

How do Festival Churches fit within Minster Communities?

The diocese is working towards every parish being part of a Minster Community by the end of 2026.

In the Short Term...

In the short term, some parishes may seek to explore becoming a Festival Church before a Minster Community is established in their area. An example of this is Peatling Magna in Guthlaxton Deanery.

Our approach is to work with these parishes to help them explore becoming Festival Churches when the energy is there at a local level to do this. Being a Festival Church is not a permanent status and can easily be reversed if it makes sense to do so once the Minster Community is formed.

In the Medium Term...

Once Minster Communities are formed then the conversation about becoming a Festival Church will take place in this context.

One of the concerns raised about the Festival Church model is the impact of several churches adopting the model within a single Minster Community.

The impact will depend on the current reality within the Minster Community, (e.g. what is the regular service pattern across the Minster Community, how many are *already* only holding services at Major Festivals, what innovative service/events are emerging and where is there growth?) Establishing some Festival Churches within a Minster Community may actually be a reflection of the current reality, and could enable and resource ministry.

This conversation about Festival churches may be a relevant step in Phase Two of the Minster Community formation process for some areas. Making all those within a Minster Community aware of the Festival Church model will ensure a more coherent approach to looking at how each church can play a role in enabling worship and mission.

It is worth noting that there is no limit on the number of churches that can become Festival Churches - local conversations will lead to how best to use this model, bearing in mind that the Festival Church model is always reversible.

Leadership, Capacity and the Role of the Clergy

There will be fewer stipendiary clergy in the foreseeable future. Within the formation of Minster Communities, there is a growing emphasis on the importance of lay ministry and empowering local people to lead. When talking about Festival Churches, it needs to be made clear that becoming a Festival Church does not mean holding a service at all Major Festivals, nor does it mean all services be led by clergy. It is about seeking to engage the local community for combined community events and services which will be organised and led by a core team of local lay people. It is not clergy led. A Festival Church continues to have a dedicated Focal Minister or other identified person in accordance with the Minster Community structure.

Festival Churches in Urban Settings

Whilst the concept of Festival Church was developed, and is largely discussed, in the context of the rural setting, particularly in multi-church/parish rural benefices, it is not limited to the rural setting. Many city, urban and sub-urban parishes are experiencing significant demographic changes and Festival Church may be a suitable approach to renewal and mission. This may be particularly relevant where parishes are experiencing significant depopulation by transference to commercial, industrial, retail or leisure use or are experiencing urban decay and demolition. Festival Church may similarly be an appropriate missional approach in areas where social demographics have changed to a significant predominance of one or multiple other-faith identities and Christianity has become a significant minority in the parish.

Where Festival Church is used in the urban setting, consideration should be given to the inter-relation between renewal of the church and mission and the process of urban regeneration. As socio-economic renewal, environmental regeneration, and revitalisation of the local economy shape the local community, attention should be paid to how Festival Church may be used as a tool to shape and inform mission that interacts with the changing context. Consideration of how the church joins in social enterprise and addressing deprivation, the role of church as reconciling community or the relevance of intercultural worshipping community may all have specific relevance to Festival Church in the urban parish.