

NewCongregations

Your guide to... **Greenhouses**



DIOCESE *of* **OXFORD**

A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world

What are Greenhouses?

In a garden, a greenhouse incubates seedlings and fragile new shoots. It provides light and warmth, and a place for nurturing, watering, protective support until the seedlings are strong enough to go out into the garden. New Congregations Greenhouses act in the same way. They are support communities for small teams of people from different parishes who want to see people from outside the church community come to know Jesus. These small teams join a Greenhouse because they have an existing mission initiative, or an aspiration for mission, and would like to see these initiatives nurtured into new worshipping communities. Usually Greenhouses will be deanery-wide, but there may be Greenhouses with a particular

focus – for example, intercultural mission and ministry, Messy Church, youth work – and these will be diocesan-wide.

The Greenhouse provides a place where teams come together to learn, share knowledge and receive training and coaching as they grow their initiative into an intentional worshipping community. They are led by a facilitation team within the deanery, with input from the national Greenhouse team. The [Greenhouse](#) idea is part of a nationwide Church of England and ecumenical initiative to help grow new worshipping communities of all shapes and sizes. It makes available to us 25 years of experience of Fresh Expressions and new forms of church.

Who are Greenhouses for?

They are for anyone and everyone who hopes to see a new worshipping community emerge in their parish, either out of existing initiatives or in a new form.

There are usually between eight and ten small teams in a Greenhouse. Each team typically contains two or more people, and these people will generally – but not always – be lay people from the congregation. Their initiatives could include lunch

clubs, Forest Church, café church, craft groups, keep fit groups, online church... anything that seeks to reach people outside Sunday church and intentionally bring them to know Jesus.

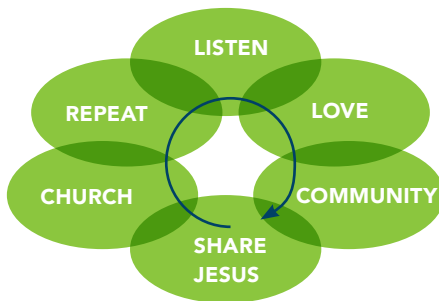
Our experience in the Diocese of Oxford is that churches of all traditions are joining in, from both 'high' and 'low' church – it's something that every parish can be part of.

Why are Greenhouses helpful in growing new worshipping communities?

Greenhouses provide a shared focus

Greenhouses provide resources through [Godsend](#), a step-by-step framework for teams to work through, with the support of others. Godsend takes teams through the Loving First Cycle. It also gives a shared focus for missional energy, particularly when people get stuck and don't know how to move to the next stage on the Loving First Cycle.

The Loving First Cycle



Underpinned by prayer and connection to the wider church, teams leading new worshipping communities travel through this cycle via a great variety of routes, with these features in common:

- Team members listen prayerfully to God, to the people they serve, to the experience of the wider church and to one another.

- Through listening, they prayerfully discover a simple way to love people around them.
- They build community in the process.
- As trust deepens, they find natural opportunities to share Jesus, as part of a fuller life.
- A new Christian community connected to the wider church takes shape among those coming to faith, where they are, and connects to the wider body. Typically, the community is part of the parish church, and will frequently be regarded as a new congregation.
- New believers repeat the journey in their own way.

Greenhouses offer just-in-time learning

By using the Godsend resource, teams will prayerfully discover what they need to know when they need it, to move to the next stage of the cycle.

Godsend provides a range of tools that help leaders progress through the cycle. The variety of tools, which are designed to spark imagination,



Photo courtesy of Katherine Crowsley

means that there is something that can work across church traditions. Leadership teams will also be using the tools and training to help form new Christians into mature disciples, confident in their everyday faith.

Greenhouses encourage regular gatherings

Teams will come together twice a year for planning, team and personal formation, and mutual support. During the gathering, each team will share with the other teams:

- Where are we at? This includes what we have been learning.
- What could we do next? Teams brainstorm possible next steps.

- What will we do next? Teams prepare a simple plan describing what next step they will take, and who will do what by when.

They support a shared presence on social media

Between gatherings teams support each other by exchanging news and prayer requests, sharing ideas and materials that work and asking each other for advice.

They facilitate coaching/mentoring

The Greenhouse convening team will help teams when they get stuck. The coaching will normally be available online (e.g. Skype or Zoom).

What does a Greenhouse look like in practice?

This is one example, the Witney Deanery Greenhouse:

Identifying missional energy and interest across the deanery

The facilitation team, led by the Revd Simon Kirby at St Mary's, Cogges, arranged meetings with clergy in the deanery to explain the Greenhouse and gauge their interest.

Invitation event

The incumbents and their potential teams were invited to an online event to find out more about the

Greenhouse, and whether it was something they would like to join. Between 11 and 14 teams attended, and at least 8 teams signalled they would like to go ahead and join.

Launch event

This includes introductory training, taking teams through Godsend. (Other Greenhouses will choose to do the Godsend training as four shorter evening sessions after the launch.)



Photo courtesy of Martin Fowmes

Gatherings

Although teams will keep in touch via social media between gatherings, formal gatherings to track progress and plan next steps will be held three times a year. (Many Greenhouses will choose to gather twice a year.)

What next?

This rhythm of team learning from Godsend, gatherings, exchanges on social media, team leaders' meetings and coaching as needed continues for an initial two years. After this, teams may recommit to their Greenhouse and, as new communities reproduce, their 'offspring' will be invited to join too.

Do I have to join a Greenhouse?

Absolutely not! This is a support network that is there for you if you consider it appropriate for your situation and context, and if you would like the New Congregations team to help lift the burden of

mission. While we think that it will help you focus your missional energy and give you a wealth of support and resources, there will be some for whom it isn't the right time or approach.

Does it work for rural parishes?

Yes – rural ministry and mission is vitally important in the Diocese of Oxford and a Greenhouse will serve parishes in all contexts. In fact, it is often rural mission that is the most innovative and ground-breaking, as rural churches face a particularly challenging context and need to

seek new ways to reach people outside church. Greenhouses are appropriate for urban, suburban, new town and new housing contexts too. Their effectiveness lies in their ability to be contextually appropriate for every type of social setting.

What if your deanery doesn't have a Greenhouse?

Greenhouses are emerging across the diocese, and some are further ahead than others. Here are some things you can do if there isn't yet a Greenhouse in your deanery:

- Speak to your Area Dean to find out if there are plans underway to establish a Greenhouse.
- Contact the New Congregations team – if a Greenhouse isn't

emerging, they may help you to join a neighbouring Greenhouse until one launches in your deanery.

- Find a team and start a Greenhouse yourself – you can read [more about being a Greenhouse convener](#) and it may be that you can offer this to your deanery.

I have more questions – who should I ask?

Speak to our New Congregations Enabler, [the Revd Sarah Flashman](#), for more information. You can also visit our [website](#), where you will find a number of helpful resources.

NewCongregations



oxford.anglican.org/growing-new-congregations