

Church Army's Research Unit

**An Evaluation of the Preston City Centre
Resourcing Parish Strategic Development
Funded Project**

**In collaboration with the Diocese of
Blackburn**

January 2025



Executive Summary

Church Army's Research Unit (CARU), in collaboration with the Diocese of Blackburn, have conducted a review of the national Church Strategic Development Fund (SDF) funded Preston City Centre Resourcing Parish Project. The project has successfully revitalised a struggling parish with two worship centres into one which seeks to continue resourcing other parishes and churches across the diocese, while continuing to steward Preston Minster and St George's sustainably.

The Preston Resourcing Parish Project received c. £1.52 million for the revitalisation of Preston Minster in partnership with HTB and St George the Martyr, a church in the Anglo-Catholic tradition. This project has demonstrated the benefits which can be gained from two differing Christian traditions working together for mutual flourishing. Moreover, this project has galvanised the parish into evangelistic ministry as Preston Minster and St George's are resourcing other churches and parishes across the city, and the diocese.

Objectives and Outcomes

The project has achieved the objectives, but some outcomes are still being worked towards (as can be seen in the table below). Measuring objectives independent of outcomes is difficult, but both churches in the parish are thriving when compared to their starting points. Within the parish, there are six times the number of regular attendees and a greater depth of discipleship within both church communities than before the project began.

Achieved
 Still working towards
 Unlikely to achieve by end of 2025.

Target	Baseline (2019)	End of Project (2024)	Evaluator's Assessment
400+ combined (Minster and St George's) regular weekly attenders.	46 individuals (all-age)	278 (avg.) <small>*November 2024 RWA Diocesan Survey</small>	
275 new disciples (69%) from de-churched / non-churched backgrounds.	0 individuals	90 (31%) <small>*July 2023 Diocesan Survey</small>	
To have an age profile of predominantly under 50.	6 under 50 (13%)	247 (85%) <small>*November 2023 Diocesan Survey</small>	
5% exploring ordination / lay reader.	0%	3% (N=9) <small>*July 2023 Diocesan Survey</small>	
To have planted, grown and resourced other parishes in Preston and adjacent deaneries.	0	5 Plants/Resourced Parishes.	

The pandemic forced the churches to close to the public within six months of launching the project, and our assessment is that this 18-month lag has significantly impeded and delayed progress with targets. Nevertheless, the staff team worked throughout the pandemic and commendably responded to the practical needs of the citizens of Preston through creating a 'food distribution hub'. This put Preston Minster and St George's on the radar of key stakeholders within the city and has further enabled social action projects, such as 'George's Kitchen' and the 'Spear Project' to thrive in partnership with both the city and county councils.

Design and Implementation

Prior to the launch of the project, c. £700k of building work and audio/visual (A/V) plus lighting installations was completed at Preston Minster with minutes to spare ahead of the launch service. After eighteen months of ministry by the new Team Vicar, additional building/lighting and A/V work in St George's was identified, additional (non-SDF) funds were raised, and the work is now

mostly completed, with the addition of a porch area and modernisation of the washrooms outstanding.

In addition to the clergy, it was envisaged that there would also be a paid Lay Leadership Team working in the parish with the following paid posts including: an Operations Manager, Administrator, Worship Leader, Children and Families Worker, and Youth Worker. There were various unplanned staff changes throughout the project, with none of the original lay role-holders remaining in post for the entire project, and there are important lessons to be learned from these experiences. Both the current parish and diocesan leadership teams have already reflected on the lessons learnt and have put in place new structures and processes for addressing many of the challenges the project encountered.

Throughout the project, developing a culture of evangelism and discipleship has been a focus. Our initial assessment is that the culture of 'sending out' has been a contributing factor to the vigour of evangelism and discipleship ministries, which have utilised courses such as Alpha (including 'Catholic Alpha'). Due to this culture, multiple parishes have been resourced or planted into across the diocese. For example, over three years, Preston Minster has seen thirteen participants in its Leadership Development Year, and seven of those have moved on into leadership roles within the diocese. Equally, this project has successfully planted into Blackburn and revitalised St James', Avenham. Wider resourcing into other Preston parishes through administrative support has also been ongoing. Currently, there is a pastoral scheme which is progressing, and if passed that will see Preston Minster merging with the Risen Lord parish and therefore will continue resourcing St James'. St George's will become its own parish with its own incumbent.

Emerging Lessons

This project has been successful in demonstrating mutual Christian flourishing and revitalising a parish which was struggling, with churches facing closure. Some key learning points arising from this project's experience are summarised below.

Theme	Key Learning Headline
Ensuring expectations and targets are realistic and appropriate for context.	Ensure in-depth research or contextualised understanding of target geographical area is better utilised in the inception stage of the project.
	There should be no 'one size fits all' targets for a resource church. All targets must be fully contextualised.
HR and financial scrutiny processes.	Before launching, establish clearer and transparent processes / IT tools for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR, safer recruitment and matching skills to roles. • Finance and wider governance.
	If there are particular skill gaps in a parish Project Team, the Project Board needs to ensure greater scrutiny given to these areas, alongside strategic considerations.
The gift of discernment.	The need for careful discernment as ministries unfold.
	The need for difficult decisions and the pain of letting go.
Multi-tradition Christian flourishing.	The potential for mutual learning across church traditions.
	Equitable resourcing (<i>both lay-staffing and building renovation budgets</i>) between both churches in a multi-church parish.