

HOW TO START A NEW PLACE FOR NEW PEOPLE

Beginning a New Place for New People will be different for every context, but there are some common practices that will give your project the best opportunity to become fruitful. This short introduction shares some questions and helpful advice at each stage of the pioneer journey.

The diagram below shows the five stages of a New Place for New People from its beginning to it becoming a recognisable church. Being aware of and regularly monitoring progress towards each stage will lead to greater fruitfulness and better oversight.

Listening

Listening will always be a part of a pioneer project, as it should be for every healthy church. Listening to God in prayer from the very beginning will be the place from which a project's vision and spiritual life will flow. Listening to a context is hard and challenging, but also an opportunity to get to know your community and form new creative relationships. It is from this early deep listening that a clear vision for a new Christian community relevant to your unique context will emerge.

Here are some suggestions for how to start listening deeply:

- Shape a team. Listening together will bring different relationships and understanding of the community. It will place collaboration at the heart of your project from the beginning.
- Remember to pray. In the busyness and enthusiasm to start something it is easy to forget to listen to where God might be leading. Could you ask ten faithful people to pray

for your project or organise a weekly prayer meeting for just this?

- Meet your community. It is essential to move beyond facts and figures to relationships with real people to hear what they care about. Why not invite a key community leader for lunch, sit in the local park and see who you encounter, regularly visit the same coffee shop or join a sports club?
- Listen within. It is important to hear your voice. Ask yourself, what is your role? What might you need to stop doing to make room for this? Why are you wanting to start this? To whom are you accountable?
- Consider the wider Church. It is really important to listen to those who have a position of leadership in the circuit, district and across the Connexion. Establishing a good relationship now with those who will help support your project in the future is very important. And learning from other Methodist churches and communities will be invaluable.

Vision Shaping

From listening flows the shaping of vision. What you form at this point will impact every stage of the project – the activities you choose to do, the people you deepen relationships with next and the way people become followers of Jesus.

Consider the following as you form your vision:

- Why are you planting?
- Who are you aiming to serve? What is the need?

Before you launch your project



Project beginning, unfolding and becoming fruitful

Always listening, praying and pivoting

- What are the core values for your project? (For example, inclusive, justice seeking, radically hospitable.)
- What will your 'New Place' look like in five years?
- How will you know if the project is growing towards fruitfulness?
- Work on one sentence that describes the vision to someone who has not been a part of shaping the vision.
- Make a list of who you need to share your vision with. (For example, key church leaders, minister, superintendent, share it at the circuit meeting, identify potential partners and team members.)

Loving and Serving

From vision flows beginning to love and serve the people you are starting a New Place for and with. Having listened to them properly you will know well their hopes and struggles.

Consider the following as you love and serve:

- Think creatively about what act will demonstrate God's and your love for the community.
- What is the thing the community cares about most that you can serve?
- Starting small will give people time to build trusting relationships with you.
- Work with people and avoid imposing things on them.
- What existing community groups who are already loving and serving can you join?
- Be ready to share your faith. Loving and serving is very likely to raise the question "Why are you doing this?"

Building Community

From loving and serving flows building community. This is the early group of people who trust you, have seen your loving service and may become part of the new Christian community you plant. The purpose of this stage is to gather people around activity and common purpose.

Consider the following as you build community:

- In what new ways could people gather?
- What are the common needs and issues of the individuals you have built relationships with? (For example, loneliness, mental health, parenting, debt, new to the area, racial justice, the climate crisis.)
- What creative community event or movement could you form that addresses these issues?
- Always be ready to share your faith story and to pray for people.
- Make sure you invite the key circuit leaders to see and experience what you are doing.

Church Taking Shape

From building community flows church taking shape. By this point in the project you will be able to start opportunities for people to explore faith in relevant ways. It is absolutely fine that not everyone of your wider community will want to be a part of this. This is likely to be the longest stage as it evolves over time and will involve plenty of experimentation until you get it right.

This stage has two areas: (1) explicitly faith-based community emerging and (2) becoming a mature self-sustaining church.

Consider the following as you explore how faith might be expressed:

- Where is the best place for worship and discipleship to happen? (For example, a cafe, gym, school hall or maybe a church building.)
- Avoid Christian jargon and use instead relevant language and expressions of the good news.
- How can you create the space to allow God to touch people's hearts and minds; a space for encounter?
- Think about how the gospel can transform their lives and what they care about, shaping content around that.
- Craft church in this context that draws on the ways local people already explore big questions and find meaning. What music stirs hearts? What are their cultural references? Where are they creative? How do they tell their story?
- Once a rhythm is established remember to invite key circuit leaders to see what is happening.

As a new Christian community begins to emerge so too will questions of long-term sustainability and relationship to the wider Church. It is likely that you will have asked the following questions, but it is at this point clear answers will be needed. They are:

- How will the New Place begin to support itself, in finance and governance?
- How will this new Christian community relate to the wider Methodist Church?

Find some people and projects in the wider Methodist Church who have experience of wrestling with these questions.

Thank you.

We are very pleased you are seeking to start a New Place for New People and becoming part of a movement that is touching every part of the Methodist Church. Please keep us updated with how your story unfolds and how new lives are touched with the transforming love of God.