

ARTICLE

# Implementation of the Mixed Ecology in Church of England Diocesan Strategies

Andrew Dunlop

## Abstract

The mixed ecology is a term that has come to denote both traditional and new forms of church mutually flourishing alongside one another. Since 2021 it has been part of the vision and strategy of the Church of England. The extent to which mixed ecology thinking permeates diocesan strategy varies. Strategies which originally flowed from the separate streams of church planting and fresh expressions of church now exhibit similar qualities. I argue that diocesan strategies were converging towards those that could be described as “mixed ecology” even before the national strategy was adopted, and suggest that these strategies and the national vision play a vital role in amplifying good practice and creating the active partnership between groups that the mixed ecology requires to thrive. This article is based on a survey of diocesan strategies, vision statements, and publicly available documentation in Church of England dioceses.

**Keywords:** Mixed ecology, Church of England, Strategy, Vision, Church planting, Fresh expressions

In 2021, a new vision for Church of England was adopted. It was to become *simpler* in governance and structure, *humbler* in working with others, and *bolder* in its outworking and proclamation of what God has done through Christ, all shaped by the five marks of mission. These were to be enacted through three strategic priorities: a church of missionary disciples, a church where the mixed ecology is the norm, and a church which is younger and more diverse (Cottrell 2021). The second of these was of particular interest to me as I have been following the development of fresh expressions of church and the mixed ecology throughout my ordained career – as curate, new-build pioneer, college lecturer, and now in a diocesan role. On the one hand, that the mixed ecology had become enshrined into Church of England vision was a declaration that this – and the variety of ecclesial forms that come with the

mixed ecology – was how the church should be. On the other hand, as this paper argues, it simply formalized in the vision what was happening in the dioceses anyway.

The language of “mixed ecology” is a development of the phrase “mixed economy”, describing areas where new and traditional forms of church and other missional ventures work together in an area to form a varied ecclesial landscape. “Mixed economy” was first coined by Rowan Williams while he was Archbishop of Wales, but gained wider traction whilst he was Archbishop of Canterbury through its inclusion in the *Mission-shaped Church* report (Church of England 2004). The report promoted church planting and fresh expressions of church – defined as contextual forms of church intended for those who did not previously attend church. More recently, the preference has been for an ecological rather than economic metaphor.<sup>1</sup> Whilst the phrase “mixed ecology” hasn’t been defined in detail, the work of recent writers all agree that a varied ecclesial landscape or ecosystem of new and traditional forms of church, fresh expressions, church plants, and missional activities is intended (Perrin and Olsworth-Peter 2021; Olsworth-Peter 2024; Foulger 2024).

In defining a mixed ecology, one could take a “lowest common denominator” approach which consists of different forms of church or missional communities simply co-existing near each other. This is not a good definition, and is arguably no different from how the church operated in any age. A preferable definition emphasizes a partnership (e.g. Church of England 2004: iv; Müller 2019: 252) between the new and traditional, for mutual learning, training, resourcing, networking, support, the sharing of good practice and ideas, and more.

Although the mixed ecology has attracted critique from some circles within the Church of England as undermining the parish system (Billings 2021; Milbank 2023), I contend, and argue elsewhere in a wider study of the mixed ecology in a local context (Dunlop 2025), that the mixed ecology at its best is a fulfilment of the parish system, not an undermining of it. There is no space to develop that here, so in this paper I argue that the convergence of diocesan visions towards the mixed ecology sets the landscape for an active partnership between the elements in the ecosystem to be created.

As part of this wider study, between 2018 and 2022 I undertook a survey of the vision and strategies of 40 of the 42 dioceses in the Church of England through their

---

1 The preference for ecological over economic reflects Jesus’ use of metaphors and the sense of different aspects of an ecology existing together for the benefit of the whole, in contrast to fiscal/financial models. Those writing about the transition (e.g. Passmore 2020) usually fail to note the theological aspect to the word “economy” by writers that influenced Rowan Williams, such as Vladimir Lossky (1976).

website data and publicly available documentation.<sup>2</sup> I found that, despite a variety of language and approaches to mission and ministry, there was a general convergence towards strategies that could be described as mixed ecology with an intention to having a mutuality or active partnership between groups. This convergence highlights a complex relationship between diocesan and national vision, and the activity of practitioners on the ground. Money made available for mission and church planting ventures from the Church of England's Strategic Development Fund (SDF) and its successor the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board has undoubtedly enabled dioceses to be more proactive in setting an ecclesial landscape. In 2019, Sabrina Müller wrote:

*The mixed economy has become one of the implicit ecclesiological self-understandings of the Church of England in the last 15 years. (Müller 2019: 252)*

I argue in this paper that with diocesan visions converging to mixed ecology ways of operating, this ecclesiological self-understanding has now become explicit and is beneficial for the establishment of mutual partnerships of different churches, missional ventures, and worshipping communities.

This study should be read in conjunction with Will Foulger's research from the Centre for Church Planting Theology in Durham, conducted after the national vision was announced (Foulger 2024). His consisted of reviewing the publicly facing material in 11 dioceses alongside interviews with one key person in each diocese. He found that the language of "mixed ecology" was "ubiquitous" across the dioceses and that all were reluctant to use the word "church" to describe the "new things" that were being started, although there was much variation in what language to use. For the bulk of this paper, I examine the language and strategy before 2021.

## **An overview of the direction of travel before 2021**

Before the national strategy, diocesan strategies fell into three general categories: those which clearly articulated a vision for the mixed ecology/economy and used language that had arisen from the fresh expressions discussion, those whose vision is clearly something else, and those who are promoting a variety of strategic approaches.

The most clearly articulated visions for a mixed ecology came from the dioceses of Carlisle, Chelmsford, Ely, Leicester, Oxford, Southwell and Nottingham, St Albans,

---

2 Due to the nature of their geographies and their separation from the mainland, the dioceses of Europe and of Sodor and Man were discounted from this investigation.

and Winchester. These dioceses unapologetically used language that emerged from the conversation around fresh expressions of church. There is not space to describe each in detail, so I limit this discussion to two. The first diocese to develop a mixed economy vision, including contextual forms of church, was Leicester, who began in 2005:

*A central part of our calling as a Diocese is to see as many growing and maturing fresh expressions (new) churches in 2030 as we have continuing (parish) ones, led by a network of over 600 licensed Pioneers. (Diocese of Leicester 2018b)*

To this end, they appointed pioneer development workers for an initial five-year term (using an SDF grant) to promote and resource fresh expressions across the diocese, and to be deeply involved in one location. Further SDF funding of £5.34 million supported the development of six resource churches – larger churches or church plants intended to plant again (Diocese of Leicester 2018a).

The Diocese of Carlisle established a shared strategy with Methodist and United Reformed Churches to create intentional mission communities (Diocese of Carlisle et al., 2014). Every church was to be part of one of these clusters, which were to contain at least one fresh expression alongside a network youth church. Their visualization of such a community, discussed below, offers a practical outworking of mixed economy/ecology thinking.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Diocese of Chichester's vision for mission did not include the mixed ecology or relate to it explicitly. There is no mention of fresh expressions, church planting, mixed ecology, or resource churches. This is not to say no vision for mission exists, simply that the mixed ecology of traditional and new forms of church working alongside each other is not a stated goal. Instead, they focus on the inherited church being 'a Christian presence in every community' (Diocese of Chichester 2020), which is a received mantra commonly used about Church of England parishes.<sup>3</sup> References to 'reimagining ministry' in their strategy brochure and Bishop's Charge refer to encouraging lay ministry and developing 'confidence in clergy,' although, from the public documentation, it is ambiguous as to what this entails (Diocese of Chichester 2015; 'Diocesan Vision For Growth' 2016). They do, however, articulate the need for 'apostolic partnerships' in areas of new housing and deprivation, although little detail is given to the structure of these

---

3 'A Christian presence in every community' was at one time the main strapline on the Church of England website (see Foulger 2018, 12). It persists in recent years on websites, proposals, and academic articles (cf. Seeley 2019; Nye 2021; 'The Church: A Christian Presence in Every Community' n.d.; Diocese of Chelmsford n.d.).

(Diocese of Chichester 2020). It is important to note that Chichester has a significant resource church in St Peter's, Brighton which itself has planted multiple times, and has received SDF money directed at outreach, evangelism, social justice, and training (Diocese of Chichester 2021; 'St Peter's Brighton – Bright City', n.d.). So, despite Chichester's vision and strategy being the least explicit in terms of articulating a mixed ecology, even theirs reveals a mixed approach to mission and ecclesiology within the diocese. Their strategy, therefore, might indicate a cautious response to the intentions and perceived ecclesiology of the churches in the diocese, rather than a rejection of missional ecclesiological ventures.

All the other dioceses had a vision which, to a greater or lesser extent, included aspects relating to the mixed ecology, even if the language wasn't employed. This could be through centrally funded creation of new worshipping communities, encouragement of parishes to innovate locally, or the planting of resource churches. The variety of language being used before 2021 gravitated towards 'mixed ecology' since then (see below). Only the diocese of Winchester still used language of the mixed economy in their vision statement as of 2023,<sup>4</sup> whilst Ely diocese used multiple terms including "blended", "mixed ecology" and "mixed economy".<sup>5</sup> The language of fresh expressions was known and used in many dioceses, albeit recognizing that it could be difficult for some (Diocese of Birmingham, n.d.).

## Demonstrating convergence to the mixed ecology

There is a sense that each diocese was using the language and strategy that reflected the existing direction of travel of the churches in that diocese and perhaps, therefore, had the greatest pragmatic chance of success.<sup>6</sup> It is discernible, however, that despite the multiplicity of approaches, a common convergence can be noted towards models that could be described as mixed ecology in some way. Although this convergence is ecclesiological in nature and may result in a landscape of ecclesial communities across parishes or deaneries that bear some similarities to one another, it would be unwise to call this *an ecclesiology* as it encompasses multiple local ecclesiologies

---

4 Their vision statement remained consistent from 2018 and was correct as of 7 August 2023 (Diocese of Winchester, n.d.). A few documents on their website did reference ecology in 2022 (Diocese of Winchester 2022a; 2022b) but these have since been removed. As of October 2024, there was no mention of either mixed economy or mixed ecology on their website. On the other hand, the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich has had a consistent vision since 2016, yet their website vision pages did not mention mixed economy' in 2020 but does in 2024 (Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich 2020; 2024).

5 See, for example, Diocese of Ely 2019a; 2019b; 2021.

6 The question of what constitutes success is a pertinent one and is something I deal with in my earlier work (Dunlop 2018).

and there is often a lack of theological articulation.<sup>7</sup> The common convergence is most noticeable in pictorial representations that some dioceses have produced, but is also clear in proposals for some resourcing church projects, as discussed below.

Neither the Fresh Expressions organization nor the *Mission-Shaped Church* report offered a pictorial representation of what the mixed economy/ecology might look like. *Mission-shaped Church* simply summed up the mixed economy in the phrase:

*...a variety of integrated missionary approaches is required. A mixed economy of parish church and network churches will be necessary, in an active partnership across a wider area, perhaps a deanery. (Church of England 2004, xi)<sup>8</sup>*

There is much variation in how this phrase has come to be understood and depicted in individual diocesan approaches. Carlisle Diocese's vision for mission communities indicated one possible outworking of mixed ecology thinking. Their proposal was ecumenical and operated across a deanery with several congregations existing alongside one another (see Fig. 1 for the fictionalized example of the Flockton Mission Community: Diocese of Carlisle, n.d.). Within this setup there were several established congregations of different denominations alongside new contextual church communities and missional ventures. Some of these are connected to the traditional congregations, whilst others operate across a network or wider area. However, all were encouraged to remain connected to other local churches for mutual benefit. A 2019 Church Army report into fresh expressions in Carlisle diocese stated:

*While previously [fresh expressions of church] sought growing into 'three-self' responsibility, self-reproduction, self-financing and self-governing, a healthy interdependence is now encouraged, with traditional parish churches and fresh expressions of church learning from and supporting each other. (Church Army Research Unit 2019, 7)*

According to this report, based on quantitative research, this approach had some success in engaging with those who did not otherwise come to church, stating that one out of every four people who attend church in the diocese attend only a fresh expression of church (Church Army Research Unit 2019, 14).

---

7 Developing a single ecclesiology for the mixed ecology is unhelpful in an organisation such as the Church of England. In my doctoral work I proposed a framework of ecclesiological instincts, rather than an ecclesiology (Dunlop 2025). Discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper.

8 More recently, Olsworth-Peter produced a diagram of the mixed ecology set upon an axis from attractional to contextual groups (Olsworth-Peter 2024, 29).

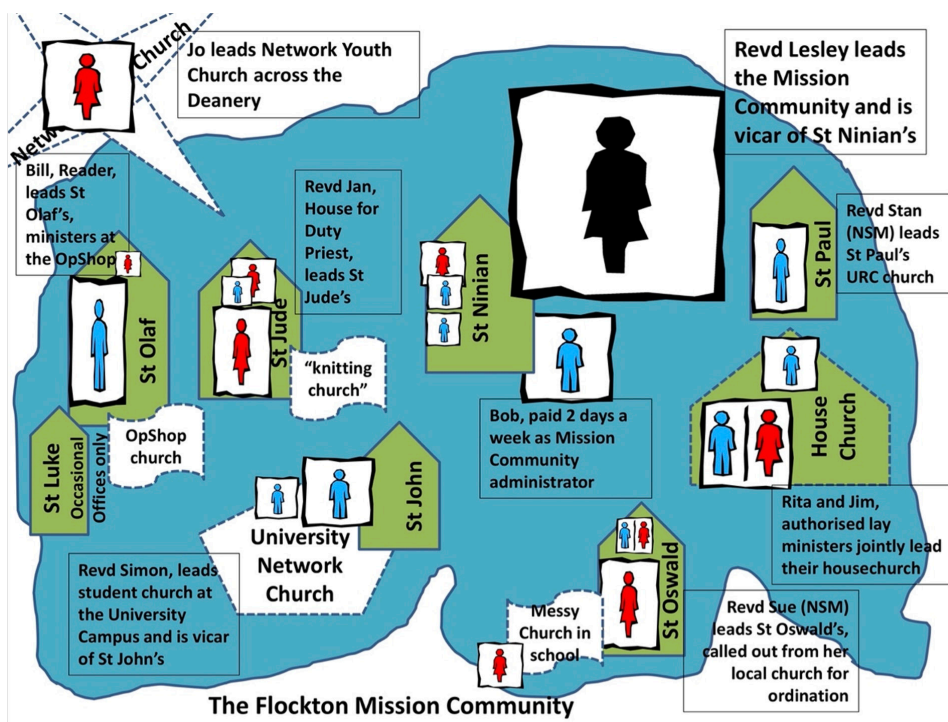


Figure 1 The Diocese of Carlisle example mission community (Diocese of Carlisle, n.d.)

Likewise, the diocese of Liverpool put together an ambitious strategy to revitalize the church in the industrial town of Wigan. *Transforming Wigan* hoped to see 20,000 people on the "journey" of faith by 2022, in both traditional and fresh expression congregations ('Strategy: About Transforming Wigan', n.d.). Twenty-nine parishes were reorganized to create seven new parish hubs, each with their own hub leader and associate, to support one another to plant five new worshipping communities each year (see churchwigan.org). The hubs were also connected to one another through the overarching project (see Fig. 2,<sup>9</sup> where the triangles represent different forms of gathering within the hubs). Clergy were authorized to exercise their specific ministry gifts across the whole team. This vision was a distinct departure from the traditional parish system, despite the forming of new super-parishes. A mixed ecology vision (although the diocese tended not to use this term) of traditional and new congregations working alongside one another is evident in this strategy. The

9 For the image source, see <https://churchwigan.org/aboutTWIGstrategy.php>.

reorganization resulted in the creation of 63 new worshipping communities including 29 “significant expressions of church” (Hutton 2023: 28–30), involving somewhere between 750 (Hutton 2023: iv) and 1500 (Diocese of Liverpool, n.d.) new regular attendees. However, parish churches, impacted by the pandemic, continued to see a steep decline in attendance and finances, resulting in closures (Hutton 2023: 31–2). In her apologetic for the parish system, Alison Milbank decries the Transforming Wigan project and offers anecdotal stories about the disgruntlement of some local clergy, the disengagement of the laity, and added bureaucracy limiting face-to-face time (Milbank 2023, 40–41). Whilst it should be noted that the pandemic certainly affected numbers (cf. Perrin and Olsworth-Peter 2021: 46–50), the Transforming Wigan results perhaps indicate that it is vital to attend to the mixed ecology ideals of creating “active partnership” for mutual benefit in developing such a project.



**Figure 2 Transforming Wigan Hubs**

Some dioceses were pursuing strategies prioritizing the establishing of resource churches – a church plant or revitalization, inspired by the Holy Trinity, Brompton (HTB) model, intended to plant again and resource the area around it (see Thorpe 2021). Their visions also appeared to converge towards a mixed ecology of different church communities. During a training session with the Diocese of Sheffield, Thorpe presented a vision of what a traditional parish actively engaging with its community could look like (see Fig. 3; Thorpe 2018). Note that this is an image of what an engaged parish church could look like, not a resource church; but there are clear overtones of the mixed ecology in the variety of church communities in different places within the parish that are suggested. Such a church could become a resource church by having the distinct intention of planting and resourcing other parishes around it to do the same (see Fig. 4).



There are many types of church plants – all are needed

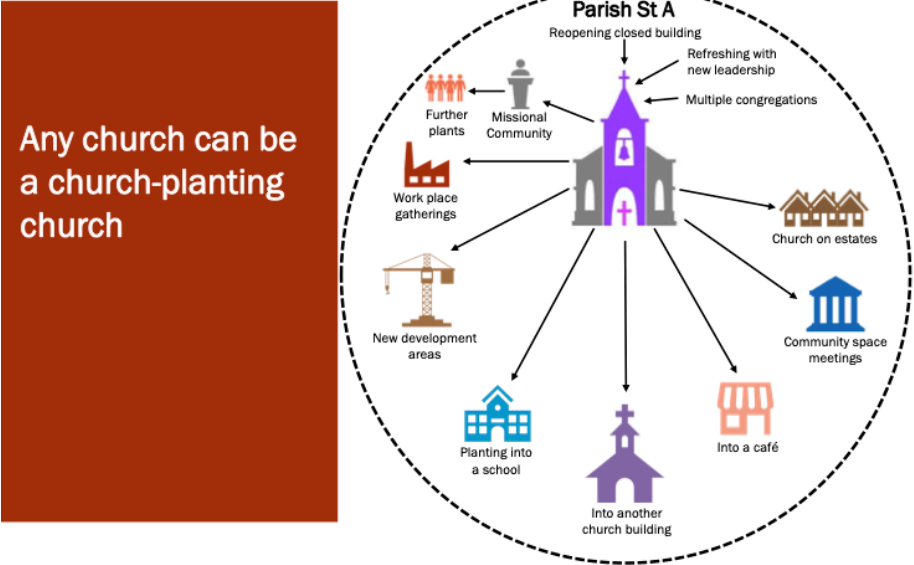


Figure 3 A church-planting church: slide from Ric Thorpe’s presentation to the Diocese of Sheffield (Thorpe 2018)

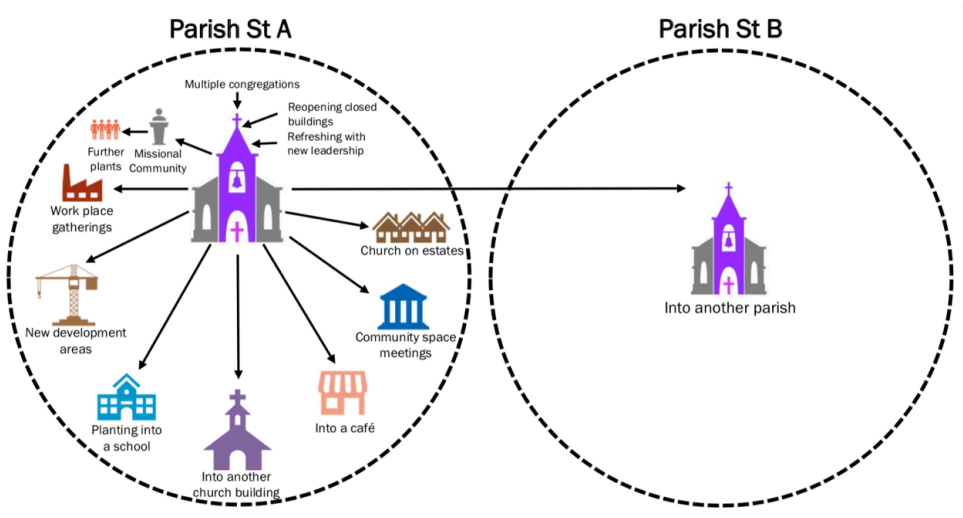


Figure 4 A resource church: slide from Ric Thorpe’s presentation to the Diocese of Sheffield (Thorpe 2018)

The implications of these images from Thorpe's presentation are threefold. First, they affirm the integrity and importance of the parish church to be the Anglican centre for all those that live within the parish. The vicar still maintains the cure of souls of those who live in her parish. However, second, there is no indication that one service of worship in the church building is sufficient. The parish church is to be a missional church, serving all sections of society that happen to exist within its boundaries. Therefore, chaplaincy, planting, and new worshipping communities based outside of the church building will be required, creating a mixed ecology. Whilst this is far reaching within the parish, a third implication is the assertion that mission within the parish alone is not sufficient. Churches that can reach beyond the parish boundary to resource, encourage, or revitalize mission work in another area should do so, although Thorpe adds that this should be done in partnership with dioceses, as part of their wider strategy (Thorpe 2021: 9–10). Here, a mixed ecology of active partnership between churches and groups is seen as beneficial to mission within the parish and, in partnership with the diocese, for enabling missional work elsewhere.

A specific outworking of this resource church strategy could be seen in the Diocese of Truro through the Transforming Mission strategy (Diocese of Truro n.d.; 2018). The diocese covers the English county of Cornwall which is rural and coastal. The most populated town, Falmouth, is home to only 22,000 people, with a further 5000 students based at nearby Penryn on the joint campus of Falmouth University and the University of Exeter.<sup>10</sup> The mission strategy of the diocese, Transforming Mission, was made possible through SDF money and aimed to see six or seven new resource churches planted or designated across Cornwall over five years. Resourced through a new vicar who led the project, a pioneer minister, a student worker, a café manager, a worship pastor, and operations support, they aimed to reach families and students and see new congregations planted in cafés and on the student campus. There were different styles of church community across the hub including two existing parish churches (one in the Anglo-Catholic tradition – [www.allsaintschurchfalmouth.co.uk](http://www.allsaintschurchfalmouth.co.uk)), a new church plant ([www.newstreetchurch.org](http://www.newstreetchurch.org)), a pre-existing church-café community, and further student outreach. By 2022, phase 2 was under way in Camborne, Truro, St Austell and Liskeard with similar aims (Diocese of Truro, n.d.). Again, the visualization of such a missional project leans towards a mixed ecology, with multiple churches, Christian communities and mission initiatives working together (see Fig. 5). Similar rural projects exist in other parts of the country, such as the Potting Shed resource church in the diocese of Southwell and Nottingham (<https://www.thepottingshedchurch.org/about-us>). In these cases, some expectations and forms

---

10 Data estimated in 2015 to exclude the outlying villages (Matthews 2017). University figures estimated from 2016 (<https://www.fxplus.ac.uk/build>).

of ministries were identified in advance. In Truro, the café and student campus were key. Other aspects of the ministry could be discerned contextually by the planting team/pioneers after the project has begun, giving a clear direction but leaving space for ecclesial imagination and missional responsiveness.

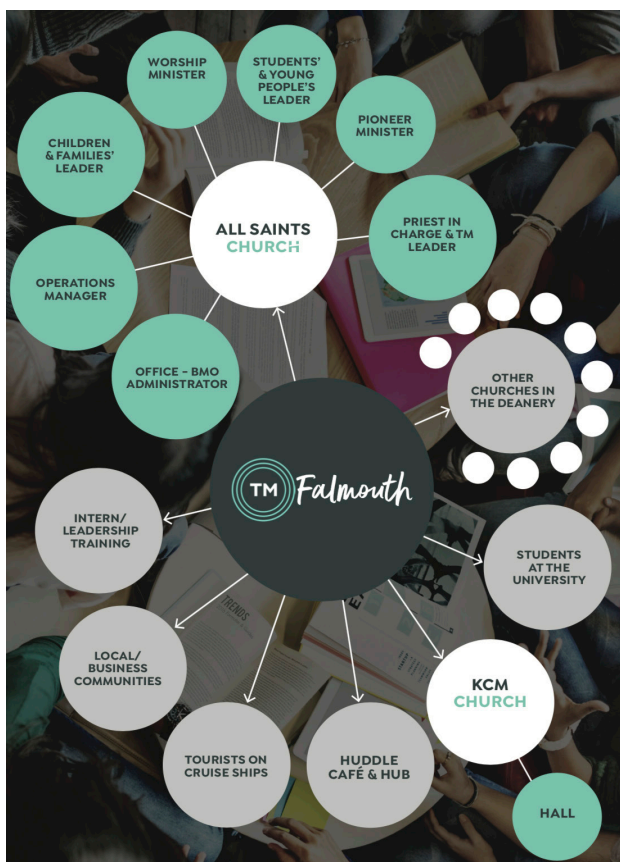


Figure 5 A visualization of the Transforming Mission Falmouth project (Diocese of Truro, 2018)

## Convergence of pioneer and church planting approaches

Fresh expression thinking and traditional church planting, as evidenced in the HTB-style church plants or resource churches, are stereotypically understood to have different starting points. Fresh expressions are expected to arise from a context after a period of listening, through a process that is often referred to as the

serving-first journey (Moynagh 2017: 45). Because worship arises from the context, styles can vary and are sometimes creative or innovative. Those that engage contextually to form fresh expressions of church are called pioneers. Traditional church plants, following what has been described as the worship-first journey (Moynagh 2012: 206), usually start with a larger number of existing Christians gathering for worship in a new area, often replicating the style of the sending church. In the case of HTB church plants, this is usually evangelical-charismatic,. From this central service, momentum is built, and the congregation reaches out in mission to draw people into the church, and to faith. So, these demonstrate two seemingly different starting points to mission. I say “seemingly” here as there are clearly similarities between the two approaches too. Fresh expressions require a small group of committed Christians, usually with some links to what might be described as a “sending” church, to commit to engage contextually in an area. Likewise, although ‘worship-first’ church plants usually replicate a style of church, there are often contextual adaptations, particularly if these plants are in a differing socio-economic context to the sending church. Whilst describing the circumstances in which the models are used as “contrasting”, Moynagh notes the nuances and the over-generalizations of using any models to describe reality (2012: 206).

Diocesan strategies indicate a convergence of both these approaches into something resembling a mixed ecology encompassing many different forms of worshipping community operating supportively across an area. it is clearly discernible that Thorpe’s and Truro’s models have developed from traditional church-planting methods, rather than fresh expressions thinking. It is also clear that contextual methodologies influenced them too, hence I have likened them to mixed ecology approaches. In each case there is a central church (the resource church) out of which imaginative and pioneering ministries emerge. This marks a difference between these resource church models and the mixed ecology approaches of, say, Leicester or Carlisle dioceses or Transforming Wigan which are more fluid across an area. In practice, however, Thorpe’s resource church model does not deviate too far from the way in which most fresh expressions are started in relation to the missional ventures that happen within the parish. Only relatively few fresh expressions begin from diocesan initiatives external to the parish; most are started by a parish discerning a local need (Lings 2016: 191–2). Many fresh expressions continue to have a close relationship with the parish from which they sprang (Lings 2016: 101), some with the intention that they may never become entirely independent churches. Mixed ecology language is flexible enough to encompass the variety of missional activity and worshipping communities that spring out of a central church such as through resource church models, as well as to include fresh expressions and traditional churches that find themselves co-existing in an area after a more pioneering “ground-up” starting point. From both these starting points, the convergence towards mixed ecology thinking can be seen,

and in many cases there is a central parish church that is either planted from or offers ongoing support to the new worshipping community.

## What the national vision has done

Although there is clearly much more that can be said about the mixed ecology, I have limited myself in this article to demonstrating a convergence to a mixed ecology approaches over the last 10–15 years, before “mixed ecology” became part of the national Church of England strategy. To conclude, I will highlight three areas of relationship between the national vision, diocesan visions, and the general direction of travel, and why these are significant.

First, in terms of diocesan vision, Foulger points out that the language of ‘mixed ecology’ is now ‘universally accepted’ across the dioceses he surveyed, with the term being employed in the interviews he conducted (Foulger 2024: 34, 71). I am not going to contradict this, but I have found that the use of the phrase in vision statements, publicly facing documentation and websites is still relatively uncommon, even if the values or shape of the mixed ecology are clear. The phrase is being used more frequently, however, in descriptors of diocesan departments and in advertisements for key roles (e.g. Diocese of Carlisle 2024; Diocese of Oxford 2024). In this regard, the national vision has provided normative internal language for the dioceses in how they understand their visions and the direction of travel they are on, but, perhaps rightly, the language is not used in more public-facing material. In other words, the *values* of mixed ecology are becoming more pervasive due to the national vision.

Second, there has been a blurring of language and approach in terms of pioneer and planter. Pioneers, who started contextual fresh expressions, tended to be trained in contextual approaches (e.g. serving-first) locally or nationally through initiatives of the Fresh Expressions organization, or through lay or ordained pathways at theological colleges, whereas planters tended to be trained in the HTB planting style of “worship first”. Whilst my statements here are over-generalizations, my intent is to emphasise the contrasting contextual starting points, and different networks of support that the two groups had. Now, there is less of a distinction between the two as pioneers and planters are trained in both contextual and planting methods, and networks such as CCX include those innovating church in a variety of ways. Foulger, drawing on an independent review of SDF money, notes that dioceses tended to focus on plants in their funding bids, rather than fresh expressions (Strategic Investment Board 2022: 33; Foulger 2024: 71). The report makes recommendations on increasing the diversity of projects funded (Strategic Investment Board 2022: 9). Foulger rightly claims that mixed ecology language can help hold together the need for larger resourced church plants, with smaller fresh expressions or worshipping communities that often emerge from the work of a parish. Its inclusion in the national vision

emphasises the importance of a variety of new things to be started, including but not limited to large church plants. Both pioneers and planters fit into this as there is less distinction between the two ways of working.

My third aspect to note is that the relationship between the national, diocesan, and local visions and practice is and will always be complex. I have noted the direction of travel of the diocesan visions towards a mixed ecology way of thinking, but these visions would have been influenced by several factors. Innovative missional work by practitioners in the 1990s found its way into the *Mission-shaped Church* report, which further influenced national thinking, strategy, and structure through Bishop's Mission Orders and the funding of the Fresh Expressions organization. This organization, often supported by dioceses, amplified "fresh expressions" thinking by sharing stories, offering training, support, and points of connection to more would-be practitioners, thus affecting local practice. Local practice influenced national concern which in turn further affected practice. Similarly, the church-planting initiatives of a relative few, notably HTB, in the 1980s and 90s then became part of the strategy for the Diocese of London which then overflowed into other dioceses. The designation of national funding for dioceses for new missional ventures also brought diocesan strategy to the fore as it forced dioceses to ask missional questions of their strategy in order to be eligible for it. These strategies and funding then affected the ecclesial landscape on the ground. Moynagh rightly asserts that either top-down or bottom-up approaches alone would not have been sufficient for the mixed ecology to thrive. Diocesan intervention amplifies good practice, gives training and helps people see the possibility for local contextual missional ventures (Moynagh 2017: 99ff.).

The national mixed ecology vision also holds these things together; genuine contextual missional innovation still needs to come from the ground up, from those who know and work in their communities. The national vision and consequently diocesan visions and strategies for the mixed ecology must recognise this complexity in relationship and seek to unearth the missional energy for localities to find and support the best course of action for a context. This may be by funding something big and new, but equally should be simply through local connection and training of people together to engage appropriately with their context. In this way, the initiative rests with the local practitioners, with diocesan support, and can give rise to truly contextual missional ventures. Diocesan strategy can have a role in amplifying these voices which, in turn, may then influence future diocesan vision or funding bids.

In the above, I have described a convergence to a mixed ecology landscape in the vision and strategies of the dioceses, and through a convergence of language and approach between fresh expression and church planting methods. The convergence in the vision and strategies of dioceses was occurring even before the 2021 national vision was agreed by synod. These took various forms, arose from both pioneering and resource church planting initiatives, and have been called a wide variety of things, but the general sense of direction was clear.

I suggest that this convergence of diocesan visions towards the mixed ecology accentuates and encourages the connections or 'active partnership' vital to making it thrive. A mixed ecclesial landscape, whatever one may call it, is necessary to the mission and ministry of the church in contemporary society, and the active partnership is vital for mutual learning, resourcing, supporting, and growth. Therefore, that dioceses are actively encouraging mixed ecology in a way that isn't the lowest common denominator of different groups co-existing, leans towards creating resourcing, support, and structures for local connection as well as opportunities for wider training, connection, sharing of stories and support. This is the amplification phase that Moynagh talks about in his innovation framework (Moynagh 2017: 112–13). As stories are shared, innovation and creativity are fostered in others which, with the right support, leads to new things. Although the ideas need to be local and contextual, the diocese plays a role in shaping the structures that foster imagination. Therefore, the convergence of diocesan vision is important to the development of the mixed ecology – it emphasizes the active part both between the diocese and the new thing, and between different expressions of church in an area.

## About the Author

Rev. Dr Andrew Dunlop is the Director of Mission and Ministry Development for the Diocese of Rochester in the Church of England. His previous roles include lecturing in Pioneer Ministry, Church Planting, Mixed Ecology, and Theological Reflection at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, and Cranmer Hall, Durham. He has had ministry experience in a city centre church in Plymouth, and as a pioneer minister in Northampton. Andrew's research interests centre around the mixed ecology, how it is understood locally, and implemented at a diocesan and national level. He has recently completed a PhD on this subject, doing empirical research using Theological Action Research, through the University of Roehampton. Contact: [andrew.dunlop@rochester.anglican.org](mailto:andrew.dunlop@rochester.anglican.org)

## References

- Billings, Alan. 2021. 'What the C of E Can Learn from the Police'. *Save the Parish* (blog). 24 September. <https://www.savetheparish.com/2021/09/25/what-the-c-of-e-can-learn-from-the-police/>.
- Church Army Research Unit. 2019. 'An Audit of Fresh Expressions of Church: Diocese of Carlisle'. Sheffield: Church Army. [https://www.godforall.org.uk/uploads/1/1/9/1/119134366/fresh\\_expressions\\_in\\_the\\_diocese\\_of\\_carlisle\\_copy.pdf](https://www.godforall.org.uk/uploads/1/1/9/1/119134366/fresh_expressions_in_the_diocese_of_carlisle_copy.pdf).
- Church of England. n.d. 'The Church: A Christian Presence in Every Community'. n.d. *Vocations Sunday* | The Church of England. <http://www.vocationsunday.org/>.
- . 2004. *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context*. Mission and Public Affairs. London: Church House Publishing.
- Cottrell, Stephen. 2021. 'GS2223 Simpler, Humbler, Bolder: A Church for the Whole Nation Which Is Christ Centred and Shaped by the Five Marks of Mission', <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/GS%202223%20Vision%20and%20Strategy.pdf>.

- Diocese of Birmingham. n.d. 'Fresh Expressions'. <https://www.cofebirmingham.com/info-for-parishes/mission-learning-development/new-christian-communities/fresh-expressions/fresh-expressions.php>.
- Diocese of Carlisle. n.d. 'The Flockton Mission Community: An Example Mission Community'. <https://slideplayer.com/slide/12842721/>.
- , The United Reformed Church in Cumbria, and The Cumbria Methodist District. 2014. 'A Strategy for Ministry in Cumbria'. [https://www.carlislediocese.org.uk/uploads/932/Paper\\_Cii\\_A\\_Strategy\\_for\\_Ministry\\_in\\_Cumbria.pdf.html](https://www.carlislediocese.org.uk/uploads/932/Paper_Cii_A_Strategy_for_Ministry_in_Cumbria.pdf.html).
- Diocese of Chelmsford. n.d. 'The Church of England – a Christian Presence in Every Community'. <https://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/the-church-of-england-a-christian-presence-in-every-community>.
- Diocese of Chichester. 2015. 'Welcome Message: A Presence in Every Community'. Accessed 20 December 2018. <https://www.chichester.anglican.org/martin-cicestr-welcome-message/>.
- . 2016. 'Diocesan Vision For Growth'. <https://www.chichester.anglican.org/documents/diocesan-booklets/diocesan-strategy-growth/>.
- . 2020. 'Vision for Growth 2020–2025'. [https://cofechichester.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2020/01/NEW\\_Vision\\_Booklet\\_web.pdf](https://cofechichester.contentfiles.net/media/documents/document/2020/01/NEW_Vision_Booklet_web.pdf).
- . 2021. 'Diocese Awarded Significant Funds for City Projects'. 13 May. [https://www.chichester.anglican.org/glitter\\_news/2021/05/13/diocese-awarded-significant-funds-city-projects/](https://www.chichester.anglican.org/glitter_news/2021/05/13/diocese-awarded-significant-funds-city-projects/).
- Diocese of Ely. 2019a. 'Fresh Expressions of Church'. 17 October. <https://www.elydiocese.org/church-in-action/fresh-expression-of-church/fresh-expression-of-church.php>.
- . 2019b. 'What Is a Development Officer?' Diocese of Ely. 15 November. <https://www.elydiocese.org/about/news-jobs-and-events/news-and-announcements/news/what-is-a-development-officer.php>.
- . 2021. 'Living Ely2025 – a Summary'. 10 September. <https://www.elydiocese.org/about/strategy/living-ely2025/living-ely2025.php>.
- Diocese of Leicester. 2018a. 'Church Commissioners Grant £5.34m to Fund Leicestershire's Resourcing Churches'. *Diocese of Leicester* (blog). 11 July 2018. <https://www.leicester.anglican.org/church-commissioners-grant-5-34m-to-fund-leicestershires-resourcing-churches/>.
- Diocese of Leicester. 2018b. 'Shaped by God' (blog). 18 October. <https://www.leicester.anglican.org/about/shaped-by-god/>.
- Diocese of Liverpool. n.d. 'Transforming Wigan'. <https://www.liverpool.anglican.org/about-us/liverpool-dbf/sdf-projects/transforming-wigan/>.
- Diocese of Oxford. 2024. 'Mission and Ministry'. 14 June. <https://www.oxford.anglican.org/departments/mission-and-ministry/mission-and-ministry>.
- Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. 2020. 'Webarchive: Our Vision'. 27 November. <https://web.archive.org/web/20201127074536/https://www.cofesuffolk.org/about-us/our-vision/>.
- . 2024. 'Our Vision – Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich'. 23 September. <https://www.cofesuffolk.org/about-us/our-vision/>.
- Diocese of Truro. 2018. 'Transforming Mission: Equipping the Church to Reach the Missing Generations (Summer 2018 Update)'. <https://www.trurodiocese.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/DOT-Transforming-Mission-A5-June-2018-FINAL-006.pdf>.
- Diocese of Winchester. n.d. 'Student Evangelism – Winchester'. <https://www.winchester.anglican.org/student-evangelism/>.
- . n.d. 'Who We Are'. <https://winchester.anglican.org/who-we-are/>.
- Dunlop, Andrew. 2018. *Out of Nothing: A Cross-Shaped Approach to Fresh Expressions*. London: SCM Press.
- . 2025. 'Catholicity and Connection: An Ecclesiological Framework for the Mixed Ecology Discerned through Research in an Anglican Team Ministry.' PhD, University of Roehampton.
- Foulger, William. 2018. 'Present in Every Place: The Church of England and the Parish Principle'. Doctoral thesis, Durham University. <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/12856/>.



- . 2024. 'New Things: A Theological Investigation into the Work of Starting New Churches across 11 Dioceses in the Church of England'. Centre for Church Planting Theology and Research, Cranmer Hall. <https://www.cranmerhall.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/New-Things-Final-1.pdf>.
- Hutton, Kate. 2023. 'Evaluation of Transforming Wigan'. Diocese of Liverpool: Integras Consulting.
- Lings, George. 2016. 'The Day of Small Things: An Analysis of Fresh Expressions of Church in 21 Dioceses of the Church of England'. Sheffield: Church Army Research Unit. [https://www.churcharmy.org/Articles/516318/What\\_we\\_do/Research\\_Unit/Fresh\\_expressions\\_of.aspx](https://www.churcharmy.org/Articles/516318/What_we_do/Research_Unit/Fresh_expressions_of.aspx).
- Lossky, Vladimir. 1976. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press. <http://archive.org/details/mysticaltheology0000loss>.
- Matthews, Chris. 2017. 'Which Town in Cornwall Has the Highest Population? The Answer Might Surprise You'. Cornwalllive. 26 January 2017. <http://www.cornwalllive.com/news/cornwall-news/town-cornwall-highest-population-answer-365330>.
- Milbank, Alison. 2023. *The Once and Future Parish*. London: SCM Press.
- Moynagh, Michael. 2012. *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice*. London: SCM Press.
- . 2017. *Church in Life: Innovation, Mission and Ecclesiology*. London: SCM Press.
- Müller, Sabrina. 2019. 'Fresh Expressions of Church and the Mixed Economy'. *International Review of Mission* 108 (2): 241–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12282>.
- Nye, William. 2021. 'The Church of England: Some Personal Reflections on Structure and Mission'. *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 23 (2). <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ecclesiastical-law-journal/article/abs/church-of-england-some-personal-reflections-on-structure-and-mission/8CD-47119D591CB65DCFE0A2F0003E2C5>.
- Olsworth-Peter, Ed. 2024. *Mixed Ecology: Inhabiting an Integrated Church*. London: SPCK. <https://spck-publishing.co.uk/mixed-ecology>.
- 'Our Life in Christ: The Bishop's Charge 2015'. 2015. Diocese of Chichester. <https://www.chichester.anglican.org/bishops-charge/>.
- Passmore, Richard. 2020. 'Mixed Ecology a Language of Protest since 2011?' *Sunday Papers – The Supplement* (blog). 8 October. <http://www.sundaypapers.org.uk/?p=3992>.
- Perrin, Ruth, and Ed Olsworth-Peter. 2021. 'The Mixed Ecologists: Experiences of Mixed Ecology Ministry in the Church of England'. Focussed Study 2. The Living Ministry Research Project. London: Church House. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Focussed%20Study%202020-%20The%20Mixed%20Ecologists.pdf>.
- Seeley, Martin. 2019. 'GS Misc 1224 Ministry for a Christian Presence in Every Community'. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/GS%20Misc%201224%20Ministry%20for%20a%20Christian%20Presence.pdf>.
- 'St Peter's Brighton – Bright City'. n.d. <https://stpetersbrighton.org/bright-city/>.
- Strategic Investment Board. 2022. 'Independent Review of Lowest Income Communities Funding and Strategic Development Funding'. Church of England. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/irls-final-report-2.pdf>.
- Thorpe, Ric. 2018. 'Sheffield Diocesan Development Day: Church Growth, Church Planting and Resource Churches'. Sheffield, October 6. <https://www.sheffield.anglican.org/strategy-launch>.
- . 2021. *Resource Churches: A Story of Church Planting and Revitalisation across the Nation*. London: The Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication.