

New Places for New People

Starting new Christian
communities:
A practical guide

Chapter 12

How to Begin
Pioneering and
Recognise
Fruitfulness

How to Begin Pioneering and Recognise Fruitfulness

Whether you are 'starting from scratch' to form a New Place for New People (NPNP) and are unsure how to begin, or starting with an existing group or project and want to be more intentional in your pioneering, this chapter is an essential read. It will guide you through your first year, teach you the core practices of pioneering, and enable you to recognise, celebrate and increase the fruitfulness of your work.

Often in the Bible, we read of 'fruitfulness'. In Genesis, God blesses humanity and says, "Be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28). We want to build fruitful NPNPs, and so we need to understand the hallmarks of a fruitful Christian community, and what core practices will lead to this fruit. The 'fruitfulness markers' and core practices presented in this chapter are the result of consultations with ministers, lay people and pioneers across the Connexion, and are rooted in tried-and-tested best practice that works in all contexts.

We've linked our review process to these markers of fruitfulness, to ensure that we're recognising, celebrating, and building on the things that are essential to the flourishing of Christian communities. We recommend that all NPNPs follow this review process, and this is a conditional requirement for funded NPNPs.

Beginning to pioneer

In the first year of a project, it is vital to:

1. clarify your vision
2. connect with new people
3. build a team and begin gathering together.

For this reason, we recommend focusing on the first three fruitfulness markers and core practices (see below). These are the essentials that will lay strong foundations for future work on the other markers of fruitfulness.

Ways of measuring fruitfulness

In reviewing NPNPs, we want to encourage a breadth and depth of reflection, which is why our review questions encompass three different ways of measuring fruitfulness.

Firstly, we want to consider what can be measured, ie the aspects of community life which are quantifiable, such as number of people contacted, adherence to safeguarding policy, and community service offered. These quantifiable aspects are known as 'hard metrics'.

Secondly, we want to consider experience and characteristics, ie things which are qualitative, such as emerging themes and patterns, how inclusive the community

is, and where we have seen signs of God. These qualitative aspects are known as 'soft metrics'.

Thirdly, we want to gather the emerging stories of community life, which offer rich and varied insights. These stories are sometimes known as 'testimony'. Remember that not all stories have to have a 'happy ending' – God is present in all of life, and we can learn much from stories of conflict and difficulty (for more on conflict and transformation, see page 62).

Fruitfulness markers, core practices and review questions

There are nine fruitfulness markers and each has associated core practices that support them. We have also included review questions that can help you recognise, celebrate, and increase your fruitfulness.

1. Vision

Fruitfulness marker: A focused vision of who the New Place for New People is seeking to reach and the context in which a new ecclesial community will emerge.

Core practice: Clarifying and communicating the vision of the project.

The District NPNP Team (see page 11) will help you discern a location and a vision for your NPNP (see page 14 for more on discernment). Summarise the vision in one sentence and plan how you will communicate this vision with other people as the project is initiated and developed (see page 66 for more on storytelling). Use 'non-churchy' language that makes sense to different people, for example:

- **Jazz Community Church:** Improvising Life, Following Jesus.
- **Coffee Shop Sunday:** Meeting God in ordinary places.
- **Starting Point:** We're a community that holds on to the essentials so that people will meet Jesus through the gospel, conversation, and prayer.
- **Inclusive Gathering Birmingham:** We're a church committed to pursuing God's radical inclusion.

Review questions:

- **Hard metrics:** What context are we focusing on? Who and how many people are we reaching? How will we communicate our vision to others?
- **Soft metrics:** Is our vision clear and focused? Are we communicating our vision effectively to others?
- **Story:** Who in our community or network could tell a story about how they clarified, understood, shaped, or communicated the vision for our NPNP? What is that story, and where is God in it?

2. Contextually relevant

Fruitfulness marker: Any new ecclesial community will arise out of careful listening and will always remain connected to the wider community and aware of its needs.

Core practice: Connecting with new people and building the pioneering team.

Finding the first six to eight people to join the pioneering team (see page 11) is one of the key priorities of the six to twelve months prior to the launch of the new community. Pioneering alongside others not only increases your capacity, but also sets a pattern for diverse leadership, creates a culture of invitation, and ensures the NPNP is firmly rooted in the local community. Building the team will flow from connecting with the wider community, one-to-one meetings, and clear planning.

Create a rhythm of regularly connecting with new people in the wider community, using the suggestions on page 59. In connecting with new people, ensure you are intentionally listening to other people's stories (see page 56 for more on listening) and looking to invite people to one-to-one meetings.

Establish a pattern of weekly one-to-one meetings to build relationships with new people (see page 52 for guidance on one-to-ones). For employed full-time pioneers, between eight and ten one-to-one conversations should be scheduled every week. For employed part-time pioneers, this should be four to five conversations. Invite the interested people from your one-to-ones to gather informally (eg at a coffee shop) to begin to create community. Encourage those attending to invite others, in order to create an invitational culture from the beginning. At the end of every week, pray over the names of the people you've had one-to-ones with during the week and consider who might be invited to join the pioneering team. No doubt, some people will decline the invitation, but don't let that discourage you from inviting people to join in.

Stronger together

The pioneering team members can each independently connect with the wider community and undertake one-to-ones, but you should also aim to practice evangelism as a group, which will build trust and friendship. Group evangelism will also raise the profile of your NPNP, drawing more people in. Regular group evangelism will forge deeper bonds with the wider community and you will learn more about the community's character and needs. Think about how you can easily be recognised as a team (eg lanyards, badges, matching T-shirts). Practising evangelism together will help build the team's confidence – soon you will be seen as a natural and integral part of the neighbourhood. Group evangelism ideas include:

- Host a listening event (see page 57).
- Do a litter-pick or offer bag packing at a store.
- Take a stall at a market, fête or fair (you could do a bring-and-buy, a swap shop, a tea stand, give away balloons with messages on, offer an 'everything is free' stall, or anything else that plays to the team's strengths).
- Celebrate the festivals of the Christian year publicly (eg carol singing at Christmas, giving out pancakes or donuts on Shrove Tuesday, offering ashing on Ash Wednesday, organising an Easter egg hunt in a local park, collecting for a food bank at Harvest).

- Attend a big public event as a group (eg a Pride parade, bonfire night or carnival).
- Sponsor a concert series, host an exhibition, or have an open-mic poetry or music night.

See www.methodist.org.uk/evangelismlibrary for more ideas.

Plan it out

Make a plan for how you will connect with new people, undertake one-to-ones, gather a community and invite people to join the pioneering team. Set clear goals related to these for each month (you may want to attend three different community events each month, or have three people in the pioneering team by month five for example). Ensure you are systematically recording information related to your goals, such as which community events you have attended, the number of one-to-ones you have done, contact details for people who have expressed an interest, etc.

Further training and support on connecting with new people, conducting one-to-ones, and planning is offered through the Methodist Pioneering Pathway (see page 38).

Review questions:

- **Hard metrics:** How many people have we contacted? How many one-to-one meetings have we done? Who are we listening to? What community activities have we joined in with? In what ways have we served our community? What networks and partnerships have we established?
- **Soft metrics:** What themes and patterns are we noticing about the wider community from our listening? How will this listening influence our NPNP?
- **Story:** Who in our community or network could tell a story about connecting with the wider community, a powerful one-to-one meeting, or inviting someone to join in? What is that story, and where is God in it?

3. Gathered community

Fruitfulness marker: There will be moments of gathering the many individuals connected to the pioneer. From these gatherings, new patterns of worship will emerge that resonate with new people, and events will take place that build bridges to the wider community.

Core practice: Establishing regular patterns of meeting together as a pioneering team to develop the NPNP community.

In the first year the pioneering team should meet regularly (at least fortnightly) and activities should include:

- Reflecting on the vision and core values (use the NPNP theological underpinning and core values). What values will root your community?
- Building relationships by praying/reflecting on the Bible together.
- Sharing one another's passions and gifts.
- Identifying who has the potential to lead particular aspects of the work eg prayer, hospitality.

- Reflecting on how you develop a culture of invitation to expand beyond the pioneering team (how will you gather people and where, eg informal group coffee meetings, joining in with an activity together or planning an activity to which others can be invited?)
- Discerning how the pioneering team can continue to develop. For example, the pioneering team could meet with the pioneer's coach or a critical friend every quarter.
- Having honest, transparent conversations about financial generosity, long-term funding, and sustainability plans (see 'Financial sustainability' page 69), as well as budgeting for the project. This should involve inviting and making personal commitments to support the project by giving time, money, or talents (see page 69 for more on financial sustainability).
- Discerning what other teams are needed. Depending on the model, the pioneering team could be capped at 12-15 (or another smaller number) or could simply grow as large as possible in the first year in order to build a sense of momentum. As you grow, multiple 'working' teams may need to be set up depending on the nature of the project: greeting/welcoming/follow-up/discipleship, evangelism, finance, hospitality, etc.
- Identifying what will need to be in place before you launch the new community.
- Engaging with the review process – the pioneering team should be involved with the review process (see more below).

Review questions:

- **Hard metrics:** Have we identified people to join the pioneering team? Have we established a rhythm of meeting as a pioneering team? Have we secured our core values? What events and activities have we held? How are we exploring faith together? Are we effectively safeguarding one another? Do we have a basic budget and have we made personal commitments (giving time, money, talents) to support the mission?
- **Soft metrics:** Are we discovering the gifts, skills and needs of our community? Is our rhythm of meeting enabling us to become a community? Do our core values shape our life together? What has gone well? What have we learnt? When we meet are we celebrating, learning, and exploring faith effectively? How diverse and inclusive are we as a community? Are we developing healthy patterns of relating? Are we managing conflict in a healthy way?
- **Story:** Who in our community or network could tell a story about joining the pioneering team, helping shape patterns of worship, or an event that built bridges with the wider community? What is that story, and where is God in it?

4. New people

Fruitfulness marker: There will be new people making a profession of faith through baptism, confirmation, and membership.

Core practice: Nurturing testimony and faith development. For more on nurturing testimony, visit www.thestoryproject.org.uk

All This for You is a short book, available from Methodist Publishing, which unpacks the meaning of baptism using vivid images and thoughtful text. It is easy to read for those not familiar with church vocabulary and it provides the opportunity to reflect deeply on the lasting significance of the sacrament.

Review questions:

- **Hard metrics:** How many previously unaffiliated people are attending? How many people regard the NPNP as their faith community? How are we encouraging testimony and story-sharing? How many people are exploring faith? Are we explaining the journey of faith to baptism? Do people know how to connect through membership?
- **Soft metrics:** Are we developing an invitational culture? Where have we seen signs of God at work? Are we encouraging people to speak about their faith journey?
- **Story:** Who in our community or network could tell a story about baptism or new membership? What is that story, and where is God in it?

5. Deepening discipleship

Fruitfulness marker: There will be creative ways for those new people finding faith to move beyond profession, into lives shaped by following Jesus.

Core practice: Developing discipleship pathways. For more on creating discipleship pathways, see www.methodist.org.uk/travellingtogether

Review questions:

- **Hard metrics:** How are we introducing new people to faith? Have we established discipleship pathways? How many people are in small groups? How are we exploring the Bible together? How are we encouraging and practising prayer?
- **Soft metrics:** Are we open to the questions of others? Is our discipleship programme effective in enabling people to explore and deepen their faith? Are new people experiencing God? Is our faith in God impacting our lives? How are we practising our faith as a community?
- **Story:** Who in our community or network could tell a story about changes in their life due to their new faith, or about joining a small group, or about deepening/exploring/living their faith? What is that story, and where is God in it?

6. Social justice

Fruitfulness marker: Communities contributing to the transformation of society by offering loving acts of justice and service, and challenging injustice.

Core practice: Challenging and responding to injustice by listening to, amplifying and being changed by people experiencing injustice and marginalisation (both locally and globally). Offering acts of loving service within the local and global community.

For more on engaging with issues of justice and peace, see www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/social-and-climate-justice

Review questions:

- **Hard metrics:** What acts of service have we offered to our wider community? What injustices are present amongst us and the wider community? What other partners and networks are challenging injustice that we could/should join in with? What kinds of transformation are we seeking?
- **Soft metrics:** Are we challenging injustice effectively within our community and the wider community – what's changed? Who are we listening to and being challenged and transformed by?
- **Story:** Who in our community or network could tell a story about how they have served or been served by others, or how they have seen transformation in the community from loving acts, or where we have worked for justice? What is that story, and where is God in it?

7. Connection to the wider Church

Fruitfulness marker: There will be a clear relationship of mutual accountability with the wider Methodist Church, and the project will inspire other churches and circuits in the district to start their own New Places for New People projects.

Core practice: Accountable to the wider church and contributing to the development of NPNPs in the district.

For more on connecting with the wider church, speak to your District NPNP Team, your District Chair or your Learning Network Methodist Pioneering Pathway regional lead.

Review questions:

- **Hard metrics:** How are we connected and accountable to the district/circuit? How do we plan to communicate the vision and learning from our community to inspire other people?
- **Soft metrics:** Do we feel connected and supported by the structures in place? If not, what do we need? What could we offer to the Wider Church?
- **Story:** Who in our community or network could tell a story about how they have worked with the wider Methodist Church, or inspired/supported other NPNPs? What is that story, and where is God in it?

8. Long-term sustainability

Fruitfulness marker: The project will seek long-term financial sustainability by nurturing a culture of financial giving and/or entrepreneurship, and long-term sustainability of leadership by growing a base of volunteers and new leaders from beyond the initial planting team.

Core practice: Growing the leadership community and encouraging a culture of giving.

For more on financial sustainability, see page 69.

For more on building the pioneering team, see page 55.

Review questions:

- **Hard metrics:** How many people are volunteering their gifts, finances, energy? How are we developing a culture of giving? Do we recognise what resources we need for long-term sustainability?
- **Soft metrics:** Are we enabling people to offer their gifts and skills?
- **Story:** Who in our community or network could tell a story about how they have contributed their time, money or skills to the NPNP, or how they have grown as a leader? What is that story, and where is God in it?

9. Replant or second plant

Fruitfulness marker: The project will seek to form an emerging idea of the next new ecclesial community that could be planted from this project or inspired by it.

Core practice: Actively discerning where to locate the next NPNP and praying about it regularly.

For more on discerning where to locate a new project, see page 14.

For more on praying for your NPNP, see page 40.

Review questions:

- **Hard metrics:** Are other people interested in what we are doing? Are we capturing our learning, and communicating this to other people?
- **Soft metrics:** Do we welcome the questions and observations of others? Are we communicating in ways that inspire other people to start an NPNP? Is the time right to extend our community to begin another?
- **Story:** Who in our community or network could tell a story about how they feel called to start another NPNP, or where they see the need for another NPNP? What is that story, and where is God in it?

The review process

The review process we recommend all NPNTs follow, and which funded NPNTs are expected to follow, is two-fold:

1. A review meeting every six months to review work and set specific goals based on the fruitfulness markers above.
2. An annual submission of responses to the review questions (see above).

Review meeting

Every six months a meeting should be scheduled to review, evaluate, and set specific goals for the NPNT based on the fruitfulness markers. The fruitfulness markers and associated questions should guide your meeting. This meeting could involve people from the District NPNT Team, the pioneering team, the management/steering group, the reference group/stakeholder forum, and/or the NPNT itself, depending on the current context of the NPNT. Enabling an atmosphere of prayer and openness will be important to support these conversations.

For the first review meeting (six months after the start of the project), we recommend the following agenda:

1. Welcome and prayers.
2. Discussion: Have we established the three core practices (clarify your vision, connect with new people, build a team and begin gathering together)?
3. Reflect on the review questions associated with the first three fruitfulness markers. Opportunity to respond to these questions in a variety of ways (eg open discussion, votes, writing comments on a flipchart, giving each person 30 seconds to respond).
4. A time of prayer/worship/silence for reflection.
5. Set clear priorities for the next six months. Remember: when it comes to priorities, less is more. The fewer priorities you have, the more progress you will be able to make.
6. Closing prayers.

For the second review meeting (12 months after the start of the project), we recommend the following agenda:

1. Welcome and prayers.
2. Discussion: Have we established/are we building on the three core practices?
3. Time to reflect on the review questions associated with the first three fruitfulness markers. Opportunity to respond to these questions in a variety of ways (eg open discussion, votes, writing comments on a flipchart, giving each person 30 seconds to respond).
4. Reflect on the additional core practices you need to develop the fruitfulness markers of deepening discipleship, new people, social justice, and connection to the wider church.
5. A time of prayer/worship/silence for reflection.
6. Set clear priorities for the next six months.
7. Closing prayers.

For subsequent review meetings, we recommend the following:

1. Widen your conversations to reflect on all the fruitfulness markers, using the review questions. Though the project may be focusing on one area (eg social justice or discipleship), healthy NPNPs will be 'well-rounded' and bear some fruit in all areas.
2. Always set clear priorities and goals for the next six months.
3. In year three, begin to focus on long-term sustainability.
4. In year four, begin to focus on replanting or second planting.

Annual submission

Responses to the review questions above will be gathered annually. This will enable the learning from local NPNP communities to be shared, and to develop and build the movement across the Connexion, with the aim of seeing an NPNP emerge in every circuit. Responses should be sent to the Project Officer, who will collate and analyse the information from across the Connexion and share trends and learning. For further details on how responses should be submitted contact the Project Officer on bondj@methodistchurch.org.uk