



Resourcing churches in the Diocese of Bristol

In 2018, the Diocese of Bristol planted two “resourcing churches”, St Nicholas, Bristol and Pattern Church, Swindon. This was part of its 2016-20 Strategic Plan to support the vision of Creating connections and the priorities of making disciples, growing leaders and engaging younger generations.

A resourcing church is a church which is initiated by and works closely with the local bishop with the intention to grow in order to resource mission across a city or town. Both churches aim to play their part in the evangelisation of the nation, the revitalisation of the Church and the transformation of society.

This report and the presentation at Diocesan Synod describe how St Nicholas and Pattern Church have developed in the initial, two year phase.

Structure and finance

Both churches are Bishop’s Mission Orders with a city or town wide focus. Each is a limited company with charitable status with a trustee body. Bishop Lee is a trustee of both churches.

The leadership of both churches have participated in the Diocese’s Resourcing churches Programme Board since prior to launch. The Programme Board, which was joint with the Mission Areas until early 2020, is the structure of accountability and decision-making in the Diocese, reporting to the Bishop’s Council. It is supported by the Diocese’s Strategic Programme Manager, Rebecca Cross. The board is now chaired by Revd Dr Simon Taylor and also attended by Bishop Lee, the Archdeacons and the Diocesan Secretary.

As well as securing additional funding for the capital refurbishment of the church buildings, the Diocese was given a grant for start up funding for ministerial leadership and staffing. That funding tapers in 2021 with the churches taking on further staffing costs and increasing their contribution in Parish Share and again in 2022. As a result, the Resourcing churches, which began giving in Parish Share in 2020, will remain financial net contributors in relation to established ministerial costs.

Ministerial leadership

The Senior Leader of St Nicholas is Revd Toby Flint. There are three incumbent status training curates: Revd Matt Southcombe (who acts as Associate Minister), Revd Laura Doe and Revd Andy Carter (planting curates). Amy Walker is Head of Operations.

The Senior Leader of Pattern Church is Revd Joel Sales. Revd Kaf Smith leads alongside Joel as Associate Minister. There are two planting curates: Revd Paul Freeland and Revd Tom Morgan. Katy Snowball is Head of Operations.

Buildings

Both churches were planted into buildings which were not currently used as churches in order to establish new worship, outreach and service. Neither were ready for use when each church launched and therefore both met in temporary spaces: St Nicholas from September 2018 to December 2018 and Pattern Church from December 2018 until lockdown began in March 2020.

St Nicholas is owned by the Bristol DBF but had been leased to Bristol City Council since it closed following wartime bomb damage 65 years earlier. Although not a large building, located by Bristol Bridge it was a strategic location for a city-wide ministry. After over a year of negotiations, the Council agreed to relinquish their lease and agreed dilapidations costs which contributed towards the reordering of the building.

The DBF purchased the Pattern Store in May 2018, a landmark, four-storey building in Swindon's railway village, adjacent to its popular Outlet Centre. The top floor remains independent from the church and will be leased commercially by the DBF as part of its investment portfolio. The first phase of building completed during lockdown this year and worship began in the building at the end of the summer 2020..

Unlike parish churches and centres of worship, the DBF owns both buildings which sit on its balance sheet. The relevant parts of the buildings are now leased to the churches on a repairing and insuring basis. The DBF was responsible for the refurbishment of both properties, raising 50% of costs from a range of external sources. Each contract was delivered on budget although not on time. Both churches are responsible for any further development and fit out. St Nicholas falls under faculty jurisdiction while Pattern Church does not.

Worshipping community

Both churches were planted to have a focus on reaching people who were not Christians (unchurched) or who had not been part of a church in recent times (dechurched). They also were given a particular focus to engage younger generations, especially young adults in Bristol and young families in Swindon.

At the same time, they needed a base of Christians to reach and engage these groups and to plant in the future. It was therefore recognised that people would join who were moving to Bristol and Swindon or from other churches, including Church of England churches. While recognising people's free choice and the fact that people do move churches for geographical, phase of life or preference of tradition reasons, a priority has been put on preventing undue levels of transfer.

Changes in attendance patterns owing to COVID19 and difficulties of surveying at this time mean the figures below are estimates based on different data sources. Further work will be done on this in advance of the annual review at the beginning of 2021. In common with other

churches, worship went exclusively online during lockdown, reaching some new people, and now operate a “mixed mode” of in person and online worship, reverting to online for the next lockdown..

2020 attendance

	Pre-lockdown Jan-Mar 20		Lockdown Apr-Aug 20	Mixed mode Sep-Oct 20	
	Attendance	Community	Devices	Attendance	Devices
St Nicholas	340	470	154	180	56
Pattern Church	270	400	120	150	90

Age and origin

	Median age	Mean age	Under 30	Under 40	Un/de-churched	New to area	Moved church
St Nicholas	25	27	64%	84%	20%	40%	40%
Pattern Church	26	27.5		70%	25%	20%	45%

Prior to lockdown, both churches were tracking expectations for size in their second year. However, in common with other churches, it is hard to gauge the size of the worshipping community following the summer. Age data is based on up to date information and shows both churches getting younger as they grow, and exceeding their goals for under 30 (St Nicholas) and under 40 (Pattern Church). Further surveying is required to gauge where people have come. But growth appears to be increasingly from those who have not been attending church: Pattern Church’s 2020 newcomer data suggests one in four newcomers is unchurched and one in four had not attended for some time.

Evangelism

Evangelism is at the heart of the mission of each church and critical to their growth. There are a variety of ways in which the churches invite people who are not Christians to connect into the church community, but both use Alpha as their primary tool for evangelism. Their experience has been that people would have not come to Alpha in person did choose to come when offered online.

St Nicholas has run Alpha every term since planting in 2018 and has seen over 360 guests take part in that time. During lockdown they launched five separate online courses after an increased interest in exploring faith online. A large number of these guests came after a personal invitation from a friend. They have used this same model for their current courses.

15 people, six infants and nine adults, had been baptised prior to lockdown, most of whom made the decision to be baptised after attending Alpha. There are an additional 15 adults and infants who have expressed an interest in being baptised.

At Pattern Church, 96 people signed up for Alpha in 2019 and in 2020 there were 115 people who signed up. Shine Pinehurst, and St John’s Haydon Wick had ‘tables’ at Pattern Alpha Online in the summer term. Prior to lockdown, 12 adults had been baptised at Pattern Church.

“I have found Alpha to be an overwhelmingly positive and peaceful experience, it has helped me cope through difficult times and opened my mind to the possibility that there is something out there, I’m still not 100% sold but will continue to research and read the Bible to further learn about faith.” St Nicholas, Spring 2020

“I’m a standard, run of the mill individual, work in Swindon, born and bred. Jesus has made a huge difference... I feel less alone... A sense of relief that it’s ok to hand over guilt and shame. I feel like I’ve got a whole new purpose.” Pattern Church

Discipleship

St Nicholas wanted serving to be at the heart of the church so for the first year focused on building teams in four key areas – social action, children and youth, Sunday services, and Alpha. We have around 200 who volunteer on one of these teams.

Antony joined in 2018 and found a home at St Nicholas through serving weekly. For the first few months he arrived every Sunday at 8am to help set up the chairs: *“Before coming to St Nicholas I had never been involved in serving at church. When I joined the plant I wanted to get to know more people so I signed up to be on a volunteer team. I had never thought I would be much help and now I serve a couple times every month.”*

Small groups launched in September 2019 with the aim to be places of community where those attending can grow in their faith through worship, bible discussion and prayer. At this moment, the church has 221 people signed up for 23 groups, some which meet in person as a six, others which meet online.

Giving has steadily increased at St Nicholas as a result of regular gift days and weekly opportunities to give. The church now has around 160 people giving regularly.

Pattern Church ran Alpha groups, which often continue as Pattern Groups. The hope is that people grow to become Alpha helpers (and help in a Pattern Group), then become Alpha hosts who go on to lead our Pattern Groups. They have people serving on teams, over 50% of adults who call Pattern Church their home are serving on teams. There are 93 regular givers – 53 families and 40 individuals.

A, who’s recently become a Christian, serves on the hosting team on Sundays: *“It’s a great way to get involved and get to know people.”*

Weekly prayer meetings, online and in person, are a feature of both churches and are well attended.

Social Action

St Nicholas approaches social action through three lenses: people, place and purpose.

- People: Committed to empowering the skills and passions of the congregation.
- Place: Called to serve the local area.
- Purpose: Reaching the younger generation through preventative measures

Since March and the outbreak of COVID19 the church has focused its response on supplying food packs and deliveries to those living in sheltered housing in central Bristol, providing weekly deliveries of food and essential items to food banks at St Nicholas of Tolentino, St Mary’s Redcliffe and St Paul’s Southville and supporting key workers within the church. They have had over 60 volunteers involved so far. With the help of a government grant, the church will expand their response to include debt advice and employment training alongside the food distribution in the coming months.

Working in partnership with TLG, St Nicholas has also been running SPARK, a mentoring program for school children at risk of expulsion. Launched in September 2019 with 1-2-1

mentoring, SPARK has recently expanded the work they are doing in schools to include group coaching sessions in response to the impact COVID has had on young people.

Pattern Church has partnered with Safe Families to serve families who need a bit of extra support, and the church has supported over 30 children. Shirley from Safe Families said *“We are so privileged to be partnering with you!”* During COVID the building was used by Swindon Womans Aid.

Over the summer Pattern Church gave out 60 boxes of hope, three times. It will continue to do this in School holidays moving forward. They are also starting youth mentoring (in partnership with Starting Point) and debt advice (in partnership with Crosslight).

Church planting

Both churches were planted with the aim to resource church planting in Bristol and Swindon and have been focused on developing leadership and discipleship to be sent elsewhere to support local mission. The church planting plans will be determined by diocesan leadership in response to local mission needs. As COVID19 continues to have a major impact on the mission of local churches, it has been more difficult to discern the long term picture of those needs and therefore neither possible nor appropriate to move forward specific plans. Both churches remain ready to respond to church planting opportunities later in 2021.