

The Communion Dilemma

The Challenges of Leading
Eucharistic New Things



THE BEDE CENTRE
for church planting theology

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Eucharistic New Things

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The Bede Centre for Church Planting Theology

Why Bede? While St Aidan and St Cuthbert are rightly celebrated as Northern saints who were instrumental in the evangelisation of the country and the planting of many churches, without the scholarship of St Bede, we would know barely anything about the ministry of the northern saints. It is because of Bede that we know how the Church grew and expanded in this country more than 13 centuries ago, and that we have such rich stories of the men and women who were instrumental in building the church that we now inherit. At the Bede Centre for Church Planting Theology, we are committed to continuing this legacy of scholarship which serves the mission of the church.

We exist to tell the story of church planting by encouraging a conversation across the whole church which exemplifies the following values:

- **Theological.** We seek to sustain church planting through quality theological and empirical research, which draws theologians and practitioners into dialogue.
- **Critical.** We offer a rigorous and analytic voice in the conversation to help guide best practice and future strategy and to encourage careful and theologically informed thinking on church planting.
- **Practical.** We seek to provide practical means to resource church planters to engage theologically and be

equipped for the ministry God is calling them to. We seek to build partnerships and collaborate with others for the good of the whole church.

Our core areas of activity:

- **Research.** We produce high quality empirical-theological research on church planting which is free to access and shared widely. We seek to resource the discussion of church planting through the publication of academic journal articles and books which are of benefit to practitioners.
- **Training.** We provide free-to-access training, e.g., through our regular webinars and online events. We host an annual international conference on church planting theology. We offer accredited training on church planting through Cranmer Hall at all academic levels (BA, MA, DThM). We look for ways to resource other training institutions to teach well on the theology of church planting. We resource churches/ dioceses with training on the theology of church planting.
- **Networking.** We provide regular network meetings for those interested in the conversation around church planting theology to connect and share updates (as well as through our network mailing list). We look for opportunities to collaborate in serving the church in theological research.

The Dilemma in Brief: Executive Summary

This research seeks to explore the use of Holy Communion in new church contexts (new worshipping communities, fresh expressions of church, missional communities, etc..) in the Church of England. Building on previous research published through the Bede Centre, we use the umbrella term, “new things” for these contexts.¹

The research examines three possible responses faced by leaders in new things in deciding whether to celebrate Holy Communion. These are:

1. Don't celebrate the eucharist
2. Celebrate the eucharist in an authorised way (i.e. using authorised liturgy, presided over by an ordained clergy person, etc.)
3. Celebrate the eucharist in an unauthorised way

The research gathered data from 63 different contexts in the Church of England and included examples of contexts representing each of these responses. While many in these contexts were satisfied to use one of these three approaches to Communion in their context, we think it is clear that none of

these three options is satisfactory from a theological or missiological perspective. Put simply, we think the communion dilemma is a loser's game; none of these options provide a response which will allow new things to flourish within the Church of England.

Thus, we suggest, that if the Church of England is committed to the starting of 10,000 new worshipping communities in the next 5-7 years,² then more needs to be done to connect the work of “Vision and Strategy” with the work of liturgical reform. The ecclesiological pluralism which has unfolded in the past two decades has seen a renewal from the edges to the centre, to the extent that pioneering forms of mission are central to the ministry of the Church of England today. If the Church's vision for the 2020s is to be successful, we suggest, the same must happen within the Church's liturgy. If the edges are not allowed to renew the centre (i.e. the Church's inherited liturgical traditions), then those leading new things are being set up to fail and the wider Church will not benefit from their ministry.³

² Church of England, “Vision and Strategy”.

³ It should be acknowledged that for some, ‘the centre’ carries associations (often negative) of Synod, bureaucracy, control, diocesan or national ‘officers’ etc. What is meant by ‘centre’ here, is the Church of England's inherited liturgical tradition and the rules which safeguard that. With thanks to Mark Earey for this clarification.

¹ Foulger, *New Things*.

Key Findings

Each of the three responses to the dilemma will be examined in detail. Here are some of the key findings emerging from the research relating to each of these responses:

1. Don't Celebrate

- Only 9 of 63 contexts we engaged never celebrated communion.
- The commonly held idea that new things are non-sacramental was not supported by this research and more research is needed to establish the extent of sacramental engagement in new things.
- For those who didn't celebrate, a variety of responses were given including the perceived inaccessibility of communion for newcomers, but also more practical considerations such as clergy not being available, and preferring to signpost people to existing services.
- 65% of respondents disagreed that communion made worship less accessible.
- 74% of the contexts celebrated communion at least monthly or weekly, and many of these contexts only gathered monthly, and so celebrated communion in every gathering.
- Of those who did celebrate regularly, communion was described as integral to the church's life and identity and deeply connected to its understanding of mission.

2. Celebrate in an authorised way

- This response was the most popular of the three, with 63% of those celebrating using authorised forms to do so.

- Most of the contexts using authorised forms chose to use *Common Worship*, with respondents noting that it contained a variety of accessible and adaptable liturgies suitable for use in new things.
- Not all respondents understood what counted as an authorised liturgy, raising questions about the level of training and guidance for those leading new things.
- 51% of respondents felt that authorised liturgies were not suitable for the context of their new thing. Many respondents spoke of the challenges of using authorised liturgies, noting in particular the difficulties of long, formal texts in informal contexts with low levels of education and literacy.
- While many contexts are happy with the use of authorised liturgical texts, a significant number are concerned that authorised texts undermine the contextual, local approach they have been encouraged to use in creating new things.

3. Celebrate in an unauthorised way

- Only 2 of 63 contexts celebrated without an ordained person.
- 39% of new things which regularly celebrated communion were using unauthorised or heavily adapted liturgies.
- A variety of reasons were given for this decision, including the overly prescriptive nature of authorised liturgies, and the lack of inclusive language in current texts.
- The move towards locally written liturgies raises significant questions for ecclesiology, and particularly the relationship between local churches and the regional/ national church.

Next Steps

In the final section, we explore three changes which would allow for more faithful engagement with eucharistic practice in new things:

- i. Engage more seriously in liturgical process and revision
- ii. Designate some new things as centres for liturgical experimentation
- iii. Provide more serious theological training for thinking about liturgy in new things.



Methodology

The research surveyed the leaders of 63 different contexts, across 20 dioceses in the Church of England. The only criterion for participating in the research was that the participants represented some kind of church community other than an inherited parish church. Participants were asked a mixture of closed (e.g., how often do you celebrate Holy Communion) and open questions (e.g., describe why you think Holy Communion is important or not for your context). All questions were optional.

This report seeks to use these 63 contexts to explore broader theological question about the place of the eucharist in new things across the Church of England. These responses from these contexts provided 63 small-scale case studies, offering insight into the conversation around sacraments and new worshipping communities, rather than offering a detailed insight into what is happening nationally. More work would need to be done to establish conclusively the eucharistic practices in new things.

Limitations of the Research

First, as alluded to above, the number of contexts represented is relatively modest. But at present, this report is the only source of up-to-date data on the eucharistic practices in new things. As such, it provides some helpful insights into the extent of engagement within these contexts. Moreover, the responses provided also offer crucial qualitative insights into some of the issues faced by leaders in the context of new things.

Secondly, it is important to note that the contexts highlighted in the research are limited by the channels of recruitment which were available. Two primary methods were used: Recruitment through existing networks (e.g., CCX, Open Table, Northern Mission Centre, etc.) and recruitment through diocesan staff (e.g. directors of mission, those listed as overseeing new worshipping communities). It seems likely that in both methods of recruitment, those responding to a survey on the use of Holy Communion are more likely to represent the status quo than the pioneering edges. Moreover, because many of the participants were recruited through diocesan channels, it's reasonable to assume that participants represented the more established projects with diocesan recognition, rather than those pioneering new communities under the radar, so to speak.

Lastly, language. As our previous research showed,⁴ there is currently a lack of consensus about which descriptors are used for new initiatives in the Church of England, and this varies from diocese to diocese. Those completing the survey represented Fresh Expressions of Church, Bishop's Mission Orders, Church Plants, New Worshipping Communities/ Congregations, Missional Communities, and New-Monastic Communities (and in some cases more than one of these designators applied to the particular context). But the presence of pluralistic language also proved difficult in recruitment. Language of “non-parish communities” was used to provide a catch-all designation in the information provided, but many dioceses pointed out that most of their new things were integrated into parishes. In this report, we continue to use the

⁴ See Foulger, *New Things*.

label, “new things” to cover the range of descriptors used across the church.

Similarly, finding common sacramental language proved challenging. Some gatekeepers approached to share the survey felt the term “eucharist” would put off some contexts (one told us that the “Latin [sic] word ... [is] so churchy and will immediately make them feel the people behind the survey won't 'get' them or be on their side”).⁵ Contrastingly, as our previous research identified, Anglo-Catholic contexts are almost entirely missing from the conversation around new things in the Church of England. It's not unreasonable to think that some of this absence is due to a difference in the use of terminology.⁶ There is no uncontentious or neutral approach to conducting research in this area, and it is not clear how beneficial it would be (as the gatekeeper above appeared to suggest) to target one demographic of those starting new things. So, while we tried to maintain a broad scope in the use of terminology in the survey, it also seems likely that participation was limited to those who could self-identify with the language used in the survey, and therefore that some contexts may be underrepresented because of linguistic barriers.

⁵ Note the word “eucharist” is a Greek word not a Latin word.

⁶ See Cockayne, “Exploring the impact of new things”.



Eucharistic New Things? Background and Context

T“The Church of England is dropping the word ‘church’ to be more “modern”!⁷ These were the words of a recent headline in the *Telegraph* newspaper responding to a piece of research published by the Bede Centre in 2024. *New Things* (written by Will Foulger) sought to examine the practice of starting new initiatives (e.g. Fresh Expressions of Church, new worshipping communities) in the Church of England. Contrary to the national press attention, the report did not state that the Church of England had sought to give up the word “church” in a push towards modernisation, or to make a case for its relevance in contemporary culture. But the report did find that across the 11 dioceses and 900 new contexts represented by the research, there was a lack of consistency in terminology in how they described new initiatives started by churches to engage communities in worship. Some dioceses talked about starting “new worshipping communities”, some “new congregations”, and others “fresh expressions”. None of the 11 dioceses we engaged with used the language of “church” or “church plant” to refer to these new initiatives being started. This mirrors the national vision and strategy of the Church of England, which speaks of the aim to start 10,000 “new

worshipping *communities*”, not new *churches* (as in previous terminology of Fresh Expressions of *Church*).

While it’s far from clear that the Church of England is *giving up* on the word “church”, it’s fair to say that the shifts in mission and ecclesiology represented by this diverse use of language are significant. This research seeks to build on the findings of the *New Things* report by asking a very specific question of the new things, namely, the role of Holy Communion within these contexts.

Whether or not new communities share bread and wine together might seem incidental to some. A more obvious question might focus on the missional effectiveness of new things, or their ability to engage with children and young people. But it is important to notice what is at stake in this seemingly incidental decision.

While the last three decades have seen a radical shift in the Church of England’s ecclesiology, especially in relation to the parish and the place of new initiatives, there has been no official departure from the centrality of the two dominical sacraments (baptism and communion) for the life of the Church. The place of regular communion in the life of the church is integral not only to the Church’s canons and regulations,⁸ but also within some of the most foundational aspects of the tradition. For instance, the 39 Articles states that, “the visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly

⁷ Janet Eastham, “Church of England dropping word ‘church’ to be more ‘modern’.”

⁸ For example, see Madeline Davies’s recent article, “Eucharist through the years”.

ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.”⁹

So, while we might affix the word, “church” to any activity or interest group (e.g. café church), if it does not gather around the word of God in Scripture and practice the sacraments Baptism and Communion, it is simply not a church, at least not an Anglican church. Give the importance of sacraments to the Anglican tradition, it seems crucial to ask what role, if any, they are playing in the life of new initiatives in the Church of England and how they impact the understanding of being a church in these contexts. Before we explore these questions further, it will first be helpful to give a little more detail concerning the background in which this present discussion is situated.

The Age of New Things

To set the scene of the present discussion, we need to rewind 20 years to the publication of a report, *Mission Shaped Church*, published in 2004 and led by Bishop Graham Cray. Amongst other things, the report reflected on the relationship between the worship of the Church of England and the ever-changing cultural demands of the recently dawned millennium. For example, the report claimed that,

The nature of community has so changed... that no one strategy will be adequate to fulfil the Anglican [mission] in England today.... our diverse consumer culture will never be reached by one standard form of church.”¹⁰

⁹ Articles of Religion, Article XIX.

¹⁰ Cray (ed.), *Mission Shaped Church*, x



The report focused, in part, on the introduction of so-called ‘fresh expressions of church’ (often abbreviated to ‘FxC’), new communities seeking to engage in imaginative ways in different contexts than had been possible under the parish structure. In his foreword to the report, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams wrote that,

...we have begun to recognize that there are many ways in which the reality of ‘church’ can exist.... The challenge is not to force everything into the familiar mould; but neither is it to tear up the rulebook and start from scratch (as if that were ever possible or realistic). What makes the situation interesting is that we are going to have to live with variety; the challenge is how to work with that variety so that everyone grows together in faith and in eagerness to learn about and spread the Good News.”¹¹

Reaction to the report was unprecedented. Countless books and further reports have been devoted to critiquing and defending the claims made by *Mission Shaped Church*. Whether we like it or not, the report and the subsequent ministry arising from it has radically changed the Church of England’s approach to ecclesiology. At the height of this movement, it was reckoned that there were more than 50,000 people attending FxCs. The data suggests that FxCs were small (typically under 50), quick to grow, and engaged much more effectively with those outside of church. The data in 2013 suggested that FxC were twice as good

¹¹ Cray (ed.), *Mission Shaped Church*, ii

at attracting under 16s than average parish churches, and 36% of them were led by lay people. FxC ranged from the replicable practices of Messy Church and café church, down to the more niche and bespoke: Lego church, kayak church.

Fast forward another 12 years, and as we have seen, the language of FxC is rarely used in the Church of England. Only 1 of the 11 dioceses we interacted with in our previous research was still using this terminology. The data suggests that attendance figures have plateaued but remained fairly steady at around 50,000, but the lifecycle of fresh expressions is often very short-lived; the median average lifespan is around three years.¹²

As already indicated, the language currently in vogue is that of “new worshipping communities”, or “new worshipping congregations”. This was given most prominence in the “vision for the 2020s”, which was discussed at General Synod in July 2021, before being more widely rolled out. Like *Mission Shaped Church*, the Vision for the 2020s paper considered by synod offers reflection on the need for more diverse forms within the church. For instance, it remarks that, “the parish system that we have inherited ...is good for serving more settled geographic communities. It is less effective in the networks of contemporary life”.¹³ Elsewhere, within the same document, there appears a much higher confidence in parish than in previous discussions. It notes, for example, “most of the

exciting new ways of being church have arisen from parishes.”¹⁴ And later, “We believe God is calling us towards a revitalised parish system within which new and inherited worshipping communities flourish together.”¹⁵ The vision for new things in the 2020s is one which maintains the creativity of the FxC movement but which places a much stronger emphasis on integration and parish revitalisation.

In 2023, the Church of England’s Statistics for Mission questionnaire added a question concerning New Worshipping Communities (or NWCs) for the first time (alongside an existing question about FxCs). Here, a NWC is defined as

a new congregation or gathering which ‘has as its purpose the worship of Jesus Christ and helping people grow in their faith. Its practices will include two or more of: prayer, scripture, praise, sacrament, and acts of service’. Each NWC ‘aims to reach people who were not previously attending church regularly and to make new Christian disciples’. They must meet at least once a month and be connected with the wider Church through the parish church, deanery, or diocese.¹⁶

Whereas FxC were often stand-alone, pioneer communities, NWCs (and other new things) are much more likely to be integrated into the life of parishes: a coffee morning with a Bible study, a foodbank with a worship service, or a new eucharistic

¹² Nunney, “The Fresh Expressions Lifecycle Survey”.

¹³ Church of England, “Simpler, Humbler, Bolder”, 5.



¹⁴ Church of England, “Simpler, Humbler, Bolder”, 5.

¹⁵ Church of England, “Simpler, Humbler, Bolder”, 9.

¹⁶ Jackson and Botting, “New in the North”, 4.

service in a care home, for example. While we are yet to gather comprehensive data on NWCs, early indications show that a number of new projects have been started by parishes across the Church.¹⁷

Communion and New Worshipping Communities

We have seen an unprecedented shift in ecclesiology in the Church of England in the past three decades. How might this impact the liturgical and sacramental life of the church? The vision of FxC, and subsequently of new things, has typically been that they eventually become mature church communities in their own right, and not merely missional projects of parish churches. For instance, *Mission Shaped Church* envisaged that FxC would also be sacramental Christian communities at some point in their future:

Churches are eucharistic communities, irrespective of their church tradition, or the frequency of eucharistic worship. The Eucharist lies at the heart of the Christian life. It is the act of worship (including the ministry of the Word) in which the central core of the biblical gospel is retold and re-enacted. New expressions of church may raise practical difficulties about authorized ministry, but if they are to endure, they must celebrate the Eucharist¹⁸

¹⁷ In total, 1,410 new congregations or new worshipping communities were reported as having been started in 2023, while 540 congregations/ worshipping communities came to an end in 2023 - i.e. a net increase of 870 congregations or worshipping communities (Church of England, "Statistics for Mission 2023", p.19).

¹⁸ Cray (ed.), *Mission Shaped Church*, 101.



There were some early indications that this journey towards sacramental ministry was being taken seriously in practice. George Lings' report, *The Day of the Small Things*, produced through the Church Army Research Unit, indicated that many FxC had started to engage in Communion in some form. Lings notes that,

while on average 42% of the 14 most common types of fxC have held a communion service, in some fxC this is very occasional. Undoubtedly the likelihood of communion goes down with less frequent meetings; 66% of weekly ones have held one, but only 19% of the monthly ones have done so.¹⁹

But despite these intentions for new things to be sacramental, a source of perennial criticism of the movement has been the lack of sacramental engagement and tradition within new things. For example, Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank write that FxC,

neglect to observe even the bare legal requirements of the Church when it comes to forms of worship. Here, however, they are only fulfilling a logic that has been present from the beginning. From Mission-shaped Church onwards there have been calls to do away with the requirement for anything distinctively Anglican to their worship... There are disparities between varieties of Anglican churchmanship in the parishes, but these are as

¹⁹ Lings, *The Day of the Small Things*, 23.

nothing compared with the disparity of worship, style and structure in Fresh Expressions, standing as they do outside the framework of common liturgy and practice. Fresh Expressions are almost each one of a kind.²⁰

While Davison and Milbank are here asking the broader liturgical question, much of what is said could apply to the practice of Holy Communion. Indeed, as Milbank insists in her most recent discussion of the topic, many new things are non-eucharistic, which, she writes, “is not so bad if one considers these as modes of evangelistic outreach, but for independent churches as these claim to be, this is just not right.”²¹

So, is it true that new things in their many varieties are keen to eschew common liturgy in favour of *one of a kind* liturgies? Are new things typically non-sacramental? What role might the eucharist play in the starting of new things? This research seeks to address some of these questions by attending to the voices of leaders within new things across the Church of England.

²⁰ Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 98.

²¹ Milbank, *The Once and Future Parish*, 103.





The Communion Dilemma

Response 1: Don't Celebrate

It is nowhere part of the definition of a new worshipping community (at least as it is currently conceived) that they must be eucharistic. Coupled with the complexities of offering eucharistic worship in the Anglican tradition (e.g. the need use authorised liturgy and to be led by an ordained priest), it is not difficult to see why many new contexts might prefer to prioritise other aspects of ministry, whether that be offering practical support and friendship, or other practices such as prayer and Bible study. For many contexts, sacramental worship is already being offered within the parish church, and so there is perhaps little desire to replicate something already present elsewhere.

Moreover, while the question of whether FxC should be sacramental was a question which was frequently asked, new things are ecclesologically much more ambiguous. Our *New Things* report highlighted that many of these new things were not explicitly seeking to exist as independent church communities in their own right, but as missional extensions of a parish church. And so, the questions about Anglican ecclesial identity (such as the application of the canons and the 39 Articles) are not as straightforward here. A new thing may have no desire to become an independent church community, and in which case, there may be no reason for it to celebrate communion.

However, for many new things (including many of those represented in this research), there is a clear desire to plant a new church community, and not just an extension or ministry

of a parish church. In which case, the question of celebrating communion becomes much more important. For as we have seen, the foundations of Anglican ecclesiology see the gathering of the church as centred around Word and Sacrament. While historically there have been differences in interpretation of what this means (not least around the question of how regularly communion is celebrated), the idea that a *church* could be non-sacramental is difficult to make sense of within the Anglican tradition. Indeed, it is surely this desire to be a distinct ecclesial unit independently from the parish church, that is the source of much of the criticism which was levelled at FxC.

We have already seen (in Milbank and Davison's work, for example) that there is a prevalent stereotype that new things are typically non-sacramental in nature. But problematically, there is very little data to show that this is true. For instance, the data cited by Milbank in her most recent book to make this claim is now 8-years old (it was published in 2017, and the data itself was gathered prior to the publication date).

Notably, our data (while nowhere near as comprehensive as the 2017 study from Church Army) does not reflect this assertion about the non-sacramental nature of new things.

Of the 63 contexts we surveyed, only 9 never celebrated communion in any form. 74% of the contexts celebrated communion at least monthly or weekly, and many of these contexts only gathered monthly, so celebrated communion in every gathering.



So, our findings do not support the idea that new things are trying to exist as church communities without sacraments.

More revealingly than the numbers, a significant number of the contexts we engaged with shared Davison and Milbank's conviction that "you cannot have 'Church' without baptism and communion."²² For example, many used the language of communion being "central" or "core" to their identity as a church community, some expressing that their community wouldn't "make sense" without regular eucharistic worship. While there were certainly examples of those who felt communion was less central to the life of the church (e.g. one person noted that "prayer ministry" was more important, and another "Bible reading"), the majority of those participating in the research sought to practice communion regularly, and spoke powerfully and theologically of its centrality to the life of the faith community which had been started.

But what of those who chose not to celebrate? What can we learn from their responses? Of the 9 communities who never celebrated communion, a range of reasons were stated. Some discussed challenges with the lack of ordained clergy available to celebrate, or with clergy in the parish who lacked capacity to "fit in another service" into their schedules. Others explicitly stated that eucharistic worship was available in other services in the parish and so felt it easier to signpost to these, rather than replicate. However, at least three of the nine communities who never celebrated spoke of some of the missional reasons for their decision. For example, some respondents felt that a high proportion of non-Christians in the community made

celebrating communion exclusive in a parish where the expectation was that everyone receiving communion is baptised and confirmed. Others spoke of the "steps" and "journeys" people would need to go on in their faith before being ready to share communion.

However, it is important to note that these three respondents who felt communion would make their worship less accessible (and therefore decided not to celebrate), were not the norm.

When asked to what extent they agreed that Holy Communion made worship less accessible to newcomers, 35% agreed or strongly agreed, and 65% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

In other words, while some respondents expressed a concern about the accessibility of eucharistic worship, they do not represent the majority view. Indeed, one of the common themes from the responses was that communion was seen as a highly missional act. One respondent writes that, "**It is a holy mystery where Christ can be encountered - so it's very evangelistic.**" Another states that, "**Communion is the central act of hospitality of the Christian faith**".

A consistent theme arising from the discussion of the value of communion was that it was central not only to the life of the church community, but to its understanding of mission and engagement with the wider world.

One response addressing the theme of accessibility is worth exploring in more detail. One context which described itself as "fresh expression of church" estimated that a high proportion

²² Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 142.

of their community were new to faith, and while many were baptised, a significant number had not been confirmed. They told us that this meant, “only 5% or less of our attendees or less would be able to partake according to parish rules (unless they received a blessing instead of the Eucharist). The problem isn’t with the act of communion itself, but rather the religious red tape that surrounds it within our parish.” This will be a theme more fully explored later in the report (when reflecting on the use of authorised liturgy), but it is important to note that questions of accessibility do not always concern the accessibility of practices themselves. In this case, the Church of England’s practices around confirmation and being admitted to communion were the primary barrier to a new church context being able to offer communion, and not the practice of communion itself.²³

Finally, another important factor to acknowledge is that not all contexts which do not celebrate Holy Communion are unfaithful, they may simply be unready to exist as a fully

²³ General Synod has made provision for those who have been baptised and not confirmed to participate in communion. While Canon B15A notes that, “members of the Church of England who have been confirmed in accordance with the rites of that Church” may be admitted to Holy Communion, it also goes on to stipulate the following exception: “any other baptized persons authorized to be admitted under regulations of the General Synod”. The admission of baptized children to Holy Communion Regulations 2006 accepted by General Synod on 8th February permit the admission of baptised children to Communion if they have been suitably prepared, in consultation with the parish and diocese. It remains a local decision, therefore, whether to admit baptised individuals to Communion (and Canon B15A also permits the participation of “any baptized persons who are communicant members of other Churches which subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity”). (Church of England, Canons, Canon B15A).



formed Anglican church just yet. Indeed, of the 9 participants who never celebrated communion, 4 of these contexts were only 1-2 years old. As work by Lings and others have shown, new churches rarely (if ever) emerge fully formed. For Lings (as for the authors of *Mission Shaped Church*), celebrating the sacraments should be the *goal* of mature Christian communities, and may be a criterion by which we can judge they have become a “church”, but we should not expect this to happen instantly.

We have seen that there are many reasons why contexts may choose not to celebrate communion, many of which are important to take note of. It was striking that

from the contexts we engaged, very few had no desire to celebrate communion.

Even for those who could not currently celebrate, there were clear reasons why this could not happen in the present.

For some new contexts, this first response to the communion dilemma may be a temporary solution. But it surely cannot be a reasonable option for a context that wants to mature as a church community, existing as more than a missional activity of a parish church.

Response 2: Celebrate with Authorised forms of liturgy

We have already seen that most of the contexts we engaged with saw communion as a crucial part of the church's life and most were finding ways to celebrate at least monthly in their context, and often every time they gathered to worship. We have also seen that the desire to start sacramental communities, and not just more missional activities, has been central to the movement of FxC and now to those starting new things.

But within the Church of England, there are clear parameters within which the sacramental life of the Church must lie. The Declaration of Assent, which all clergy make at their ordination and upon their appointment to each new post, states that, “in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use only the forms of service which are authorized or allowed by Canon.”

So, what are the forms of service authorized by Canon for celebrating communion within a new thing? One might think, given the significant work that was done to create structures and systems to support new FxCs and NWCs, that this question would have been given some serious thought and that clear guidance would have been provided. But this has not been the case.

During the introduction of the *Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure* in 2007, then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams described the need for a “careful loosening of the

structures” to allow the continued growth and flourishing of FxC. This included, amongst other things, the introduction of Bishops’ Mission Orders (BMOs), a piece of legislation which allowed FxC to exist outside of (or alongside) the existing structures of authority in place through the Parish system. But as Mark Earey notes, despite this significant shift in governance of FxC, there was no provision offered to help FxCs engage with authorised liturgical texts, or advice about how they were to celebrate the sacraments, beyond a very short appendix in the paperwork for the measure. As Earey summarises it,

the basic gist of what is said there is this: You will need to be flexible and creative, taking account of context, but you will need to do this within the frameworks already established in the Canons and Common Worship. ...this guidance is for the more ‘extreme’ examples of fresh expressions of church, expressions which cannot be ‘held’ within existing models, and where the needs are likely to be mostly ‘outside the box’. It is these emerging church contexts which are told that all they need is provided by Common Worship, and that the rules which govern their liturgical life are the same as those governing all other expressions of church in the Church of England. Whatever else one might think of this guidance (which in many respects is great) it seems a little unrealistic.²⁴

It is important to dispel some common sources of misinformation here. First, on the limits of episcopal authority.

²⁴ Earey, *Beyond Common Worship*, 55.

It is common (at least anecdotally) to hear of new church contexts which have been given “permission” to operate differently by their Bishop, including permission to administer communion in a different location or using alternative liturgy. However, the legislation for BMOs makes clear that it is not within a Bishop’s authority to grant freedom from the canons, especially around the administration of the sacraments.²⁵ The Bishop is given authority to “make such provision”, as they “think fit for the administration of the sacraments” in a BMO, but crucially, this must be “in accordance with the relevant legal requirements... and will be subject to the legal rules relating to the administration of the sacraments which apply in the Church of England as a whole”.²⁶ And so, it simply will not do to get permission from a Bishop to use a different liturgical text if this is in conflict with the regulations already provided.

Secondly, another common misconception is that the Canons on liturgy permit clergy to create new services for these contexts, sometimes citing Canon B5, which states that,

The minister having the cure of souls may on occasions for which no provision is made in *The Book of Common Prayer* or by the General Synod under Canon B 2 or by the Convocations, archbishops, or Ordinary under Canon

²⁵ The legislation states that, “4.6.8 Church of England disciplines apply regarding ordained ministry and the conduct of worship under the BMO. There will, therefore, be limits to what a Bishop may authorise as part of a co-operation provision with a non-designated Church, given that the provisions of Canon B43 will not apply.” Church of England, “Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011: Code of Practice”.

²⁶ Church of England, “Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011: Code of Practice”.



B 4 use forms of service considered suitable by him for those occasions and may permit another minister to use the said forms of service.

Anecdotally, I have heard it said that this provides justification for the use of alternative forms of liturgy in new things, since *no provision* has been made for the context of a forest church, or the NWC in the school hall. However, within *New Patterns for Worship*, a resource produced by the Liturgical Commission to assist churches in leading worship, a worked example is provided which flatly denies this interpretation of Canon B5. In the worked example, a minister asks permission to adapt eucharistic liturgy for a school worship service. A letter from a Bishop’s legal advisor is cited in response:

It does not matter legally whether the service is in school or in church. Canon B 1 limits Church of England ministers to using only the services it covers, unless he is claiming that the provisions of Canon B 5 apply, namely that it is a service for which no provision is made in the *Book of Common Prayer* or under Canons B 2 or B 4. Our common understanding is that Canon B 5 cannot be stretched to cover services of Holy Communion even if they are for specific occasions, age groups, or places not specifically provided for in the BCP or Canons B 2 and B 4. So a service of Holy Communion ...should be regarded primarily as a service of Holy Communion (and therefore coming under Canons B 1 and B 2), and not as a special liturgy ...for which the BCP etc. makes no provision, thus

leaving the minister to his own discretion under Canon B 5.²⁷

The above discussion may seem overly technical, but the point is this: If an ordained minister wishes to make the Declaration of Assent with integrity, then it is difficult to see how anything other than liturgies authorised by the Church of England might be used in the celebration of communion. Unlike the provisions for a Service of the Word, the liturgies offered for Holy Communion lack the same degree of flexibility. And this means that (at the very minimum) one of the 8 eucharistic prayers in Common Worship, the consecration prayer from The Book of Common Prayer, or one of the two additional Eucharistic prayers recently published for celebrating communion with children must be used. While, as Earey has shown in some detail,²⁸ there is significant room for creativity and freedom around the surrounding liturgy,²⁹ one of the authorized Eucharistic prayers must be used without significant alteration or amendment.³⁰

For many contexts, this poses no significant problems:

²⁷ Church of England, *New Patterns for Worship*, 50.

²⁸ See Earey, *Beyond Common Worship*.

²⁹ E.g., unless the eucharist is a principal service of the parish, there are some changes which can be made to the material used before the eucharistic prayer. See the following guidelines on Messy Church for a worked example of this (Messy Church, “Messy Church Communion”).

³⁰ But as the guidelines for Messy Church Communion make clear, there is some scope for contextualising and creativity by use of an extended preface when using Prayers A, B or E.



63% of the contexts which were regularly celebrating communion said they were using authorized liturgical texts in the context of new things

Although we should note that this 63% also includes those who said they used a eucharistic prayer from the Iona community, with the assumption that this was an authorised text. In this 63%, 24 were using Common Worship, 7 other authorised texts, and 3 a lightly tweaked authorised liturgy of some description.

49% of those we engaged with in the research felt that authorised liturgical texts were suitable for use in their context. Many responses noted that “flexibility” of Common Worship, noting the “variety”, “accessibility” and “adaptability” within authorised liturgies.

Others noted the importance of “structure” and the sense of “familiarity” for members of the community with a historic connection to the church. So, clearly many felt that Common Worship was a resource which was both suitable and broad enough to allow for new eucharistic communities to be formed.

But there is more work to be done around the use of authorized liturgies in context. As one respondent put it, “Common Worship is a wonderful resource if used creatively and with care to the local context.” The *if* is significant here.

Clearly, not all contexts engaged with this research saw the value and adaptability of authorized liturgies (more on this shortly), but it remains a live question whether the issue is the liturgies themselves, or their use in context. A trivial, but revealing example, was found in one respondent noting they used “authorised liturgies” and then stating “we used Celtic Liturgies” when asked which liturgies they use. The respondents to this research are the primary leaders in these contexts, and the fact that they were unable to distinguish authorised from unauthorised liturgical texts speaks to the level of liturgical literacy in the wider church.

As many of the respondents note, there is significant scope for contextualising Common Worship to be used in new contexts, and many churches offer legal eucharistic services without them feeling traditional or removed from the realities of context. It seems reasonable to think that for many, the problem lies in confidence and training. If the Church of England has no plans to *carefully loosen* the liturgical structures as it has done with governance and polity, then much more support is needed to help people navigate the structures with confidence and clarity. We will return to this recommendation in the conclusion of this report.

But even with further training and a rise in confidence, it is important to acknowledge that the current liturgical restrictions mean that from the words of the Preface until the Breaking of the Bread (around 700-1000 words, or 5-8 minutes) a

prescribed text must typically be used.³¹ Many of the respondents noted the challenges of these restrictions, especially in engaging with those on the fringes of church.

Several respondents noted that there were problems with education levels, reading ability, and literacy that made authorised liturgies a barrier for mission.

Others noted that Common Worship was effectively a “middle class” set of liturgies which is very difficult to make relevant to everyone. One of the most common terms that was used to describe authorised liturgies was “wordy”; many noting the level of complexity in the sentence structure was a barrier to engaging all of the community in worship and narrative of the sacrament. One respondent sums up the sentiment concisely:

“Jesus went out and met people in their context; communion has to be delivered in the same way to be relevant.”

Another phrase used by respondents was that authorised liturgies were “jarring” with the rest of the content of their public worship. It’s not difficult to see why this might be the

³¹ With a few exceptions. For example, as Mark Earey helpfully identified to me, there is some flexibility for extended prefaces to be locally composed, informal, and/or extempore (when using Prayers A, B and E), and in more restricted ways, for local choices to inform short proper prefaces, and especially so in one of the two Additional Eucharistic Prayers.



case. In contexts which have been given the remit to start new contextual communities, to find ways to “proclaim afresh” the good news of Jesus Christ (to borrow from the Preface to the Declaration of Assent), and to engage beyond the confines of traditional and inherited church, the need for contextual language is crucial. One of the respondents said that the worship in their context was “conversational”, noting that, “to use set liturgy would be out of place in this context.” Many of the services which are represented by these contexts will be very informal, drawing in different voices into community, and looking for opportunities to translate theological ideas into the vernacular. To stand up and read 700-words of formal liturgical prose in such a context is bound to feel “alien”.

And so, while we have seen that almost half of respondents (about 49%) thought that authorised liturgies were sufficiently adaptable and accessible for their communities, 51% of respondents felt that authorised liturgies were not suitable for the communities. Many of these people spoke in detail about the barriers which arose from long, complex, and wordy liturgical texts. On the whole, these respondents wanted to grow eucharistic communities and cared deeply about the place of sacraments in the mission of the Church but felt that the resources they had been provided with were insufficient for this purpose.

While surely (as we have noted), more could be done to train, educate and equip people to use authorised texts with confidence and creativity, it seems clear that for many the second response to the Communion Dilemma is simply not a live option. That is, they are unable to use authorised liturgies while remaining engaged with their context in the way that they

have been sent by the wider Church to do. So, while far more of our respondents chose this response (in contrast to the first response), it is clearly not the ideal for all.



Response 3: Celebrate in an unauthorised way

Lastly, the final response to the Communion Dilemma is to use an unauthorised liturgical text while leading worship in a new thing. Consider two anecdotal encounters which highlight this third response. A leader of a FxC which had existed for a number of years and had regularly celebrated Holy Communion was preparing for an Archdeacon's visitation (the first in nearly a decade). There was a distinct look of confusion across the leader's face when the Archdeacon asked which of the Eucharistic Prayers would be used when they came to preside; "we write our prayers", was clearly not the answer the Archdeacon wanted to hear. Another ordained leader of a growing church plant engaging with significant numbers of young people typically uses the words of institution in 1 Corinthians 11, and then offers extemporary prayers before breaking bread. An Archdeacon happens to be a member of this congregation and told the vicar: "I need to tell you off once a year about your use of liturgy, then I won't mention it again".

Notably, while the question of lay presidency remains a live issue in the Church of England, it was not an issue substantially addressed by our respondents. Only 2 of 63 contexts admitted celebrating with a non-ordained person, and the remaining responses were divided between the ordained leader of the new thing (34) and an ordained person who wasn't the primary

leader (20). 7 said no one celebrated.³² This isn't to say that the question of ordained leadership and presidency is not relevant to the place of eucharist and new things, only that it didn't come up as a central issue of this research.

As we have seen, many people in the context of new things find the formal words of authorised liturgy restrictive and jarring in contexts which seek to engage people from diverse backgrounds unfamiliar with the Christian faith.

Of the contexts celebrating regularly (54 in our research), 18 of these contexts are using liturgy which has specifically written for or adapted for their context, and 3 contexts are using a mixture of authorised and adapted liturgy.

This amounts to 39% of the contexts we engaged using texts which are not authorised by General Synod. There was a mixture of sources for these texts, including a few mentions of Iona and/or Celtic liturgies, "liturgy from inclusive church", and those who stated that they read a biblical passage together, such as 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

The motivations for using unauthorised texts have already been discussed. A theme which occurred regularly in the responses was the desire to avoid liturgy being too "prescriptive", noting the intention to build community which was responsive and congregational. This is summed up well by

³² Note, 2 of the 34 responses from contexts which said the ordained leader of the context celebrated also stated they never celebrated communion.

one respondent's words that authorised liturgies rarely capture the "language of the heart". Another participant wrote that,

authorised liturgies "are designed for modalities with a passive audience. Not the engagement of koinonia".

Some noted the lack of inclusive language in authorised liturgies, raising problems about the "heavily male gendered" language in liturgies (particularly the predominantly male ways of referring to God in authorised liturgies, e.g. "Lord", "King", "Father", etc...), especially challenging in contexts with significant engagement with LGBTQI+ communities.

Adding these concerns to those summarised in the previous section, concerning literacy and accessibility, it is not difficult to see why some contexts find the use of prescribed liturgical texts problematic. It is important to notice that this is not an issue unique to the contexts of pioneering and new things, either. Anecdotal, it is common to find Anglican churches in the evangelical tradition which hold authorised liturgy very loosely, prioritising extemporary prayer, contemporary music, and extended preaching over and above set liturgical texts. It is also not uncommon to find Anglo-Catholic contexts which choose to use the Roman Missal, rather than liturgical texts authorised by the Church of England.³³

³³ As Mark Earey also identifies there's increasingly an awareness of other needs for this flexibility, such as the need to engage with a wider diversity of culture and ethnicity within the Church of England and to consider the needs of those with neurodivergence.

While it is not difficult to understand the need and motivation of those seeking to find accessible and contextually appropriate forms of liturgy, this response to the Communion Dilemma is also problematic, perhaps more so than the first two responses to the dilemma. The problem is not primarily that clergy are violating the promises made in the Declaration of Assent. Although this surely is worth reflecting further on, this is an issue for personal conscience and/or clergy discipline. Nor is the problem only that contexts are "breaking the rules" of the tradition they exist within, although this is an important issue too and many contexts would benefit from engaging more seriously with the question of what it means for them to be Anglican.

One of the most problematic implications concerns the implications of widespread use of unauthorised liturgies for Anglican ecclesiology. As Earey has explored at length, the current practice in the Church of England of unenforced and widely disregarded liturgical rules, is that we are quickly becoming congregationalist in practice.³⁴ The problem is not as straightforward as wanting every context to use the same texts, either. Since the publication of *Common Worship* in 2000, it is difficult to think of the Church of England as a tradition defined by the use of a common liturgy.³⁵

In Earey's words, the present approach to liturgical form in the Church of England, "pushes creativity underground and

³⁴ See Earey, *Beyond Common Worship*. A helpful summary of his argument can be found in the conclusion on pages 139-41.

³⁵ Notably, many other Anglican provinces in the wider Anglican Communion have retained and revised a "prayerbook", rather than seeking to offer the vast and complex menu offered by *Common Worship*.

stops it being shared openly, so good practice is harder to foster centrally (though it may thrive unofficially) and we are pushed further towards congregationalism”.³⁶ In other words, in a context where the liturgical rules are stringent, but in which there are no real consequences for ignoring these rules, then inevitably, liturgy is determined locally and with no wider benefit for the church.

If eucharistic liturgies are written in the context of new things (i.e. only for that community and those who gather there), but with no attempt to engage the wider church, then the risk is twofold. First, contexts do not benefit from the church’s wisdom and historic tradition; there is no theological corrective offered, and contexts risk liturgies with problematic or even heretical content. And, second, the wider church does not benefit from the lessons which have been learnt in this context about liturgy and celebration of the eucharist. There is no mechanism by which the particular act of worship in this community can feed back into the life of the church as a regional or national body. The Church of England is a fundamentally un-congregationalist church, and to continue operating in this way liturgically is deeply problematic.

The third response to the dilemma is an attractive one for many pioneers and church planters. For those starting new things, the desire to be accessible, responsive to context, and to lead people in worship which speaks into the *language of their hearts* is understandable. But as we have seen, the implications theologically are significant. The use of unauthorised liturgies in the context of new things raises questions about how the local

expression of church is related to the wider church and its structures and regulations. If a new thing seeks to be part of the Church of England, this cannot be disregarded as institutional red tape, it cuts to the core of Anglican ecclesiology. The problem is not just new things are *breaking the rules*, but they are seeking to exist outside of the ecology of the wider church, in which all can be benefit and learn from one another.

³⁶ Earey, *Beyond Common Worship*, 139.



Where Next? From the Edges to the Centre

The Communion Dilemma is clearly a loser's game. For those leading new things in the Church of England, the choices which exist all have deeply problematic implications. If contexts choose not to celebrate then questions abound about whether this context is really a church, at least in any Anglican understanding of ecclesiology. But if contexts choose to celebrate, they are left with equally difficult choices: celebrate with authorised texts which feel jarring and inaccessible to the communities you have been sent to engage with, or find a way of making liturgies more accessible by using unauthorised forms, but thereby violate the Declaration of Assent and potentially cut the new church community off from the ecology of the wider Church.

How could things be different?

It is striking that the vast amount of ecclesial innovation in the past three decades hasn't yet resulted in any serious reform of eucharistic practice. In what follows, we offer some constructive ways forward if the Church of England truly wants to see the flourishing of eucharistic things.

1. Engage more seriously in liturgical process and revision

First, while the Church of England's liturgies are authorised by General Synod and form the boundaries of faithful practice, they are not closed to future revision. A good example of how

things might be different can be seen in the recent publication of the guidelines for practising communion within Messy Church.³⁷ The Messy Church movement partnered with the Church of England's Liturgical Commission to produce a set of guidelines explaining how liturgy might be faithfully adapted and applied to a context aiming to take an intergenerational approach to worship. The guidelines also point to the publication of two new eucharistic prayers (commissioned by General Synod in 2008)³⁸ for contexts with high numbers of children present. These were originally conceived as being for church school contexts, and the pressure to produce them came from this context. In this case, rather than those leading worship with children merely writing their own liturgical texts, those engaged in this ministry have sought to work through existing processes and structures, making the case for more provision and providing clear guidelines for how practitioners might use authorised liturgy faithfully and contextually. Notice that in this case, both the contexts and the wider church benefit from this innovation.

A more radical case for reform has been proposed by Earey, who advocates for the need for canonical reform to increase the church's flexibility around using liturgy and to move away from a system of having a set of authorised texts; to move from a system of "control to trust".³⁹ Rather than indefinitely producing new liturgies, Earey proposes that churches are given the freedom and flexibility to make liturgical decisions,

³⁷ Messy Church, "Messy Church Communion".

³⁸ Church of England, "Additional Eucharistic Prayers".

³⁹ Earey, *Beyond Common Worship*, 141.

within a system of accountability and support to do so faithfully in response to the church's tradition. Clearly, any kind of canonical change would require significant energy and attention through General Synod, at a time when there are seemingly more pressing issues to be addressed.⁴⁰ But Earey's work raises a number of important questions pertinent to the starting of new things.

It is surprising that 30 years of innovation have not brought about deeper reforms to Church of England liturgy and that the process described above has not led to guidelines and liturgies for use in new church contexts.

We hope that a broader process of reform will lead to the production of further resources for use in the context of new things.

2. Designate some new things as centres for Liturgical Experimentation

A worry with the creation of new liturgies and guidelines is that they would be unlikely to take seriously the concerns of contexts and instead be a centrally conceived and enforced set of texts, unable to grasp seriously the issues on the ground.

One of the phrases which is used widely in the discussion of pioneer ministry and church planting is that "the edges renew the centre". If we are serious about avoiding congregationalism

and seeing the whole church engaged in mission, then we must take seriously that the changes that happen at the edges of the life of the church are important for all. We have seen this movement happen significantly in our understanding of ecclesiology; whereas thirty years ago, FxC were a niche and specialist activity of a few dedicated few, the starting of new things is now part of the church's priorities for the next ten years across all parishes. But this same renewal of the centre from edges has not happened liturgically. We have already explored some of the reasons for this.

What might it look like to enable a liturgical resourcing of the centre from the edges? In *Liturgy on the Edge*, a book edited by Sam Wells summarising the liturgies created through St Martin in the Fields, Wells writes that,

This book is intended to stimulate liturgical renewal in the wider Church - especially in the spirit of turning challenges into opportunities and seeing 'problems' as gifts God gives us to draw us closer into the mystery of our calling. It is designed as the beginning of a conversation, not the last word.⁴¹

Wells sees St Martin in the Fields as a context from which wider church renewal and innovation might come. This provides a helpful frame for thinking about the wider church's engagement with new things.

If the church is serious about reforming eucharistic liturgy for today's church, then it must do so in and through local

⁴⁰ Although as Earey explores at length in his essay, "Beyond Common Worship: Imperatives and Hindrances for the Church of England", wholesale liturgical revision takes a lot of synodical time and energy and there is very little energy or imperative to explore further review.



⁴¹ Wells, *Liturgy on the Edge*, 10

contexts. One way to do this would be to learn from Wells and St Martin the Fields.

The Church should aim to create centres which are designated to experiment liturgically and invited to be involved in the process of reform through several years of practice and experimentation, rather than just helping to write liturgies.

Of course, there are risks with this approach too; rather than creating a wider trust in the local church to make liturgical decisions, centres of liturgical experimentation may instead simply create more examples for people to emulate, rather than dealing with the systemic changes that would release contexts to lead worship contextually.⁴²

3. Provide more serious theological training for thinking about liturgy in new things

Finally, a part of the problem with the production of new liturgies and guidelines, and the creation of centres of experimentation to enable this, is that although it would surely make some difference, it would also mask the deeper problems. For as we have seen, the comments offered by the respondents

to this research did not speak of the need for more authorised liturgies, but of the desire to shape liturgy to their contexts in ways that were conversational and responsive.

We have also seen that one of the risks of doing so is that we are now in the position of silently endorsing congregationalism, in which pioneers and church plant leaders are also liturgists, writing eucharistic texts for their communities without the theological support of the wider church. The idea that a local pioneer could straightforwardly adapt or write liturgy which has been pored over by decades and centuries of theological reflection and debate is worrisome to say the least. Writing liturgy is an art which requires an attentiveness to the theological implications of the smallest grammatical shifts and choice of words.

Even if we were to introduce further guidelines, or allow for centres of liturgical experimentation, we would also need to take seriously the need for robust theological and liturgical training.

How are we training pioneers and leaders of new things? Are they equipped to think deeply about the implications of how they form people for worship?

In our desire to experiment with ecclesial form to engage with a new generation of people, we have inadvertently set leaders up for failure, with no structures to guide them through the process of shaping and changing liturgy for context.

⁴² One way of addressing these deeper systemic barriers, as proposed in Earey's work is to change the liturgical canons so that the centre of gravity shifts from boundaries to 'trust (of the local) with accountability (to the wider church, through the bishop)'. See Earey, *Beyond Common Worship*.

Grasping the Nettle

The dilemma presented in this paper is not new. There have been discussions about the use of liturgy in the context of new things for many decades. But there seems to be very little appetite for liturgical reform on this issue at present. If the dilemma presented here goes unattended to, we think that the church's vision to start 10,000 new things in the next decade may ultimately be a flawed endeavour. For without the resources and structures to equip new contexts to engage sacramentally with communities, we are implicitly stating that sacraments are of no real relevance to the task of mission today. We hope that the reflections offered here will provide some fruitful ways forward both for future research, and also for those engaged in thinking theologically about the church's direction and priorities in the coming years.



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