

Pioneer Ministry on New Housing Developments



Summary Report from the Pioneer Forum



The South Central Regional Training Partnership Pioneer Forum gathered pioneers and pioneer enablers from across the region to engage in a constructive conversation around pioneer ministry in new housing developments. The conversation was facilitated by Paul Bradbury (SCRTP Pioneer Hub Co-Ordinator) & Jon and Tammy Oliver, pioneer ministers from Southampton. We had three presentations to help develop our conversation; Ali Boulton (Baptist pioneer on The Stowe, Swindon, Pioneer enabler for the Southern Counties Baptist Association and Co-Founder of the National New Housing Hub), Hasna Khatun (pioneer curate in Centenary Quay, Southampton), and Martin Gorick (Archdeacon of Oxford and Chair of the New Communities Group in Oxford Diocese). A film drawing on the experiences of new housing pioneers from across the region was shown at the beginning of the day.¹

A unique ministry

Our conversation covered many of the themes and skills of pioneer ministry more generally, for example the importance of listening, the formation of team, attentiveness to the community and to serving alongside others. However, we wanted to ask whether pioneer ministry on new housing developments invites particular ways of being and doing.

Ali Boulton argued that part of the uniqueness of this ministry is due to the particular opportunity provided by such a huge and rapid nationwide programme of housing development. Ali asked us: **'Is this a kairos moment?'** as large numbers of people arrive in new communities that, for a time, are a 'thin place' in which the ministry the church can be particularly fruitful.

Others commented on the distinction between this ministry and ministry in other contexts. In the latter there is already a diverse community, an established context to come alongside. In new housing contexts **'everyone is on the same boat'** and there is an openness to the leadership needed to form place and form community.

In this respect whilst community development can form a significant part of the pioneer's ministry in most contexts, there is a particular emphasis on this dimension for ministry in new housing contexts where a desire for connection and place-making, combined with limited resources from the statutory sector, means that the church is a welcome partner in the leadership required to enable both.

Identity and practice

The unique nature of ministry in these contexts raises the question of what the identity and role of the pioneer should be. Are they a community development worker? Church planter? 'Cure of souls' to this new community? Community evangelist? Or all of these? And if so how can these different roles be navigated together?

To begin to explore this question many of those present spoke in terms of the posture of the pioneer minister. Ali Boulton offered 7 underlying principles of this ministry:

1. **Bless unconditionally**
2. **Live incarnationally**
3. **Listen**
4. **Make friends**
5. **Lay down agenda**
6. **Lay down our lives**
7. **Keep on going**

The servant-hearted, relinquished posture inherent to all these principles was picked up other

contributors: **'be a friend and a neighbour', 'work with what you've got', 'listen, pray, initiate, join in, give it away.'**



Unsurprisingly what then emerged from our conversation was not a title that best

described the identity and role of the pioneer. 'Community development worker' might work if the term were understood more holistically and included the spiritual needs of the community. 'Cure of souls' might well be an important concept for the church but has arrogant overtones to neighbours and friends with as much a stake in this new community as the pioneer.

Instead a series of metaphors emerged to shape the posture and methodology of this ministry:

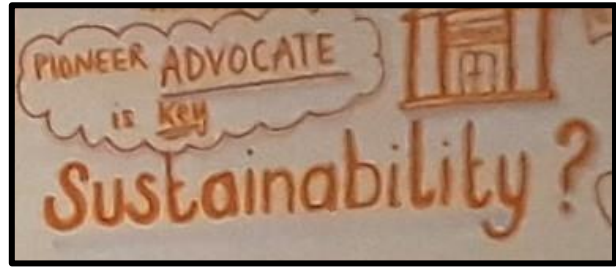
- Artist
- Midwife
- Craftsperson

"A pioneer should weave together whatever comes to hand in order to shape the community of the future by the agency of the Holy Spirit."

The pioneer is '**painting a community owned vision**', '**a future-weaver for the community**'. They are a '**midwife to the community and emerging faith community**', '**midwives birthing a new "geographic" community and a new faith community**'. They are '**taking responsibility for shaping community according to Kingdom principles**'

Sustainability

The issues of sustaining ministry in new contexts is also not unique to areas of new



housing. However, this is an area of ministry that has been a focus for investment of money from sources such as the Strategic Development Fund. Martin Gorick, Archdeacon in a Diocese that will eventually see a population the size of Edinburgh have moved in between 2007 and 2026, described how Oxford Diocese has already responded to new housing through the creation of new pioneer posts and how new housing areas will continue to be 'mission priority areas' to which new funding will be focussed. Nevertheless, at the cost of £0.5m over 7 years for a full-time pioneer post, this approach is expensive. For this reason '**lay leaders are key**' and a vision for smaller lay-led fresh expressions of church alongside larger churches in key locations is being promoted.

This brings into focus the question of what we mean by sustainability – '**its not all about money!** – or even if we want to use the word sustainability at all when this word seems wedded to '**a model of investment and return**'.

Furthermore the question of sustainability cannot be fully answered at the local level: '**if you want to ask genuine questions about sustainability you have to ask them at the highest possible levels of your church.**' The question of sustainability is being asked in the context of felt injustices in the balance

between the funding of established and new ministry. It also raises the important distinction between sustainability and self-sustainability – **'does a fresh expression of church have to be self-sustaining'** – inviting the question whether mixed-economy could also involve a greater inter-dependence of the established and the new.

The institution is also an important provider of other means of sustainability. Hasna Khatun argued for the critical importance of a pioneer advocateⁱⁱ in supporting and sustaining her ministry. Resourcing hubs and the support and accountability of steering groups or trustee boards are also key.

However, the question of sustainability seemed most clearly focussed around the importance of people, partnerships and passing on the missional DNA of this ministry. Leadership is crucial with a number of people

"It's all about the extraordinary potential of human beings with the Holy Spirit inside them fully present."

citing research arguing for **'the importance of a named leader – someone dedicated to that.'** However, the kind of leadership implied by much of the conversation was a facilitative leadership that enables **'making disciples who make disciples'** and who nurture other pioneers in the emerging community – **'enabling 2nd & 3rd generation pioneers to replicate the DNA – from day 1.'**

In this sense the sustainability being argued for is one of constant missional imagination

and adaptability – not the kind of sustainability often assumed by the word, where a community develops into something established and maintained. Ali Boulton argued that instead of seeing this ministry as creating butterflies, i.e. a new form of church emerging from an initial pioneering phase, we should be creating communities more like snakes – able to grow and shed their skin in



order to constantly adapt and change. The **'mission of God is always renewed afresh'** as the Holy Spirit is at work in a society that is now one of constant and accelerating change. We might all need to **'be more snakey'** (!) and see sustainability as something far more fluid than solid.



Graphic recording by Tammy Oliver – tammy_m_s@hotmail.com

ⁱ <https://youtu.be/sV4jhA7mCQw>

ⁱⁱ For a description and reflection of the role of pioneer advocacy see

<https://churchmissionsociety.org/resources/posture-pioneer-advocates-greg-bakker-anvil-vol-34-issue-3>

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