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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Cathedral Growth: How the Rest of the Church of England Can Join In: Away from Polarization and Towards a New Mixed Ecology for Growth

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## Abstract

In light of current debates and historical precedent, this article rejects polarized approaches to growth in the Church of England. Instead, it points towards the significant numerical growth experienced by English cathedrals as evidence for the fruits of a mixed practice approach. Analysing the growth experienced by cathedrals in recent years, it is posed that, combined with rootedness in place and local identity, a mixed practice approach could be a model for a well-functioning mixed ecology, and a growing Church.

**Keywords:** cathedral; church; ecclesiology; ecology; growth; ministry; mixed; practice

## Introduction

The Church of England is going for growth, and so it should. Church growth, after all, is a good thing. A growing church is a gospel and biblical imperative. Jesus himself called his followers to ‘make disciples of all nations’ (Mt. 28.19), as did the leaders of the early Church throughout the New Testament (Acts 9.31; Eph. 4.12; 1 Cor. 3.6; Col. 2.19). Church growth is also key to the Anglican Church’s five marks of mission, implicit in the call to ‘teach, baptise and nurture new believers’.<sup>1</sup> And if theological imperatives were not enough, church growth is also a pragmatic necessity. If the Church continues to decline as it has over recent decades, it will run out of money and be unable to sustain its ministry to the nation. It is a relief, then, that the growth agenda remains central in the Church’s Vision and Strategy for the 2020s.<sup>2</sup> But with some predicting the Church

<sup>1</sup>Anglican Communion, ‘Marks of Mission’, [www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>2</sup>Church of England Vision and Strategy for the 2020s, [www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/emerging-church-england/vision-and-strategy](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/emerging-church-england/vision-and-strategy) (accessed 10 October 2022).

of England's disappearance within 40 years, should the current rate of decline continue,<sup>3</sup> discerning the right approach for growth has never been more important. In recent times a number of different approaches have been advocated. From the traditional parish model, of a priest and their parish church, locally and geographically rooted, focused on the needs of the whole community, to the network targeted churches, developed out of the Fresh Expressions movement. As well as these there have been the Resource Church plants seeking to establish new churches and grow new Christian communities in new or existing locations. Too often, though, despite all the aforementioned approaches seeking growth (though the latter two perhaps more explicitly) these approaches are pitted against each other.

How, then, should the Church of England approach growth? Well firstly, this paper rejects any ideological polarization in approaches to church growth. Not least because they obstruct the Church's ability to have practical conversations about when and where finite resources go. But also because such polarization, purporting either/or binary approaches, that only *one* model will lead to growth, are a fallacy. Such approaches are neither practically useful for growth, nor a sustainable way of ensuring a Christian presence in England. They are also not, as recent experience of the Church of England can testify, good for any semblance of Church unity.

As an alternative model, the paper will employ the evidence of growth experienced by English cathedrals. Cathedrals help reject polarization, factually showing the fruitfulness of a *mixed* approach to mission and ministry. Cathedrals demonstrate not least how mixed practice approaches are more flexibly responsive to the complex needs of a community and therefore enable growth. The English cathedral, then, could be a model of a well-functioning 'mixed ecology', but one that also demonstrates the importance of a rootedness in place and local identity, a further key ingredient for a successful mixed practice approach to church growth.

## Rejecting Polarization in Approaches to Church Growth

The strapline of the Church of England is 'A Christian presence in every community'.<sup>4</sup> In recent centuries this has generally been understood to mean the presence of the parish church, served by a parish priest, in every part of England. Being the established church of the land too, this is not just an ecclesial ambition, but is also a legal reality undergirded by a parish system under which everyone in England resides. This is of course not *all* the Church of England is. Its presence in prisons, hospitals, schools and universities testify to this. But for the country that it seeks to serve, the parochial nature of the Church of England is its defining charism, and indeed its reason for being.

In recent years, however, despite the parish system remaining intact as a *legal* reality, the reality on the ground has begun to change. In the preceding 18 years up to 2020 there was a reduction of more than 2000 stipendiary parish priests from just

<sup>3</sup>Kaya Burgess, 'Religious Infection Rate Reveals Dying Churches', *The Times*, 25 May 2022, [www.thetimes.co.uk/article/religious-infection-rate-reveals-dying-churches-j08tfb50p](https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/religious-infection-rate-reveals-dying-churches-j08tfb50p) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>4</sup>In header of Church of England website, [www.churchofengland.org/](https://www.churchofengland.org/) (accessed 10 October 2022).

short of 9500 in 2002 to just more than 7000.<sup>5</sup> These are (to use modern employment parlance) full-time, paid, incumbents or 'vicars'. At the same time the size of multi-parish benefices has grown, meaning that stipendiary priests have pastoral responsibility for an increasing number of parishes, and with that their church buildings.<sup>6</sup> The reason for this development is generally accepted to be the result of decline in church attendance and with it the financial resources to support their ministry (the reasons for this decline have been discussed at length in other places<sup>7</sup>). During this time, perhaps especially since the *Mission Shaped Church* report in 2004,<sup>8</sup> there has been a period of experimentation and an increase in attempts to 'do church differently'. The result of this has been most notably the rise of the Fresh Expressions movement and the popularity of Resource Churches, with the rediscovery<sup>9</sup> of 'church planting' under Bishop's Mission Orders.

At a time when the parish church attendance is declining and finances are stretched, many have asked (and continue to do so) why such a focus *away* from the parish is considered. There appear to be two narratives that account for recent developments. The first is one espoused primarily by those proposing and leading the change. For them, society has changed at such a rate of knots that the parish system alone is no longer sufficiently able to fulfil the Church of England's mission to be a presence in every community.<sup>10</sup> This was the overwhelming thrust of the seminal *Mission Shaped Church* report of 2004.<sup>11</sup> For the authors of this report, social trends of the 30 years prior to 2004, such as those in housing, employment, mobility, family life, technology and leisure, have changed society into one that is primarily made up of 'networks'.<sup>12</sup> As a result 'community and a sense of community are often disconnected from locality and geography',<sup>13</sup> and is more likely formed around interests or particular affiliations. In a world where community is formed primarily through networks rather than locality, the argument goes, the parish system is ineffective.

The second narrative is espoused by those less satisfied by the expansion in the Church of England's mode of presence. For them, the rise of Fresh Expressions and the focus on Resource Church planting actually betrays a lack of ecclesial understanding, and not as much a lack of confidence in the historic Church of England as a disregard for it.<sup>14</sup> Writing in their 2010 book *For the Parish*, Davison

<sup>5</sup>Church of England Statistics Department, *Ministry Statistics 2020*, [www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Ministry%20Statistics%202019%20report%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Ministry%20Statistics%202019%20report%20FINAL.pdf) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>6</sup>Though generally accepted to be true, academically reliable sources for this are difficult to find as the Church of England Statistics Department does not record this. One source claiming this can be found at: [www.blanchflower.org/cgi-bin/cofe.pl](http://www.blanchflower.org/cgi-bin/cofe.pl) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>7</sup>G. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); G. Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2015).

<sup>8</sup>Mission and Public Affairs Council of the Church of England, *Mission Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of a Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

<sup>9</sup>W. Bevins, 'Victorian Church Planting: A Contemporary Inquiry into a Nineteenth Century Movement', *The Asbury Journal* 75.1 (2020), pp. 8–22, doi: 10.7252/Journal.01.2020S.02 (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>10</sup>G. Cray, 'Introduction' in Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission Shaped Church*, p. xi.

<sup>11</sup>Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission Shaped Church*.

<sup>12</sup>Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission Shaped Church*, pp. 1–6.

<sup>13</sup>Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission Shaped Church*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>A. Davison and A. Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM Press, 2010), p. 41.

and Milbank, for example, claim that behind the Fresh Expressions movement is an ecclesial shift away from the 'theological centre of gravity of mainstream churches and from the explicit teaching of the Church of England'.<sup>15</sup> This is demonstrated for them not least in the distinction they see drawn between how the Church is formed, and the faith it teaches. For them, the 'Faith is bound up with [the] practices [of the Church]'<sup>16</sup> and so if these practices are changed, something of the essence of the Faith is lost. They are also concerned about segregation. They see the local church exhibited within the parish system as mixed communities, drawing people together across various differences. Conversely, they see the Fresh Expressions movement and its focus on networks as encouraging uniformity and 'homogenous congregations'.<sup>17</sup>

As the ecclesial reality of fewer stipendiary clergy with more multi-parish benefices has continued to be evident in the life of the Church of England, and meanwhile more money has been spent exploring different ways for the Church to be present, an increasing sense of polarization has unfolded. *For the Parish*, for example, carried with it a wave of sentiment shared by many in the Church that the Fresh Expression and church planting movements were a threat to the parish system. Arguably now carrying the book's torch is the Save the Parish Movement, which came to prominence in 2021. The organization was created because of the threat it perceives the parish system to be under, having been 'starved of priests and money over many decades'.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, others have spoken about the parish system as a threat to Church growth and the spread of the gospel in England. Most notable (even resulting in its own hashtag #LimitingFactor), was Canon John McGinley's reference to 'key limiting factors'<sup>19</sup> in 2021. The Director of Church Planting for New Wine, an influential parachurch organization, McGinley argued that churches which require a 'building and a stipend and long, costly college-based training for every leader of church'<sup>20</sup> frustrated church growth.

What seems clear is that this polarization is characterized by fear. Those 'for the parish' fear the decline of Christianity, but especially the parish church and its mode of existence disappearing from the landscape. This can be witnessed in the campaigning of groups already mentioned such as Save the Parish, and their push to increase representation on General Synod. Those less excited by the parish system also fear the decline of Christianity and seem to want to blame the parish system for its decline so far. This is evidenced not least in the above quotation of Canon McGinley, the Director of Church Planting for New Wine. Both of these groups fear the decline of Christianity, but also a lack of resources for what they see to be the most true and effective way of being the Church.

Further fuelling this sense of polarization in recent years, anecdotally at least, has been the use of resources. With the advent of Strategic Development Funding (SDF)

<sup>15</sup>Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, p. 50.

<sup>16</sup>Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup>Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, p. 65.

<sup>18</sup>Save the Parish Manifesto, <https://savetheparish.com/manifesto/> (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>19</sup>M. Davies, 'Synod to Discuss Target of 10,000 New Lay-led Churches in Next Ten Years', *Church Times*, 2 July 2021, [www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/2-july/news/uk/synod-to-discuss-target-of-10-000-new-lay-led-churches-in-the-next-ten-years](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/2-july/news/uk/synod-to-discuss-target-of-10-000-new-lay-led-churches-in-the-next-ten-years) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>20</sup>Davies, 'Synod to Discuss Target'.

in 2015, as part of the Church's Reform and Renewal programme, the perception is that there has been a proliferation of spending on projects that have as yet returned limited success in relation to their aims. This has happened at the same time that the reduction of stipendiary priests, not least stipendiary priests serving a single parish, has accelerated. And this is despite a key finding from the Church of England's own Resource, Development and Strategy Unit research that churches resourced with a stipendiary priest are more likely to grow than those without.<sup>21</sup> With all this, and the Church of England's Vision and Strategy announcing the objective to create 10,000 new worshipping communities, suspicions have grown among those who fear that the parish system in England is being eroded. In response, campaign groups such as 'Save the Parish' have drawn large amounts of attention in the national press. Save the Parish has also successfully gotten over 150 of its supporters elected to the General Synod<sup>22</sup> (essentially the Church of England's parliamentary assembly). Conversely, other organizations such as the Gregory Centre for Church Multiplication, an organization led by the Church of England Bishop of Islington to support church teams and dioceses in church planting, have raised their ambitions for new ways of doing church, not least through the project Myriad. Here the Gregory Centre is pledging to support more church plants, seeking to create 10,000 new worshipping communities by 2031 (this is separate from the 10,000 new communities set out in the Church of England's vision and strategy for the 2020s).<sup>23</sup>

Despite all this, there is a lack of evidence for the success of either of the latter two approaches working in isolation. Whether popular or not, the reality is attendance has declined in parish churches over the last few decades. This is not to say that it is the fault of the parish church system, or even in many places its exercising of ministry. There are many cultural and societal influences on this trend.<sup>24</sup> But it is also unfair to blame other movements from within the Church who seek to do ministry in a different way. How parish churches work, and how ministry is offered, has to change according to the context in which it is set, with each new generation. Ways in which we live, socialize, communicate, work and so on, have evolved. This observation is one of the strengths of the *Mission Shaped Church* report (though I think it overplays the extent of the response required from the church, as is demonstrated in the final section of this paper highlighting the importance of place and the local in the success of cathedral mission and ministry). As a result, though, in some cases this has meant that a number of parish churches are just not sustainable or a good focus for resources, both human and financial. For example, in a parish population of 150, it would be impossible and impractical to resource with a full-time stipendiary priest costing upwards of £60,000 a year to its parishioners.

<sup>21</sup>Resource, Strategy and Development Unit of the Church of England, 'Amalgamating Parishes and Declining Clergy Numbers', 28 July 2016, p. 6, [www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/amalgamating\\_parishes\\_and\\_declining\\_clergy\\_numbers\\_final.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/amalgamating_parishes_and_declining_clergy_numbers_final.pdf) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>22</sup>Save the Parish, 'Save the Parish Celebrates First Birthday as Leaders Move for More Change in CofE', 3 August 2022, <https://savetheparish.com/2022/08/03/save-the-parish-celebrate-first-birthday-as-leaders-move-for-more-change-in-cofe/> (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>23</sup>M. Davies, 'Clarification: Not 10,000 but 20,000 New Lay-led Churches; Not a Strategy but a Vision', 9 July 2021, [www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/16-july/news/uk/clarification-not-10-000-but-20-000-not-a-strategy-but-a-vision](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/16-july/news/uk/clarification-not-10-000-but-20-000-not-a-strategy-but-a-vision) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>24</sup>D. Goodhew (ed.), *Church Growth in Britain: 1980 to the Present* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

It is also important to state that, if reversing this decline is desirable, the parish system is a *result* of church growth, rather than a necessary ingredient. England was not created with a parish system. The parish system was established as the Church grew, initially out of minster churches and monasteries, which planted new churches as need increased. Originally known as 'field churches' (those in the field away from their mother churches), parish churches increased in number in medieval times with the parish system then being formalized as the general population rose.<sup>25</sup> Similar phenomena can be observed in the Victorian era which saw a surge of new church building (or planting). Between 1851 and 1875, for example, nearly 2500 churches were built or rebuilt.<sup>26</sup> These new churches were built/planted because existing parish church buildings in towns and cities were either too small or simply did not exist in areas of rising population. A result of population growth and the influx of migration into urban areas, rather than the inspiration for it, the churches that were built later became parish churches, rather than the other way round.

But just as parish churches are a result of growth rather than a necessary ingredient, it is hard to find evidence that suggests the Fresh Expressions or the modern church planting movements will be successful models for growth on their own. Not least because currently both rely heavily on central church funding, ironically raised in part from the proceeds of parish churches.<sup>27</sup> Though it may be unfair to judge the success of these models at this stage in their life against parish churches, some of which have existed for many centuries, there are few examples that have become self-supporting and sustainable. Indeed, during the Church of England's gathering of the General Synod in July 2022, it was accepted that many of the SDF-funded projects since 2015, many of which fit into this category, had not met or were not meeting the targets for growth that were set as a condition for their funding.<sup>28</sup> At a time of ever scarcer resources, as well as increased division, this is a concern.

As has been demonstrated above, it is hard to argue that any of these approaches in isolation will lead to the sort of church growth needed to reverse the Church of England's numerical decline. As a result, binary approaches to church growth must be resisted. But this does not mean that all aforementioned approaches to church growth should be dismissed. Though all have weaknesses, none are fruitless and all undoubtedly result in at least some new people becoming Christian. They are also not necessarily incompatible. For example, though some approaches struggle in isolation, some Fresh Expressions that have arisen out of, and remained embedded

<sup>25</sup>N. Orme, 'Origins and the Parish', in *Going to Church in Medieval England* (New York: Yale University Press, 2021), pp. 5-23.

<sup>26</sup>English Heritage, 'Victorians: Religion', [www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/story-of-england/victorian/religion/](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/story-of-england/victorian/religion/) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>27</sup>The Venerable Luke Miller, Archdeacon of London, talks about this in more depth in his 2020 blog post, 'We Are All Visionaries Now', <http://frlukemiller.blogspot.com/2020/11/we-are-all-visionaries-now.html> (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>28</sup>T. Wyatt, 'General Synod Digest: Strategic Development Funding Results to Be Reviewed for 2024', *Church Times*, 15 July 2022, [www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/15-july/news/uk/general-synod-digest-low-income-and-strategic-funding-results-to-be-reviewed-for-2024](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/15-july/news/uk/general-synod-digest-low-income-and-strategic-funding-results-to-be-reviewed-for-2024) (accessed 10 October 2022).



in, the life of the parish church have led to growth.<sup>29</sup> However, the strongest example of the last twenty years that has demonstrated the fallacy of a polarized approach to church growth is that of the growth of the English cathedral. We will now go on to discuss why.

### Cathedral Growth Disrupts a Polarized Approach to Church Growth

Evidence from Church of England cathedrals strongly challenge any polarized or binary approach to church growth. Though some have the legal status of a parish church, none are simply parochial in their ministry, all having a particular public and diocesan focus as the mother church of their diocese. At the same time, cathedrals are very much *not* a new expression of church. Cathedrals have existed in England from the earliest days of the Church in this land.<sup>30</sup> Though their worship has evolved over the centuries, the tradition they express today is almost uniform across the country. They are the seats, the *cathedra*, of the bishop, and thus possess a charism that is replicated in some way across all churches under the bishop's oversight. And despite being neither simply a parish church, nor being either a new plant or a new expression of church, cathedrals have seen consistent growth over many years.

This growth has given rise to a small but growing field of literature on the study of cathedrals, with contributions from academic researchers and reflective practitioners alike.<sup>31</sup> This literature has done much to give colour to the life and practice, mission and ministry of cathedrals, while also giving some context to the data collected, not least by the Church of England Data Services Unit.<sup>32</sup> Much of this growth has been experienced (and recorded) in the twenty or so years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, and despite the obvious shock and considerable blow the pandemic brought, it is those 'normal' years that this paper makes its argument from. This is not to disregard the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life of cathedrals. The pandemic's effect was significant both in terms of numerical

<sup>29</sup>B. Jackson, *What Makes Churches Grow?* (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), p. xv.

<sup>30</sup>Canterbury Cathedral, '1400 years of History', [www.canterbury-cathedral.org/heritage/history/cathedral-history-in-a-nutshell/](http://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/heritage/history/cathedral-history-in-a-nutshell/) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>31</sup>D. Danziger, *The Cathedral: Behind Open Doors, Talking with People Who Give their Lives to a Cathedral* (London: Viking, 1989); L. Francis (ed.), *Anglican Cathedrals in Modern Life: The Science of Cathedral Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); J. Holmes and B. Kautzer, *Strand 3: Structures. Report on Strand 4a. Cathedrals, Greater Churches and the Growth of the Church* (Durham: Church Growth Research Programme, 2013), accessed from: [www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/progress\\_findings\\_reports](http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/progress_findings_reports); I.M. MacKenzie (ed.), *Cathedrals Now: Their Use and Place in Society* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1996); J.A. Muskett, *Shop Window, Flagship, Common Ground: Metaphor in Cathedral Congregations* (London: SCM Press, 2019); S. Platten and C. Lewis (eds.), *Flagships of the Spirit: Cathedrals in Society* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998); S. Platten and C. Lewis (eds.), *Dreaming Spires? Cathedrals in a New Age* (London: SPCK, 2006); Theos & The Grubb Institute, *Spiritual Capital: The Present and Future of English Cathedrals* (a research report commissioned by the Foundation for Church Leadership and the Association of English Cathedrals; London: Theos, 2012); see also a special edition of *Theology* dedicated to cathedrals, vol. 118.6, October 2015.

<sup>32</sup>The Church of England's Data Services Unit collects, analyses and publishes data relating to a wide range of aspects of the Church of England, including cathedral statistics. These can be found at: [www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/key-areas-research#cathedral-statistics](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/key-areas-research#cathedral-statistics)



attendance, as well as financial sustainability.<sup>33</sup> However, it is to argue that it is more fruitful to observe what is typical for cathedrals in 'normal' conditions. To reinforce this, signs of a return to pre-pandemic buoyancy are already being seen in the statistics.<sup>34</sup> Though it may be some time before a full recovery is made, cathedrals are re-growing again.

So what does typical cathedral growth of recent years look like? Let us turn to the evidence. Between 2001 and 2011 not only did the number of adults attending cathedrals on Sundays grow, but they also grew as a proportion of total Church of England attendances from 1.8 per cent to 2.1 per cent.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, attendance at cathedrals by children also grew as a proportion of Church of England Sunday attendance from 1.4 per cent to 1.6 per cent.<sup>36</sup> But this growth in cathedral worship attendance is not only true for Sundays. Midweek between 2001 and 2013 overall attendance grew by an enormous 268 per cent from 5600 per week to 15,000, with the number of children growing from 300 to 4500.<sup>37</sup> Looking at growth more recently, in 2018 and 2019 weekly attendance at cathedral worship was around 37,000, with the total in 2019 reaching 37,300.<sup>38</sup> This attendance total is 13 per cent larger than it was a decade prior in 2009.<sup>39</sup> As well as regular Sunday and weekday worship attendance, cathedrals have seen growth in festival attendance too. Attendance during Holy Week in 2019, for example, was 93,000, which is a 4 per cent increase since records began back in 2014. Services during Advent too, including carol services and nativity plays, rose by 5 per cent to 631,000 in the same period.<sup>40</sup> As demonstrated above, however, the greatest area of growth for cathedral worship can be seen in the midweek statistics. Between 2009 and 2019 weekly attendance has grown by 35 per cent to just shy of 20,000.<sup>41</sup>

The growth figures from cathedrals over the last twenty years have been incredibly encouraging. But that growth has not been even across all cathedrals. For example, according to a 2013 study by Holmes and Kautzer for the Centre for Church Growth in Durham, a difference in growth between regions was noted between 2008 and 2012. What they found was a 34 per cent growth in attendance at 9 cathedrals in London and the south-east, yet a 2 per cent decrease in attendance

<sup>33</sup>J. Wheble, 'St Paul's Cathedral Could Close without Tourism Cash', *BBC News*, 13 May 2021, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-56997142](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-56997142) (accessed 21 July 2023); R. Vinter, 'York Minster Faces Deficit of £2.3m After COVID Closures in 2020', *The Guardian*, 21 June 2021, [www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/21/york-minster-faces-deficit-of-23m-after-covid-closures-in-2020](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/21/york-minster-faces-deficit-of-23m-after-covid-closures-in-2020) (accessed 21 July 2023).

<sup>34</sup>Church of England Data Services Unit, *Cathedral Statistics 2021*, [www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/cathedral-statistics-2021.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/cathedral-statistics-2021.pdf) (accessed 21 July 2023).

<sup>35</sup>L. Francis and J. Muskett, 'Shaping Cathedral Studies: A Scientific Approach', in L. Francis (ed.), *Anglican Cathedrals in Modern Life: The Science of Cathedral Studies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1-20 (4).

<sup>36</sup>Francis and Muskett, 'Shaping Cathedral Studies', p. 4.

<sup>37</sup>Francis and Muskett, 'Shaping Cathedral Studies', p. 5.

<sup>38</sup>Church of England Data Services Unit, *Cathedral Statistics 2019*, p. 2, [www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/Cathedral%20Statistics%202019.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-11/Cathedral%20Statistics%202019.pdf) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>39</sup>Church of England Data Services Unit, *Cathedral Statistics 2019*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup>Church of England Data Services Unit, *Cathedral Statistics 2019*, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup>Church of England Data Services Unit, *Cathedral Statistics 2019*, p. 7.

across the remaining 33.<sup>42</sup> A similar disparity has been noted when analysing growth across different types of cathedrals. For example, cathedrals identified as 'international' (including Durham, York, St Paul's London, Canterbury, Salisbury and Winchester) saw a much greater rise in attendance, a percentage increase of 24 per cent, than cathedrals with other classifications over the same period. The next highest percentage increase of a classification was the medium-sized market town cathedral, accounting for seven cathedrals, seeing a weekly attendance increase of 8 per cent. Of the six categories devised in the study, two categories registered a decline in attendance, accounting for only 14 cathedrals. However, only one of these categories failed to show an increase in *weekly* attendance, implying that any decline is largely in Sunday attendance. Further to this, evidence suggests cathedral growth can happen anywhere. Neither situated in London or the south-east, or an international cathedral, Bradford saw an average weekly increase from 214 in 2005 to 610 in 2010, an increase of more than 50 per cent.

### Cathedrals: A Mixed Practice Model

So cathedral growth demonstrates there is no need for polarization or binary approaches to growth. A church need neither be solely a parish church, nor a plant, nor a fresh expression to grow. What then is distinctive about their ministry and practice? Firstly, it is important to note that the way cathedrals are structured, funded and run are different. For example, cathedrals always have at least three stipendiary clergy: a dean and two residentiary canons. These are funded in all 42 English cathedrals by the Church Commissioners, because though some may have parish functions, they exist to serve the whole diocese in which they are set. In that way, cathedrals are the physical manifestation of the ministry of the diocesan bishop. As was stated in the landmark 1994 report on the life and work of cathedrals, *Heritage and Renewal* (commissioned by the Archbishops' Council), cathedrals are 'the seat of the bishop and a centre for worship and mission'.<sup>43</sup> This is the core purpose shared by all cathedrals in England.

Being the seat of the bishop is something that is unique in relation to other churches within a diocese. In very practical terms, it means that within the cathedral there *is* a *cathedra* (Latin for seat), belonging to the bishop. In the Early Church this was the focus around which Christians gathered en masse to receive the teaching of the bishop who taught from his seat. Nowadays the presence of the *cathedra* reminds the Church (and the bishop!) of their office as a teacher, while also reinstating the importance of education, teaching, and learning in the life of a cathedral church. The presence of the *cathedra*, and therefore the ministry of the bishop, also speaks of the connection of the cathedral to the wider life of the local church. This is also manifest in the cathedral ministry *to* the wider diocese. Often framed as places that resource local parishes, cathedrals offer clergy and congregations a place of retreat as well as theological refreshment through events, teaching days and lectures. Through the appointment of honorary positions such as

<sup>42</sup>Holmes and Kautzer, *Strand 3: Structures*, p. 25. All following quotations from Holmes and Kautzer refer to p. 25 of this text.

<sup>43</sup>Archbishops Council, *Heritage and Renewal* (London: Church House Publishing, 1994), p. 18.

canon theologians, cathedrals also play a particular role in providing opportunities for reflection and the deepening of faith for those in their diocese.<sup>44</sup> So within the ministry and practice of the cathedral, there is something important about being a resource beyond itself.

As well as the distinctiveness of their ministry within the diocese, cathedrals are also distinctive in the way their leadership and decision-making is structured. Led by a dean and chapter, rather than a Parochial Church Council (PCC) or another form of leadership grouping, the dean (the first among equals) oversees the running of a cathedral church alongside this group of ordained and lay colleagues known as canons, appointed by the bishop. As mentioned above, among those canons are always at least two residentiary canons who are full-time stipendiaries, and have particular briefs for their ministry within the cathedral. There may be, for example, canon pastors who oversee the pastoral life and ‘occasional offices’, or a canon precentor who oversees the worship. Almost all residentiary canons are ordained, though there is one recent and significant example of a lay residentiary canon in Paula Gooder as Chancellor of St Paul’s in London, overseeing learning and education. Most lay members of chapter (those who are not residentiary) are not required to be regular members of the worshipping community as a condition of appointment (as they might be on a PCC – the closest comparative ecclesiastical body). Instead, often experts in fields important to the life and function of the cathedral, as well as people of influence and experience in the local area, they are appointed specifically because of the gifts they bring. Because of the status of cathedrals and the civic and public role they play in the life of their diocese (often closely aligned to their county), cathedrals are able to appoint lay people with good professional or societal reputation. Cathedrals are also required, as set out in the Cathedral Measure 2021 (a part of English law), to have Chief Officers.<sup>45</sup> That is, they are required to have particular expertise in the areas of administration and finance enabling professionalism in the running of the cathedral as an organization, freeing the clergy to focus on their particular ministries.

First among these ministries is the leading of worship. As centres for worship, cathedrals ensure a daily provision of services throughout the year. Their primary purpose is to be a ‘place where people gather to celebrate the Church’s liturgy through words, music, silence, symbol, and sacramental signs’.<sup>46</sup> Cathedral worship is punctuated by the rhythm of daily morning and evening prayer, and often a daily Eucharist. Cathedrals have become especially known for the singing of evening prayer in the form of Choral Evensong. It is the latter service that has seen the increase in midweek worship attendance. The worshipping life of cathedrals are mostly characterized by traditional forms of worship. But alternative forms of

<sup>44</sup>Diocese of Lichfield, ‘Sharon to Be Cathedral’s New Canon Theologian’, 9 July 2020, [www.lichfield.anglican.org/sharon-to-be-cathedrals-new-canon-theologian.php](http://www.lichfield.anglican.org/sharon-to-be-cathedrals-new-canon-theologian.php) (accessed 10 October 2022). St John’s College Cambridge, ‘The Revd Canon Mark Oakley Appointed as New Canon Theologian for Wakefield Cathedral’, 27 November 2019, [www.joh.cam.ac.uk/revd-canon-mark-oakley-appointed-new-canon-theologian-wakefield-cathedral](http://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/revd-canon-mark-oakley-appointed-new-canon-theologian-wakefield-cathedral) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>45</sup>Section 19 of the Cathedral Measure (2021), [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/2021/2/section/19/enacted](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/2021/2/section/19/enacted) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>46</sup>S. Platten, ‘Cathedrals – What’s the Point?’, in S. Platten (ed.), *Holy Ground: Cathedrals in the Twenty-first Century* (Durham: Sacristy Press, 2017), p. 11.

worship, services that sit outside the traditional daily offices and Eucharist, do exist. Canterbury Cathedral, for example, until a recent staff change, ran Sacred Space, an 'open and inclusive' student-focused gathering 'exploring questions of life through music, discussion and stillness followed by food'.<sup>47</sup> Though not a self-defined Fresh Expression, Sacred Space, it shares many Fresh Expression characteristics, and certainly contributes to the rich mixed practice approach lived out in cathedral life. Notable examples of self-defined Fresh Expressions of worship come in the form of 'Messy Cathedral' – Messy Church, but in a cathedral. Recent examples of these Fresh Expressions can be found in cathedrals as urban and as famous as St Paul's in London, and as relatively unknown and rural as Hereford.<sup>48</sup> There are no doubt many other examples of alternative forms of worship or Fresh Expressions happening in cathedrals. However, these have witnessed decline since records began in 2013, from 14,700 to 8500 weekly attendants in 2019.<sup>49</sup> This in part is due to some cathedrals ceasing to register alternative services, though it is not clear why this is the case. Part of this may be due simply to less alternative services taking place. But it may also be due to the issue of self-definition – for example, whether the cathedral defined a service as alternative or a Fresh Expression. More research is needed in this area, but nonetheless, worship both traditional and non-traditional exist within the rich mixed life of cathedral practice.

In cathedral life, mission is central. In the 1994 report *Heritage and Renewal*, a still influential report, five marks of cathedrals' missional ministry were set out: worship, teaching, service, evangelism and witness. The first two have been discussed above, and in many ways the other three are covered there too, but it is worth being more specific here. For example, the mission to serve is expressed through all cathedrals in their engagement and relationships with civic authorities. The same, too, with their inter-faith engagement and projects with community groups supporting vulnerable members of society. When it comes to evangelism, cathedrals have a special opportunity, not least with the large number of visitors they receive. Some cathedrals have also created Canon Missioners as a way of developing a stronger evangelistic emphasis to their mission. Cathedrals have, since earliest times, been a witness to the Christian faith just simply in their physical presence. Often among the largest buildings in an area, as well as centrally located (and in cases such as Lincoln, at the highest point in a town or a city), cathedrals are stone witnesses to the God they exist for. But more than this, they witness too, in their commitment to welcoming worshippers, visitors and pilgrims alike. They also witness to the Christian faith through the role they play in the national life as focuses for historical events. For example, most recently the national service at St Paul's Cathedral for the late Queen's Platinum Jubilee, which was televised as one of the main events of the weekend. In all these ways, cathedrals are missional places.

The five marks of missional cathedral ministry are aspects of ministry that unite all cathedrals in the land, but each cathedral also ministers to its individual context.

<sup>47</sup>From Sacred Space's Twitter profile (no other web presence currently exists), <https://twitter.com/sacredspace?s=11&t=Mem1yr4MiaUU-png0QqgmQ> (accessed 21 July 2023).

<sup>48</sup>[www.stpauls.co.uk/whats-on/messy-cathedral](http://www.stpauls.co.uk/whats-on/messy-cathedral) (accessed 21 July 2023); [www.herefordcathedral.org/event/messy-church-goes-outside](http://www.herefordcathedral.org/event/messy-church-goes-outside) (accessed 21 July 2023).

<sup>49</sup>Church of England Data Services Unit, *Cathedral Statistics 2019*, p. 25.

Thus, different practices and manifestations of ministry arise in different places. This is one of the strengths of cathedrals for growth, that they are places big enough (both literally and spiritually) to contain such diversity of practice. As noted above, cathedrals have played host to a range of worship styles, not just those traditional to the Church of England, but alternative styles too. There has also been the creation of online communities, such as the one at Durham Cathedral that grew out of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown.<sup>50</sup> Cathedrals also have a particular focus on education that goes beyond just the teaching ministry of the bishop. A study in 2012 demonstrated that for a significant number of cathedrals, education – both faith-related, school-related and visitor-related – was a core part of their mission.<sup>51</sup> Such activities included adult education programmes and youth-focused teaching and activities. Cathedrals also sought to offer experiences to schools that tied in with their curriculums. For visitors, education has taken various forms, from regular guided tours to permanent exhibitions on both the history of the building, but also the Christian faith.

Another dynamic of cathedral ministry springs from their especially public-facing vocation. This public-facing vocation is something all cathedrals share, but the particular expression is always rooted locally. In Norwich cathedral, for example, the redesigning of Norfolk's coastline was debated within its walls.<sup>52</sup> In Truro cathedral, the particularities of Cornish history and culture fundamentally determined the nature of its ministry and vocation.<sup>53</sup> But cathedrals are not just places where local matters are discussed and debated, but also places where local matters are celebrated and remembered. At Durham cathedral, for example, there is an annual celebration for the Durham Miners Gala, a gathering of trade union activists and supporters that is regularly attended by about 1000 people.<sup>54</sup> In Manchester cathedral in 2018 families of victims and residents of the city gathered to remember the lives lost in the arena bombing a year earlier where 22 people died.<sup>55</sup> That cathedrals are places where such public issues can be discussed and discerned as well as celebrated and remembered, and not just by religious people, but by civic society as a whole, is an indication of the public understanding of them as places of common ground.<sup>56</sup> In other words, cathedrals are experienced by many as public or common places, for all people no matter which creed or political persuasion, to discuss issues affecting society, to celebrate them and remember them. It is this understanding of cathedrals as common ground that lies behind the 'panoply of stakeholders who believe the local cathedral to be *their* cathedral'.<sup>57</sup>

Another aspect of the cathedrals public-facing vocation and practice that cannot be ignored is its ability to attract large numbers of visitors. In 2019, the year before

<sup>50</sup>[www.durhamcathedral.co.uk/worship-music/community-of-prayer](http://www.durhamcathedral.co.uk/worship-music/community-of-prayer) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>51</sup>Tania ap Siôn and Owen Edwards, 'Cathedral Engagement with Young People', *Rural Theology* 10.2 (2012), pp. 179-94 (183-91), DOI: 10.1558/ruth.v10i2.179.

<sup>52</sup>Platten, 'Cathedrals – What's the Point?', p. 17.

<sup>53</sup>L. Barley, 'Truro Cathedral: Spires of Hope in the Duchy Peninsula', *Theology*, 118.6 (2015), pp. 404-12.

<sup>54</sup>S. Oliver, 'The Cathedral and Rooted Growth', in Platten, *Holy Ground*, p. 29.

<sup>55</sup>BBC News, 'Manchester Attack: Hundreds Gather to Remember Victims', 22 May 2018, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-44197949](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-44197949) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>56</sup>Muskett, *Shop Window*, pp. 86-107.

<sup>57</sup>Platten, 'Cathedrals – What's the Point?', p. 17.

the COVID-19 pandemic, 10 million people visited cathedrals. The 2012 Theos report *Spiritual Capital* – commissioned to better understand the life of cathedrals and their contribution to public life – stated that though such figures (similar in 2019 to what they were in 2012) confirm cathedrals as successful tourist destinations to those who visited, they were also more than that. They found that cathedrals often conveyed a ‘sense of the spiritual and sacred even to those who are on the margins of Christian faith, or who stand some way beyond’.<sup>58</sup> Cathedrals do of course attract those uninterested in spiritual experience, and employ various methods for engaging with that demographic. Art exhibitions and installations are well used as a means of drawing visitors. Though not always explicitly religious, they tend to provoke reflection on systems of belief around areas of life, death, hope. The ‘Leaves of Trees’ exhibition is one such recent example.<sup>59</sup> Other methods, those perhaps less reflective, have proved controversial though. In 2019 Norwich cathedral was criticized for constructing a helter-skelter in the nave,<sup>60</sup> and in the same year Rochester cathedral installed a crazy golf course.<sup>61</sup>

With visitors in such numbers, whether coming for spiritual purposes or to play a few holes, many cathedrals have felt a prayerful and pastoral presence necessary. In a significant number of cathedrals this has been established through chaplains who are present during the working day. These chaplains are often volunteers, mostly retired clergy, lay readers or other trained lay-people. Their role is to care pastorally for visitors, offer public prayer, and on occasion lead worship. It is a role that supplements the work of the Deans and residentiary clergy who often have a particular brief that means that they are not able to be on the floor of their cathedrals on a regular day-to-day basis.

### Cathedrals as a Model for Mixed Ecology

It is clear, then, that cathedral ministry and practice is mixed and varied. They are neither simply exercising a parochial ministry, and neither are they solely new or fresh expressions of church (though services in some places may be described as a ‘Fresh Expression’). They are also not modern-day church plants. Yet there is a clear indicator of sustained growth as a result of this model. Though it is difficult to discern at this stage whether the mix and variety of cathedral practice is a key driver of this growth, it is at least clear that it is doing them no harm. Within the life of cathedrals the diversity of practice, offering different opportunities for entry into the Church, is rather a strength. One only need glance at the statistics for growth in attendance at midweek services to see an indicator of this. Could this mixed approach within cathedral ministry and practice then provide a useful model or framework for growth in the Church of England? These themes will be explored in this section.

<sup>58</sup>Theos & Grubb Institute (2012), *Spiritual Capital*, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup>Peterborough Cathedral, ‘Message of Hope as Leaves Lie across Cathedral Floor’, 1 December 2021, [www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk/newsarticle.aspx/41/leaves-of-the-trees](http://www.peterborough-cathedral.org.uk/newsarticle.aspx/41/leaves-of-the-trees) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>60</sup>BBC News, ‘Norwich Cathedral Helter-skelter “Is a Mistake”’, 9 August 2019, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-49292493](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-49292493) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>61</sup>BBC News, ‘Rochester Cathedral’s Crazy Golf Course Sparks Row’, 30 July 2019, [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-49162116](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-49162116) (accessed 10 October 2022).



A mixed approach to ministry is something that has come into prominence in the Church of England especially since the 2004 report *Mission Shaped Church* with its encouragement of Fresh Expressions of church and church planting.<sup>62</sup> Into this development of the Church's life new terms have been introduced, most notably those of 'mixed economy' and 'mixed ecology'. Remarkably, for terms that have become so central in the life of the Church of England, there has been little significant theological work in defining or explaining them. This is particularly true of the newer of the two terms, 'mixed ecology', that appears to have replaced the earlier one. These terms will now be taken in order.

Mixed *economy* was actually a term introduced into the Church of England by former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, in a General Synod speech in 2003.<sup>63</sup> In his speech, Williams referenced the Anglican Church in Wales where they used to talk about a 'mixed economy . . . that is, one which is learning how to cope with diverse forms and rhythms of worshipping life'. For Williams, these diverse rhythms and expressions of the church were a necessary response (though not an exclusive alternative) to where the parish system wasn't 'making an impact'. For Williams, though, this mixed economy meant a variety of practices operating alongside each other. The model was not there to replace the existing parish system. In 'all kinds of places', he noted, the parish system was 'working remarkably'. But, he recognized, due to the changes in modern society, there were 'some questions' that the parish system was unable to answer, and in large part because it was never meant to.

For Williams, becoming a mixed economy church simply meant recognizing where the 'Church appears' and having a 'willingness and skill to work with it'. In other words, God is at work within communities and people are receiving the 'invitation of Jesus' and 'recognising it in each other', so if the Church was to be faithful to God, it must recognize that these communities are a part of the Church. For Williams this was important, not least to ensure accountability. This meant, in a very pragmatic way, recognizing the Church was already a mixed economy. As this became a reality in subsequent years, and the *Mission Shaped Church* report ensured that this was the case, further moves were made to define the 'mixed economy' as it was now experienced. Michael Moynagh's definition may be more of an aspiration in some places than a definition, but he defines mixed economy thus:

a setting within the Church of England where emerging churches [fresh expressions, new church plants] exist alongside inherited churches [parish churches] in a relationship of mutual respect and support.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup>Mission and Public Affairs Council, *Mission Shaped Church*.

<sup>63</sup>R. Williams, 'Archbishop's Presidential Address - General Synod, York, July 2003', <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1826/archbishops-presidential-address-general-synod-york-july-2003.html> (accessed 10 October 2022). All following quotations from Rowan Williams refer to this text.

<sup>64</sup>M. Moynagh, 'Do We Need a Mixed Economy?', in Louise Nelstrop and Martyn Percy (eds.), *Evaluating Fresh Expressions: Explorations in Emerging Church* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008), pp. 177-86 (177).



For Moynagh, a mixed economy could be set within a single parish, or a benefice, deanery or even whole diocese. Similar to Williams, Moynagh's definition seeks to recognize a reality of different worshipping styles and rhythms within the life of the Church while encouraging mutual flourishing rather than supersession.

In recent years, 'mixed economy' as a term seems to have dropped almost entirely out of use. In its place official documents now talk of mixed *ecology*, and in none more so than in the Church of England's *Vision and Strategy for the 2020s* where a 'mixed ecology church' is to become 'the norm'.<sup>65</sup> Here 'mixed ecology' is described as the 'flourishing of church and ministry in our parishes, and in other communities of faith through things like 'church planting, fresh expressions of church, and chaplaincy and online'.<sup>66</sup> Essentially this is a vision of a Church of England where a variety of modes of practice exist alongside each other. Looking at the General Synod Vision and Strategy papers written by the Archbishop of York Stephen Cottrell (by whom the term 'mixed ecology' is said to be 'coined'<sup>67</sup>) there is strong similarity to the earlier notion of 'mixed economy'. Cottrell himself admits that 'this is not a new aspiration' for the Church of England and that it builds on the *Mission Shaped Church* report.<sup>68</sup> He also references Rowan Williams' point about recognizing the many ways in which the 'reality of the "Church" can exist'.<sup>69</sup>

The only major difference, then, seems to be the choice of operative noun: ecology over economy. And though this may be preferred in an age where care for the environment is rightly more central, and thus the imagery evoked by 'ecology' is more appealing than that evoked by 'economy', the semantic shift is not without implications. For example, though economy may have less obviously attractive connotations, it does at least carry with it the suggestion of deliberate action. In other words, it both recognizes as well as implies an agency present in the choices made when ordering and resourcing the life of the Church. In contrast, ecology with its connotations of the natural world perhaps falsely implies something more akin to organic development, free of intervention. As described above, this is not wholly true in the life of the Church, especially when it comes to its ordering and resourcing. Ecology as a term, though, does more appropriately fit with the sense of the Church as an ecosystem, and this appears to be evident with the contextual extension (rather than substantive change) of the make-up of the Church with the inclusion of digital forms. These having come into prominence during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. As well as this, ecology as a term does more firmly root the Church in the reality of place, more deliberately implying the locatedness of its life. This is something that, as will be seen below, is particularly important to cathedral growth.

<sup>65</sup>Church of England, [www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/emerging-church-england/vision-and-strategy](http://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/emerging-church-england/vision-and-strategy), *Vision and Strategy* page, 2021 (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>66</sup>Church of England, *Vision and Strategy*.

<sup>67</sup>*Church Times*, 'Mixed Ecology Church: The Shock of the New', 9 July 2021, [www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/9-july/features/features/mixed-ecology-church-the-shock-of-the-new](http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/9-july/features/features/mixed-ecology-church-the-shock-of-the-new) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>68</sup>S. Cottrell, 'General Synod – Vision and Strategy', 2021, p. 2, [www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/GS%202238%20Vision%20and%20Strategy%20Update.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/GS%202238%20Vision%20and%20Strategy%20Update.pdf) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>69</sup>Cottrell, 'General Synod – Vision and Strategy', p. 3.

Nevertheless, Cottrell seeks to cement ‘mixed ecology’ as something authentically Christian. He roots it in the practice of early Church as documented in the book Acts with the conversion of Hellenists in Antioch.<sup>70</sup> He argues that the Church has always adapted to its culture with the purpose of enabling every person ‘to have accessible discipleship pathways into a community of faith’.<sup>71</sup> For Cottrell the same has always been true in the Church of England, and as evidence cites the various parishes, religious communities, chaplaincies and church plants through daughter churches. He argues that Fresh Expressions, resource church plants and the like are simply examples of the ecology of the Church developing.<sup>72</sup>

So where do cathedrals fit into this? Interestingly they do not feature in the examples of official documents, yet it appears they are solid examples of a mixed economy/ecology themselves. In reality, whether they are designated as such is not important. But what is, is the mixedness of practice that is present in cathedrals. Implicit within this mixed practice, then, is a recognition that different expressions of church are necessary to ‘impact’ on the different communities they seek to serve. As mentioned above, cathedrals respond missionally to a whole range of networks and groups. Be it the regular Sunday service, opportunities to worship midweek, services for civic institutions, schools, charities, or even – in the case of Durham Cathedral and others as mentioned above – the formation of online communities. Cathedrals, too, have a remarkable reach and attraction into the lives of the unchurched, as seen not least in the phenomenal visitor numbers. One of the charisms of mixed ecology ministry, according to a Church of England study, *The Mixed Ecologist*, is ‘a desire to reach people . . . who will not step over the threshold of the inherited church’.<sup>73</sup> This is something cathedral ministry and practice facilitates in all manner of ways, and not just through visiting, but also cultural, social and educational events all discussed above.

So if cathedrals are indeed positive examples of mixed ecology, and are also sustainable and growing examples of church, what are their distinctive characteristics that might add to this mixed ecology model, and what lessons might they offer mixed ecology as a whole? Well one of the key characteristics of cathedrals, despite their variety of practices and ministry within their contexts, is that they are all fundamentally rooted in ‘the local’ and place, and that ‘local’ and place in them. The most basic example of the former is that almost all cathedrals take their working title from their locality (the only exception being St Paul’s Cathedral in London). Of the latter, Platten argues in his 2021 essay on cathedrals, the character of towns and cities are often encapsulated in their cathedral churches.<sup>74</sup> He refers to examples such ‘the celebrated photograph of St Paul’s Cathedral in the 1940s during the Blitz, and of Coventry after the Baedeker raid’, the ‘logo of the former Norwich Union Insurance Company’, the crown spire of Newcastle Cathedral acting as an emblem’

<sup>70</sup>Cottrell, ‘General Synod – Vision and Strategy’, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup>Cottrell, ‘General Synod – Vision and Strategy’, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup>Cottrell, ‘General Synod – Vision and Strategy’, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup>Church of England Ministry Division, ‘The Mixed Ecologists: Experiences of Mixed Ecology Ministry in the Church of England’ as part of the *Living Ministry* project, 2021, p. 5, [www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Focussed%20Study%2020%20-%20The%20Mixed%20Ecologists.pdf](http://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Focussed%20Study%2020%20-%20The%20Mixed%20Ecologists.pdf) (accessed 10 October 2022).

<sup>74</sup>Platten, ‘Cathedrals – What’s the Point?’, p. 9.

for the city, as well as other examples.<sup>75</sup> One could equally point to cathedrals in local popular culture, such as York City football team's nickname 'The Minstermen', not to mention the names of various other sports teams, countless coffee shops and pubs, as well as innumerable local brands. Cathedrals, then, are undoubtedly icons and symbols of their local towns and cities. But this hasn't happened by accident, there is a deeper reason. Cathedrals are not *just* symbolic of their locality, because in reality they are shaped *by* it. They are living buildings, formed by the places and peoples amongst which they are set. They are a result of communities past and present and therefore speak of something more than just a building, but of a shared history, a common heritage. A mixed ecology church, then, should it want to learn from the growth of cathedrals, would do well to root itself in 'the local', in place, in a contextually appropriate way.

### Conclusion – Towards a New Ecology for Growth?

The Church of England is going for growth, and cathedrals are leading the charge. They are a rare example of a model of church that is growing and they should be celebrated. But growth is needed throughout the Church of England, so how can the rest join in? This paper has argued that by first, and crucially, moving away from ideological polarization. Church growth will not be sustainably or healthily achieved with an either/or binary approach. Such polarization obstructs church growth, denying space for practical conversations regarding the very real and difficult decisions on the allocation and use of finite resources. In its place must be a mixed practice approach such as the like English cathedrals so successfully demonstrate. This mixed practice approach must be flexibly responsive to the needs of the community it serves. It must be confident in its own identity, but be open to communicating in new ways and seeking to create space for those not already engaged or aware. It must also have its identity rooted in the place, people and community it exists to serve. Its mission and ministry must always be locally discerned. This is a model for a mixed ecology church that could and should become the norm. To create this new ecology for growth, however, existing approaches to growth must change, and financial models must be reassessed. For example, parish churches, including those within benefices, must be enabled to embrace mixed practice more broadly. But also, church plants and Fresh Expressions must be encouraged to understand and root themselves more intentionally in local identity and place. This might be best achieved by being rooted in, or at least in close relationship and partnership with, the local parish. Whatever the case, neither should seek or wish the disappearance of the other. Should this new ecology for growth emerge, patterns of cathedral growth suggest that the Church of England will continue to be a Christian presence in every community for many generations to come.

<sup>75</sup>Platten, 'Cathedrals – What's the Point?', p. 9.