



Mixed Ecology of Church

The diocesan vision recognises that each context is unique. When thinking about growing church being clear on what God calling you to as a church (where God is at work & you are joining in,) and seeking to be faithful that calling is important. In doing so each church takes its place in the wider vision of the Diocese and beyond.

It isn't a 'one size fits all' vision, there will be different expressions of church in different contexts and with different groups, which broadly but not exclusively fall into three categories. There may be overlaps between each category:

- Inherited church - what is already there/existing models of church
- Church plants - these are usually what is termed a 'worship first approach' with a team sent to start a worshipping community, often closely reflecting the style of the sending church.
- Fresh Expressions - these seek to contextualise the gospel and church for a particular group and rather than worship first are often termed serving first communities.

We also must not forget the place of schools and chaplaincy. The term mixed economy of church, was first used by Archbishop Rowan Williams to refer to fresh expressions, church plants and 'inherited' forms of church existing alongside each other. Whilst this was a very helpful phrase at the time, demonstrating that there were different expression of church, the danger was it could be used in a binary way i.e. Fresh Expressions or 'parish church.' There was and still is the risk of seeing new expressions of church as a step to getting people to join inherited or 'proper' church, rather than church communities in their own right. To be a church where mixed ecology is the

norm – where every person in England has access to an enriching and compelling community of faith by adding new churches and new forms of Church to our parishes, schools and chaplaincies

The term mixed ecology is now preferred and inherent to the term is diversity. The Church of England vision speaks of “a church where mixed ecology is the norm – where every person in England has access to an enriching and compelling community of faith” (for more on this click [here](#)).

This exists to some extent in many places e.g., messy church and BCP services within a parish, but a true mixed ecology it goes far beyond what happens within the parish church building or church hall. As we focus on the vision to reach people of all ages and context, church will look different in different contexts, with different groups and across traditions, this is the mixed ecology. To use a horticultural analogy, gardeners know what different plants need to thrive, with some common factors & some differences. It is the same with growing church. In exploring the mixed ecology, we can learn from the richness of traditions within the Church of England, each bringing its own gift to the church which if we receive it may help us in shaping mission and growing church.



When thinking about a mixed ecology inclusion is also a vital consideration ...

“enabling people of every age and in every context to hear the good news of Jesus.”

Although one would hope the churches are welcoming communities the reality is that they can also be places of exclusion for differing reasons. In the gospels Jesus goes to the margins and the outsiders become the insiders in the Kingdom of God. Where are we on the margins in order for people to hear the good news of the redeeming love of God? Who may have been excluded from our community's wither intentionally or unintentionally? Why might this be the case? Listening to the experience and wisdom of those who have been excluded can enable us to bring about change.

One thing among many highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic when many church services went online was that it both included and excluded at the same time. For those who could not access the technology they found themselves on the outside of church. However conversely many more people have connected with church online and people who for whatever reason cannot physically get to church were able to be part of a church community online.

The idea of hybrid church i.e. both online and in person has emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. Could online church be part of the mixed ecology moving forwards and one way of proclaiming afresh in every generation.

(For more information see Grove booklet MEv131 Hybrid Church Blending Online & Offline Community by Peter Philips)