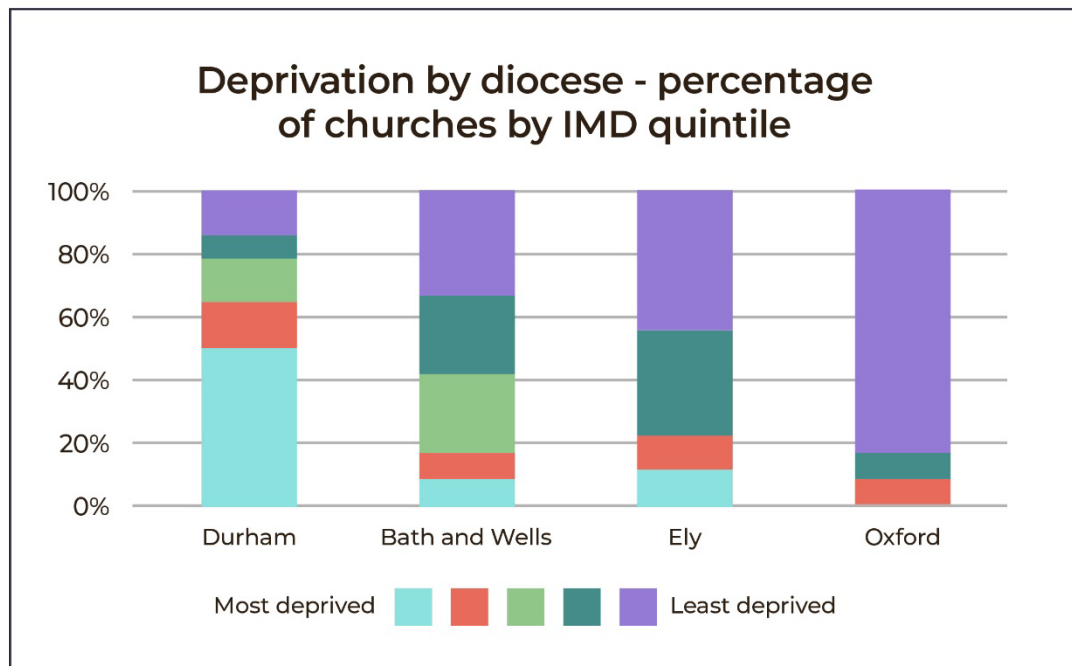
▪ Durham has the highest levels of deprivation, with half (7/14) of the churches using PMC located in the bottom quintile, i.e. the 20% most deprived areas.

▪ Oxford is the least deprived, with no churches in the bottom 40%, and 83% (10/12) churches in the top 20%.

▪ PMC is therefore operating in very different contexts, based on the characteristics of the four dioceses.

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- Looking at the total number of churches in each quintile, it is clear that PMC is operating across the full range of the IMD:

Context
Diocesan Profiles

Ely

9 churches in PMC from 2018-2022.

Ely has a higher proportion of parishes in the top 40% of the IMD.
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Durham

14 churches in PMC from 2018-2022.

Together with those that joined in 2015 a combined total of 30 churches in PMC over 7 years. Durham has the highest proportion of parishes in the bottom quintile of the IMD.

Oxford

12 churches in PMC from 2018-2022.

With those that joined in 2015 a combined total of 36 churches in PMC over 7 years. Oxford has the most affluent parishes involved in PMC, in terms of their local context.

Bath and Wells

12 churches in PMC from 2018-2022.

The participating parishes show the most even spread across the mid to least deprived range of the IMD.

Least deprived

Most deprived

Distribution of participating churches has been looked at in relation to the Indices of Deprivation, calculated by the Office of National Statistics and released in 2019, and then matched geographically with parishes by the Church of England.

Please note that the data given are based on the churches participating in PMC, rather than the whole diocese. Data on the indices of Multiple Deprivation is based on the parishes that the churches are in.

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> ❯ The PMC process has remained consistent and is essentially the same as when it was originally evaluated. (Please see Appendix A: What is PMC?) However:

> - The Covid pandemic took place during the time period covered and represents a particularly significant change. The huge disruption that this caused to people's lives in the UK also affected churches. National lockdowns and decisions by the Anglican church to close church buildings substantially affected the delivery of PMC. This triggered a secondary change, as much of PMC shifted from taking place in real life to happening online, to avoid in person meetings. Conducting the majority of interactions remotely via video conferencing was not a previous feature of the process.
> - The participating churches, having started between Autumn 2018 and early 2019, were in year 2 of the PMC learning process when Covid measures began. This is the year when churches experiment with an adaptive change.
> - Due to Covid, CMS offered to extend the process and made space for participating churches to consider its implications. Three dioceses (Ely, Bath and Wells, and Durham) decided to do this and completed phase 3. The Diocese of Oxford kept to the original timeframe but did not complete phase 3, which focuses on narrowing the churches' vision down to the specific call that they believe God has for them locally. They left it to churches to complete this as they saw fit and in their own time, with support from a diocesan accompanier. Data on how this worked is limited.

> ❯ Although Covid has influenced churches' and people's experience of PMC, and this is one area that is explored below, the overall purpose of the review is to refresh understanding of how PMC has been working with the churches that have participated since the original evaluation.

Methodology

The methodology for this review was deliberately kept as similar to the evaluation process as possible.

> ❯ The same impact framework (the model of transformation and the impact measures) remain unchanged (Appendix B)
> ❯ Focus groups used the same format, although they were conducted online rather than in person
> ❯ The survey was kept as similar as possible in terms of the questions and format, although there were some changes as it was moved onto Survey Monkey and issued by CMS (meaning that respondents were identifiable by CMS). 61 responses were received from 23 churches. Anonymised data was shared with Curiosity Society for comparison with the 2017-18 survey data
> ❯ The structure of the report is the same. However, the role of the diocese - a part of the earlier evaluation and one way of understanding how PMC might be influencing wider systems - is not covered. With this exception, readers can compare this review to the previous evaluation using the subheadings if they wish.

The authors would like to thank all of the churches and CMS staff that provided data and enabled this review.

Lamesley

Their PMC focus was the environment, inspired by the church's own graveyard and its proximity to a local nature reserve, managed by [Durham Wildlife Trust.](#) This resulted in strong partnerships with local community groups with a similar focus, including ["Harvest and Help"](#) (where teens & young adults with learning disabilities grow crops and work as gardeners), local councils and [the local primary school.](#) The church organised regular litter picking events which brought people together from across the community to care for creation together. The church is now participating in the A Rocha Eco Church scheme, too.

B. Engaging with the process of PMC

Participation in PMC:

- ▸ Across four dioceses, 47 churches participated. 17 (36%) dropped out before the end of the process. Of these:

  - 2 (4%) could be described as a "false start", something that was seen in the previous evaluation. These churches did not participate or dropped out very rapidly.
  - 4 (9%) dropped out in year 1, before Covid was a factor
  - 6 (13%) dropped out in year 2, which coincides with the pandemic
  - 2 (4%) dropped out in year 3
  - 3 (6%) do not have a clear end date

- ▸ This suggests that whilst some drop outs may be linked to the challenges of Covid, there are other factors influencing churches' continued involvement.
- ▸ CMS staff reflected that fatigue and a reduction in focus encountered during Covid affected engagement.
- ▸ Nonetheless, both survey & focus groups demonstrate the willingness of churches to keep engaging with the process in spite of the impact of Covid upon both the delivery of PMC and the ability of churches to put their training into practice.
- ▸ It is still considered a positive that PMC is not designed to be a "quick fix".

  - A member of clergy in a focus group commented: *'It's a response to what God's doing. We were open to culture change and the length of time the process would take. It laid [a] foundation for possibilities – not a quick fix. [It was a] Framework in which to ask questions & be open in a new way – on a corporate level.'*
  - Another church felt that the long-term nature of PMC encouraged them not to rush in other areas of church life. A focus group participant reflected that without PMC the church *'would have had a much quicker rush to start everything up again post lockdown. Instead, we focused on what fitted in with our vision.'*

- ▸ An issue with engagement raised by every focus group emphasised an issue referred to in our 2018 report – the language used by the PMC process. In 2018 we reflected: *'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.'* (p.10) The fact that four years on, this is still a prevalent issue suggests that more needs to be done to either help churches contextualise the language and/or the language needs to be rethought in order to make it more accessible.

  - A couple of churches in the focus groups also highlighted that the language became a barrier for those with less of a background in education/business – congregations with a predominantly working class population felt that this resulted in people feeling that they couldn't get involved in PMC.
  - Participating churches consistently reported that they had adapted the language to their context, so it might be that encouraging or inviting this could increase their engagement with and ownership of the process.

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❯ Those on the steering group often felt isolated, an issue which may have also been exacerbated by Covid, although also one that was identified in the previous evaluation. All but one of the focus groups emphasised how difficult it was to get the congregation on board with PMC and how essential it was to get people to commit to being part of the PMC leadership for the whole 3 years - something that those who had experienced PMC wanted to recommend to others that might try it.

   ▪ Size of congregation seems to be a factor here too. Although larger congregations have a bigger pool of people to draw from, it is also harder to win them over: the "tipping point" for cultural change requires a higher number.

   ▪ Where churches were a part of multi-parish benefices there were also issues with PMC only being focused upon one specific church, while the rest of the benefice wasn't necessarily engaged with the process. Without majority ownership or buy-in from a congregation and its clergy it seems that it is hard to sustain the leadership required to run PMC.

1. Engaging with the community

❯ People feel personally more able to build partnerships and relationships since PMC began. When asked to answer on a 1-4 scale, where 1 was described as "I still find relationship building very difficult" and 4 was "relationship building has become much easier", 79% of respondents (45/57, 16 scored 4, 29 scored 3) responded with a 3 or 4. This is very similar to the 80% of respondents who gave a score of 3 or 4 previously.

❯ In the structure identified in our original report, engaging with the community is both the beginning and the outcome of the PMC process.

   ▪ The listening exercise was a surprise for several churches who discovered that the community thought more positively about the church than they had expected. One church reflected that community responses mentioned God more than they had anticipated. Another church noticed that members of the community referred to "our church" even though they did not attend worship there. For most of the churches this exercise also helped to lay the foundation for community relationships, connecting the church with the community.

Portishead

Story Boat Project - www.theatreorchard.org.uk/storyboat-700/

Tidal Tales Project (which followed on from the Story Boat)

https://vimeo.com/575741874

- Compared to the 2018 research, far fewer participants mentioned the risk they felt this exercise was. Concerns about being rejected by the community were not raised in the focus groups. Some internal and external factors that might explain this could be:

  - The PMC process has either landed particularly well with these groups and/or the way in which participating are encouraged to do this has improved;
  - Churches in the more recent sample enjoyed more positive community relationships to begin with;
  - Churches in the more recent sample were further advanced in the process, and therefore were seeing the benefits of this engagement - perhaps having tried it successfully - rather than experiencing nervousness at trying it;
  - Wider changes in the relationship between church and community. We would need evidence from elsewhere of wider cultural changes either at the national level or at a regional level (comparable to a diocese). It is also a side effect of Covid - as well as wider economic challenges - that volunteerism has tended to increase locally and place-based networks have strengthened, so this might relate to an increase in openness or even expectation that churches might be active locally. There is some evidence for this within the focus groups, where mutual aid groups, with churches participating, had become a foundation for community relationships.

2. Engagement turning to inspiration

- Engagement with the process of PMC can be seen in people's use of the Holy Habits.
- The same top three habits, in the same order, were picked as in the previous evaluation. In descending order, these were:

  - Dwelling in the Word
  - Hospitality
  - Dwelling in the World

- While there was evidence of engagement with the Holy Habits, it sometimes appeared selective with some churches only engaging well with one or two of them. Focus group churches were more likely to regard them as a set of practices to select from rather than a suite to be used collectively.
- Identifying where else the Holy Habits were used (other than within PMC specific activities) provides an indication of how widely PMC has been engaged with across the congregation and wider community.

  - The most common example of use outside the PMC framework was Dwelling in the Word at PCC meetings, although 3 of the focus group churches spoke about how difficult this was at times. One reason given was the time it took away from the meeting being able to look at 'business' (although the PMC group felt confident that it was just as important!). Another church spoke about how even the PMC group found it embarrassing, initially, to give answers.

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- The most positive feedback was for receiving hospitality - perhaps because it's an easier 'win' than the other habits and already formed part of church and community culture. There was also a sense that Covid helped churches to focus upon receiving hospitality - because there were long periods of time when it could not happen, it was actively sought once possible. People's confidence in receiving hospitality increased in 51% of survey responses. (This is lower than in the previous survey, where 72% reported an increase. Given that people's ability to give and receive hospitality was limited due to Covid restrictions, this is a plausible contributory factor to the decrease.)
- Dwelling in the Word was also used at: Sunday services; PCC away days; diocesan events; wider church meetings; and church staff meetings.
- Corporate Spiritual Discernment was highlighted by 3 focus group churches as the focus of PCC away days and wider church meetings. One participant commented that in using it within a whole-church conversation, they were able to come away saying: *"It felt right to the Holy Spirit and to us…"*
- In some cases, habits could be adopted by individuals and used either in their own spiritual practice, or as part of their contribution to PMC. One church reported that using Dwelling in the Word in Sunday *services 'gave people a voice they'd not had before & framework for Bible reading at home.'* Having an emphasis upon receiving hospitality also enabled churches to encourage their congregations to focus upon this too - some churches reported that their members were now more open to this than they were at the start of PMC.

▶ Overall, it is clear that churches have made wide use of the Holy Habits. In some cases, these were experiments that were not altogether comfortable - but they still point to people engaging with and trying out an important aspect of PMC. CMS staff also noted that the Holy Habits are themselves designed to create a level of discomfort and that this is part of culture change. In other churches, the Holy Habits have been used more widely, including to the benefit of different groups and setting outside of the PMC process.

3. Inspiration leading to engagement

▶ The survey asked which factors inspired people to engage with the community in different ways, selecting the three most important factors for them. The 2022 survey showed the same top three factors in the same order as in the previous evaluation. In descending order, these were:

- Existing community relationships - this suggests that PMC built on and perhaps re-energised relationships that were already present. This is in keeping with other data points, including the continuation of relationships, sometimes in a deeper or broader way, reported with other community groups;
- Conversation/influence of other church members - this indicates the importance of peers and could suggest that culture change has played a role in many participating churches;
- The materials, training and support provided by PMC (third out of 9 options).

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❯ One of the survey questions asked which factors inspired people to engage with the community in new or different ways. Qualitative responses to this question (where people chose to select "other") included:

- *"Teaching series in sermons on the Spiritual practices was helpful and [it ran] in groups."*
- *"We ran a joint Alpha course with two local Methodist churches in the year before the pandemic. This brought the churches together and was very inspirational. Unfortunately, we were unable to repeat this."*
- *"I think that there were always folk who were offering us hospitality, but we now notice it more. It feels like a 'thing' that we celebrate and notice, and see as something that God is doing, whereas before it may have gone unnoticed."*
- *"1st year interviews with church members and the wider community was a confidence builder. Receiving hospitality in later stages was much easier to accept and build on."*

❯ The cycle identified in 2018 suggested that once those involved in PMC were inspired, they would go on to engage others in the process and/or initiatives that were outworkings of the process. This was evident again in both the focus groups and the survey.

- The need for culture change was emphasised by several churches. One spoke of how they were more interested in achieving this in their congregation than in starting new projects.
- Part of this culture change was a more positive attitude to risk taking. For example, one church reflected that PMC had enabled risk taking, but that taking risks is not obviously Anglican! As a result, *"the church has become more reflective, asks 'why?' more and & is not playing it safe. It has more confidence in the face of uncertainty."*
- Some felt that PMC combined with Covid also enabled more confidence in risk taking. As one participant commented, they were forced to take risks *"but everyone was trying to do new things because of Covid, so it was easier."*
- One church described how including times of 'Naming God' in their worship inspired their congregation to become more confident in talking about where they had seen God at work.
- Understanding what the 'success' of PMC would look like was also an important element of inspiring others to engage. For several churches, this involved moving away from a vision of "more bums on seats" towards a vision of partnership with the wider community. One church shared how, in doing this, they had reconnected with the vision the parish had at its founding in the 19th century as a church for those who couldn't afford the pew rents common at the time - instead the church was to be welcome and free for all.

❯ There was also evidence in the focus groups of churches where PMC initially met resistance from the congregation - where it was difficult to recruit volunteers - managing to inspire them sufficiently to draw them into PMC before the conclusion of the process. One church shared that some had changed their mind, *"several who were really against it now see it as something that's really important."*

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Kings Lynn

In an effort to bring together the different strands of both the PMC process and the parish, the church hosted a 'Tapestry Sunday', where community groups and leaders could share what they were doing with the church and the church could share with them. It was a vision to weave together all the strands of their community.

C. Mission together

Developing lay leadership

◆ A majority of respondents (59%) took on one or more new responsibilities. This compares to 76% in 2018. This lower proportion could have been due to a mix of factors including:

- People in the more recent sample were less keen/willing to take on new responsibilities;
- People might have been willing but may have had less opportunities or more responsibilities already than previously. Covid makes it likely that this was the case for at least some respondents.

◆ Notwithstanding the reduction, this still suggests that PMC has had a substantial effect in terms of increasing people's leadership and missional activity. This is also borne out by the partnership's information, under B1, above.

◆ People gave examples of the roles they had taken on. One focus group participant spoke of how her involvement in the PMC group had led to her being elected to PCC and she is now heading up the church's Eco Church project. Another church has identified that through PMC, church members on the fringe now seem more inclined to volunteer for their first roles as leaders in some aspect of church life.

- The survey also revealed a range of roles that people had taken on. These can be broken down into the following 3 categories:
  - 17 directly linked to the church (e.g. PCC, Church Warden, Alpha Course, prayer group, etc.); and
  - 9 directly linked to the wider community (e.g. Citizens UK; working with refugees; community cafes, etc.);
  - 5 directly linked to PMC (e.g. steering group).

◆ There is a strong theme of empowerment in the focus group conversations - both for individuals who took on new roles, but also for the laity as a whole.

- For one church, PMC was a *"new way of enabling people to take on roles within church – beyond PCC & the coffee rota. [It] Gave people a voice. There was a wide impact of PMC on the church because PMC wasn't kept in a separate box, it was at the core of everything. [It] Provided some language/framework to help people think about their giftings and calling – and to help people find them."*
- One lay participant commented that he was now *"50% more happy to do things at church because I now know what we're aiming for."* (He has also become Church Warden!)
- A key aspect of lay empowerment is spiritual - several people commented on how PMC had strengthened their faith and spiritual lives. For example, one lay person stated that PMC had *"reignited my personal zeal for things for God. I've seen the significance of church not just warming pews, but getting outside & seeing God at work."*

◆ Respondents generally reported a positive impact on their discipleship. Only 3% (2 respondents) said it had remained unchanged. 20% said it had profoundly deepened their discipleship (12 respondents scoring 4/4), very similar to the 19%

that gave this answer in the previous survey. 49% (29 respondents) gave a 3 out of 4 score, suggesting a significant positive effect, again very close to 51% in the previous survey.

▶ It's also worth noting that there are churches where they do not feel that lay leadership has developed far beyond those directly involved with PMC. Several churches spoke of the difficulties they had in recruiting volunteers for the steering group and MIT - congregations who just "didn't get" what PMC was about. In some cases PMC and its initiatives were resisted by congregations. One focus group spoke of how members of their congregation argued that these things had been tried before, but hadn't worked then - so why try again? As mentioned above, there are examples both of congregations that were generally won over, as well as ones where PMC had some positive effects, but this was with a subset of the congregation.

Changing leadership styles amongst clergy

▶ Compared to the 2018 research, we encountered more churches where the laity had essentially been left to get on with PMC by their clergy. 3 out of 7 focus groups had no clergy in them (only one of these churches was in vacancy at the time of the focus group). In total, two of the focus group churches had gone into vacancy during PMC and there was one other whose incumbent was leaving in the coming summer (2022).

- One of the churches felt that PMC was a really positive thing to focus upon during their vacancy and this has helped empower the laity. In contrast, another felt somewhat abandoned by their vicar - who had decided to do PMC and then left a year in. The church approaching vacancy found the focus group conversation a helpful way of beginning the conversation over how PMC would be owned and the benefit it could be during the vacancy.
- For churches where the clergy were not directly involved in PMC, there were different reasons for this. In one instance it was because the multi-parish benefice had a culture of lay leadership for congregations - clergy only attended the final cluster; another church had clergy at the clusters, but otherwise the laity were left to run PMC themselves. In both cases the laity felt that more clergy involvement would have been helpful. For the church whose clergy didn't attend clusters, it led to issues with the PMC vision being fully understood and enabled.
- One church reflected that their vicar didn't really understand the process, so approached PMC with his own way of thinking. Because he wasn't grounded in PMC, it wasn't easy for him to come and back the PMC team up. "PMC is about getting people out of the church, but our vicar was focused upon getting them in!"

▶ There was a strong sense that clergy needed to be involved in the process in order for it to work well.

- One incumbent, in their advice to churches considering PMC, stated that it was important to keep clergy "onside". An incumbent of a large parish reflected that *"it was difficult to keep everyone informed… without the clergy support it would've been very difficult."*
- In another church, laity reflected that greater involvement from their clergy would have helped PMC succeed more in their context. They felt that although PMC encourages clergy to take a 'balcony view', there does

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need to be oversight from clergy - they felt they would have benefitted from more regular PMC focused meetings with their vicar.

- One vicar commented in their focus group that they felt there was a dilemma for clergy over how involved to be with PMC - particularly regarding delegation. They had asked *themselves "why am I [clergy] doing this if someone else can?"* and were noticing the impact of clerical leadership. This seemed to be a question of not wanting to burden people, but also wanting to release them! They also reflected on the barrier that Church of England ecclesiology is to increased delegation by clergy - in the sense that clergy are expected to set the vision of a parish and have certain legal responsibilities that puts them in charge. Handing over an initiative like PMC to the laity could feel counterintuitive to some clergy.

- There are no signs of clergy saying that they feel that they have "lost control". However, there appear to be some signs that the pendulum may have swung too far to lay leadership in some cases, at the expense of engagement with priest/vicar. Interestingly, it is laity who are arguing for more involvement of clergy, not in the sense of deferring to them, but in wanting to see the benefits of reflecting and acting through the PMC process, together.
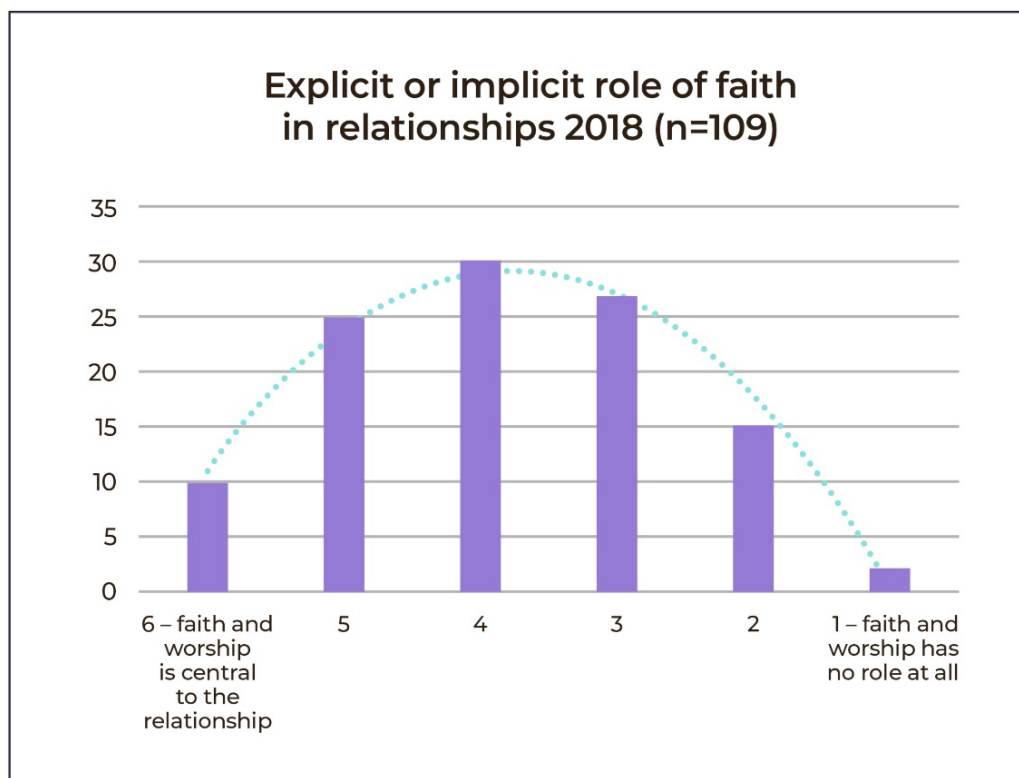
❯ On balance, it seems that PMC is a vehicle for positively increasing lay leadership *and* that this works best when it is done based on collaborative and complementary perceptions of and engagement with the vicar or priest in charge.
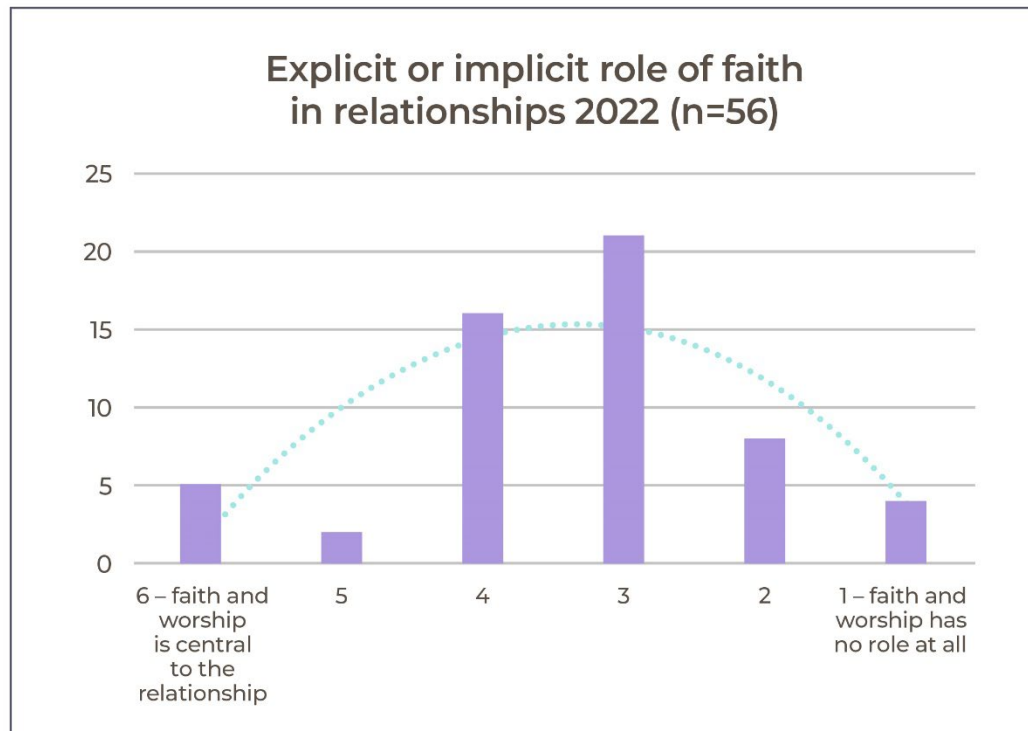
Capacity for mission: partnerships

❯ The survey asked to what extent people were more aware of their church's vision and purpose with its neighbourhood since the PMC process began. Responses were on a scale from 1 (no change in awareness) to 4 (my awareness has grown to the extent that I can share it with others). 28% (17 respondents) gave a score of 4 and 47% (28 respondents) gave a score of 3. Only 4 respondents (7%) reported no change in their awareness. This strongly suggests that PMC has been effective in this regard. The question asks about awareness; it may also be that PMC has helped churches to clarify and/or better articulate this vision and purpose than they had done previously. These results are similar to the findings of the previous evaluation and survey, so this can be seen as an ongoing strength of PMC.

❯ As stated in B1, above, it also asked to what extent they personally felt more able to build relationships/partnerships since the PMC process began, and this likewise had a high level of positive responses.

❯ The combination of awareness and confidence seems to have fed into action. There is evidence from the survey that participants' churches started new partnerships, and deepened and broadened existing ones. At least 80% of respondents reported one of these occurring (the other 20% includes people who skipped the question). This was part of a broader picture that included some partnerships/relationships continuing unchanged and some stopping. Whilst not directly comparable to the previous survey (due to slight methodological differences), the overall picture seems similar.

❯ Although one focus group church suggested they hadn't made any partnerships, this is the exception in terms of survey data, and the other 6 responses were very positive about the partnerships that had formed during PMC.

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▪ Several highlighted the benefit of building upon existing or previous relationships. For example, one church was led by a vicar who had been in post for over 12 years, meaning that they already had a lot of relational capital with their community. Another church found partnership springing up via the relationships two of their lay workers had had when their children were young.

▪ Other churches emphasised the importance of joining in with what their partners were doing, rather than starting a new thing themselves.

▪ The long-term nature of PMC and the fact that it is not designed to be a quick fix was something one focus group spoke of, saying that even at the end of 3 years they still feel as though they're only at the beginning of partnership building and there is a lot more to come.

▪ One recurring theme was partnership with councils/local government and the mixed blessing this can be. On the one hand, several churches benefitted from having a mission focus that aligned with their council's priorities - receiving funding and support in the process. However this also came with difficulties, given the secular nature of local government. One participant commented that it was really hard to partner with the council, because it required them to hand over control and limited the theological element.

◆ Faith was typically an integrated part of partnerships, falling in the middle of a spectrum, from 6, where faith and worship was central, and 1, where it had no role at all. The graphs below show the frequency of responses in 2018 and 2022. It can be seen that the overall shape of the graph is similar, but the more recent one has shifted closer to the centre of the scale, whereas previously it lay more to the left hand, explicit side. This is reflected in a lower proportion of responses scoring 5 and more scoring 3.

Explicit or implicit role of faith in relationships 2018 (n=109)

Explicit or implicit role of faith in relationships 2022 (n=56)

The comments above about joining in with others and partnerships with Councils coming with limitations (whether actual or perceived) on how theologically explicit they could be may be factors influencing this picture. This could also fit with the more selective approach to Holy Habits mentioned above: "announcing the Kingdom", which is about speaking of God in public, was the least frequently chosen option in the survey, when people were asked which holy habits had been most useful in their context. Overall, however, PMC has continued to succeed in its aim of avoiding a functional limitation of worship to church settings, instead bringing faith into community contexts, alongside action.

Learning by doing

'Learning by doing' is at the heart of the PMC process and much of what has been outlined above demonstrates how it is only by actively engaging with the PMC process that change can happen. Churches learn as they progress through the PMC journey and take up its challenges. It is clear that most churches have taken seriously the reflection component of PMC and there were several examples of ways in which they had learned and acted upon lessons learnt by reflecting together.

- As in 2018, there were examples of churches realising during the process that the mission focus they had thought they would have when they began PMC was not actually what it needed to be. For example, one church expected to focus upon children & youth, but by being open during their listening exercise, they realised that actually what the community needed was mental health support.
- Two of the focus group churches commented on how reflection led them to change the way in which they communicated PMC to their congregations. They had identified that what they had done so far was

not working and set about finding ways that would. One participant commented that one of their reflections during the process was that if activities had been explained better to church, they might have got more involvement.

▪ Another church felt that reflection had *"become part of their DNA - the church was on a journey of change so the whole point was to reflect and change."*

▪ Several of the focus group churches had recently completed the PMC process and highlighted the need to come together again as a leadership group in order to reflect on the last 3 years, learn from what took place and make plans for the future.

❯ Again, because PMC is not a quick process, it provides space to learn from mistakes and opportunities to try new things. None of the churches in the focus groups expressed any major regrets regarding decisions they had made but spoke positively about the opportunity to work through times when things did not seem to be going smoothly.

Berrow & Brean

The PMC vision was to create community hubs in spaces that were community owned (so not on church premises). They have become places for people to gather who are at risk of isolation and loneliness, where relationships can be formed and deepened. On a practical level, these hubs also provide training - e.g. in digital literacy - as well as a space for key community services (Citizens Advice Bureau, District Council & Village Agent) to meet with residents. Although the activities in the hubs are not usually explicitly Christian, volunteers from the church have been asked to pray on certain occasions - for example, a prayer of blessing over someone about to get married. There have also been meals hosted at the hubs in honour of Christian festivals.

For more information about PMC visit:
churchmissionsociety.org/pmc

D. Final comments and questions

❯ PMC continues to be an effective process for church transformation, both in terms of how churches understand themselves, their mission and their place in local communities and contexts.

❯ If anything, it is striking how consistent the results are between this review and the previous evaluation in terms of achieving impact despite Covid and the major shift online. As might be expected, Covid raised significant challenges to churches and their participation in the PMC process, although there were also some positives that stemmed from it, and some changes where both pros and cons were reported. (See Appendix C: Covid effects.)

❯ Whilst there is much in PMC that clearly works well "as is", recommendations should be considered carefully. These questions and suggestions are cautiously offered for consideration as ways in which it might be even stronger:

- With a general perception from participating churches that PMC is high effort and high impact, how is this managed on the way in, as churches are thinking about joining? For instance, is there or should there be a deliberately high bar to entry, communicating that this is demanding and is perhaps not for everyone but that those that stick with it tend to have a positive and potentially transformative experience? Conversely, is there or could there be a day or weekend long module to introduce key concepts and whet people's appetite?

- With new funding forthcoming, could some budget be allocated to improving accessibility, in terms of language, visual design/visualisation and potentially delivery format? With more taking place online, how far could CMS go in making materials digital, perhaps via a log-in area of the website or invite-only online documents? This could make it easier to access materials: shifting people online might also improve record keeping and reduce costs, with less reliance on paper copies.

- A couple of churches asked if there could be funding to help churches finance the on-the-ground costs of participating in PMC, resourcing their initiatives. We appreciate that funding is in the process of changing but this could be something to explore with dioceses, funders or even centrally with the Church of England.

- With new churches joining, could there be an opportunity to involve them in co-design and/or find someone to journey alongside them to observe their experience and look for improvements? One process that we are aware of, with a similar mix of action-learning, used an ethnographer to help codify the principles and practices that made the pedagogy effective, as well as to see the content in a new light.

❯ This review did not engage with diocesan representatives in the way that the earlier evaluation did, so it is not possible to comment on the wider effects and influence of PMC. The authors encourage CMS to seek feedback from participating dioceses and to continue to consider the role of champions and enablers who might be able to offer additional support, beyond that of CMS staff and facilitators, or peer support between churches.

For more information about PMC visit:
churchmissionsociety.org/pmc

Appendix A: what is PMC?

Reproduced from the 2018 evaluation of PMC, p.5

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, PMC has been used by churches of widely differing denominations on three continents for roughly 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.

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.

At the centre of the process are six spiritual practices referred to as "Holy Habits", which churches are encouraged to engage with in order to discern what God is doing and allow space for God to speak and guide them.

> Dwelling in the Word – God's Word in Scripture shapes imaginations, intentions and actions.

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❯ Dwelling in the World – Interacting in the wider community, looking for People of Peace, forming new relationships with them.

❯ Announcing the Kingdom – Noticing Jesus at work in the world, sharing stories of this and building confidence to point out the Kingdom of God to others so they can notice it too.

❯ Hospitality – Practising the receiving of hospitality as well as welcoming others.

❯ Spiritual Discernment – Learning a process that helps make spiritual decisions and recognising the Holy Spirit at work.

❯ Focus for Missional Action – Discerning a specific missional vocation for the whole church in their context, not dissipating energy into too many 'good' things.

Appendix B: Impact framework and methodology

Reproduced from the 2018 evaluation of PMC, p.14

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.

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.

Active learning

Don't just sit there and wait for knowledge to turn up. Seek out understanding of what is going on around you and put it into practice.

For more information about PMC visit:
churchmissionsociety.org/pmc

- 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

Systemic change

Don't just treat the symptoms. Get to the root of the problem and you will accomplish long-lasting transformation.

- 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

Empowerment

Pass the torch to individuals or groups so that they can live, lead and serve responsibly on their own.

- 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

Inspiration

Positive words and deeds can cast a spell on people. Engage people's imaginations to consider a different, dignified, and positive future.

- 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.

For more information about PMC visit:
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❯ 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

Engagement

The isolation theory does not apply to social change. Make connections with people or issues where none existed before.

❯ 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 C: Covid effects

Covid

Churches were specifically asked in the focus groups about the impact of Covid on both the delivery of PMC and their engagement with the process. There was also feedback relating to Covid that came up in the qualitative element of the survey.
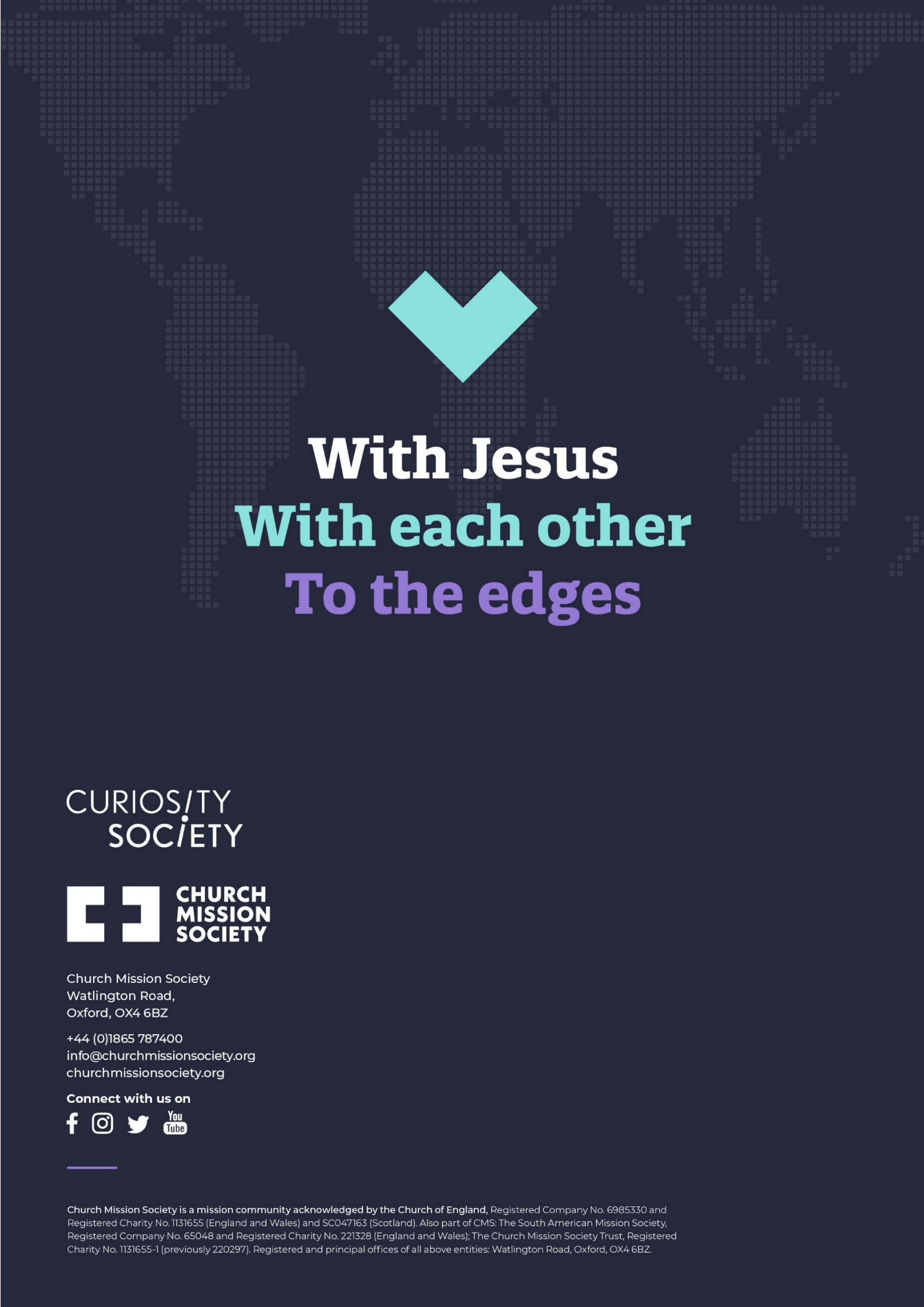
Regarding the PMC process itself:

❯ It disrupted significant elements of the PMC process, such as the conversations; building partnerships; and receiving hospitality.

❯ There were mixed feelings about Zoom training. Some found it a positive experience, for instance because it felt tighter and took less time. Others found it much harder and really missed the opportunities to chat informally with the other churches and to prepare/reflect on the journey to cluster meetings with their team.

❯ A couple of survey respondents suggested that they had expected PMC just to stop when Covid hit. One church felt that their third year "fizzled out", while another, in a different diocese, "felt adrift". However, despite these feelings, participation data shows that most churches completed the PMC process.

People's experiences of church and community also changed:

❯ Some churches felt that their momentum was lost.

❯ A few churches felt that they saw less of an impact of PMC upon congregation members (in terms of people joining the church) because of Covid and its widespread impact on church attendance.

❯ There was a sense that PMC would have been different/had a different impact if it hadn't been for Covid. One of the churches seemed quite mournful about this, while others simply acknowledged that their plans had to change because the context their community found themselves in had changed.

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❯ A couple of churches talked about "the gift of Covid" - in the sense that it required experimentation that wouldn't have even been considered before. For example, a church that moved their nativity play out of the church and onto the village green because of Covid restrictions found that it was such a success that they will do this in future years.

❯ There was also a sense from some churches that it provided a breathing space for PMC planning, because in spring 2020 everything just had to stop.

For more information about PMC visit:
churchmissionsociety.org/pmc

With Jesus
With each other
To the edges

CURIOS/TY
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