

Pioneering Parishes Evaluation Research – Executive Summary



**Pioneering
Parishes**

In partnership with



Pioneering Parishes is impacting the fulfilment of the Church of England's six bold outcomes at the parochial level. Recent independent research demonstrates that the small, start-up training organisation is giving long-established parish churches the tools and confidence to revitalise for mission, enabling them to reach out to children and families in the wider communities, and cultivating a framework for growth in discipleship.

This research was commissioned to evaluate the impact that Pioneering Parishes (PP) has had on those who have attended and on the parishes they are part of. This research evaluated the experiences of PP attendees against the **6 bold outcomes of the Church of England's Vision and Strategy**. It looked for evidence that this training helps further these aims.

All those who had received training from PP were given an opportunity to contribute to the research. Feedback was received by email, through an online form, and through 15 1:1 interviews. Quotes from this data were then used to identify evidence of movement toward any of the six **bold outcomes**.

By reflecting on this data and its correlation with the aims of the CofE's Vision and Strategy this research also offers a more general evaluation of the kind of impact that the work of Pioneering Parishes is making.

Key Insights

1. PP enables parishes to revitalise for mission

The research showed in particular that PP is extremely effective at helping parishes revitalise for mission (**Bold Outcome 3**). Parishes describe a shift in their perspective, from inward and past-orientated to outward and hopeful. They describe moving from status quo to change. One participant described this as 'a mind shift', another that 'the focus has all changed'. This change of focus was summarised by another participant as 'trying to take the church out into the community, not expecting them to come to church.'

This shift in perspective was also seen in some practical developments. Some participants spoke of how there had been renewed discussion in the parish about mission initiatives. One church leader spoke of how the parish was now 'trying to get a vision that sees us

actually being missional and seeking to be out in community spaces'. Others spoke of how new mission initiatives had started – examples included after-school drop-ins, a dementia café, a food pantry and nature walks in the community.

**"I am seeing a change
in people's attitudes...
people are daring to
dream again."**

**"Members of the PCC,
who tend to be the ones
who always help, they
seem to have the energy...
mindful to want to do
something different."**

PP also helped parishes to identify, equip and release missional leaders. One participant described how the PCC had decided to lay aside their desire for particular styles of service in order to release them as a pioneer in the community. Another talked of how the course 'gave me confidence to trust that instinct [toward mission] and go'. Another that it has 'increase my willingness to take risks'.

In these different ways it could be seen how PP was enabling a perspective and a culture that was revitalising parishes in their thinking and practice around mission to their communities.

"In the past year, we have started two after-school drop-ins, reaching 40 new families and drawing in 15 new volunteers"

2. PP enables outreach to the whole parish, including children and families

New initiatives in many participating parishes were enabling underrepresented groups to engage in the life of the church (**Bold Outcome 2**). In some cases parishes had started new initiatives aimed at children and families (**Bold Outcome 1**) with others reporting increased engagement amongst these. In a small number of examples parishes has seen initiatives develop toward the creation of a new Christian community (**Bold Outcome 4**)

"What's emerging here feels like it could be the very early stirrings of a neo-monastic community... Pioneering Parishes helped me see this not as a side project, but as a legitimate expression of ecclesial life."

3. PP enables people to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ

Respondents spoke in different ways of a greater level of engagement and participation in their parishes. They also spoke of how people were being released to give their energies to mission in line with their calling. These are good indications of deepening discipleship (**Bold Outcome 5**).

It was notable how a number of participants spoke of renewed engagement in prayer in their parishes. As people shift their attention toward the mission of God in their community there is perhaps an associated call to prayer.

Conclusion

The data in this research indicates how PP enables parishes to renew their life of worship and witness in their communities. This result is a move toward community listening, prayer, new initiatives and to changes in existing provision which makes it more welcoming and accessible.

The training that PP offers cannot claim to be a direct cause of many of the developments described above. Parishes are complex places, with long histories and multiple influences. Yet, it is also the case that many participants credited PP directly with many of the changes they were seeing in their parishes.

This is the work of culture change; work to help move parishes toward renewed vision and values for their common life. Such work can be slow and difficult. This research indicates that PP is a significant and powerful tool to help parishes make substantial progress in this area in a relatively short period of time.

"[PP] did a lot of the heavy lifting for me... of just starting to get a culture shift to think missionally. And that had been a very slow, difficult process."



Pioneering
Parishes

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**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**