

## Resource church leaders Zoom session - 11 January 2024

Paul Pavlou and Ben Doolan interview: Wyken Revitalisation story...

### WHAT DID WE DO TO PREPARE FOR THE GRAFT AND HOW DID WE GRAFT IN?

I'm in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year here now and having reflected, I think the way I went about my prep has probably been my biggest mistake for the grafting process, which will become apparent as I speak, but I'll address how I'd do things differently later...

So we landed in Coventry in September 2021, were licensed in the church we grafted into straight away **(MISTAKE NO.1 – I should have chosen to be licensed at the resource church)**. And then over a 9 month period I spent most of my time with the resource church (which was also new to us – we weren't part of this church prior to moving to Coventry – everything was alien). Over that 9 months period, I took some services at the graft church and I chaired their PCCs whilst still at the resource church **(MISTAKE NO.2 – leading inherited from a distance with no relationship & driving change - it wasn't just day to day PCC meetings, I had to get them to agree to receiving the SDF funding and becoming employers and having this graft take place!**

**So I was chairing these PCC meetings of high level change management which none of them have the competency or heart for and I'm doing it without knowing any of them and whilst I got them to vote everything through, it was very difficult because I was working with people who weren't 'ripe to receive' a graft, and I was implementing strategy without relationship - *Strategy without relationship is a waste of time.***

Then in May 2022 (9 months after licensing - **(MISTAKE NO.3 – it was too soon – due to being licensed there and pressured by SDF to develop plans and do stuff because the money timeline was ticking I felt pressured to get started, when really things were not in place relationally or operationally)**). So I, with a handful of people from the resource church migrated and some others on the fringe of a couple of other churches joined too – not a team, but just a few that wanted to come with us

We joined with their traditional 9:30am service and then over a 6 month period, I built a team up whilst being at the graft (rather than going in with a formed one from day 1) **(MISTAKE NO.4 I should have built the team and then moved with all of them, rather than flying solo and then building a team in a hostile context)**. Then we started missional activity and a new 11am service alongside the traditional one.

## WHAT WENT WELL IN PREPARATION?

- **With the resource church:**
  - o Building relationships with resource church people went well. I got on great with Phil and Rachel and their team, and I got to know a few people from there to come with us, whilst leading their Student Ministry for a bit.
- **With the inherited church:**
  - o As you've heard, the majority of the prep was filled with my mistakes, but the good within those hard conversations with the inherited church was that I made sure **I was always upfront** about what was coming and being done. So they may not have liked it, but at least they knew that I meant what I said and I would see things through after I said them.

Probably the best thing in the prep was realising that these guys weren't ripe for a graft and thus acknowledging how dominant change management would be in my ministry here, which **meant I realised two things early on:**

**1) what my purpose is here: to break up the ground,** soften it, sow and lay the foundations, in order for the next person to come and water and nourish it. So I'm here to pave the way for someone; and

**2) what the main things would be that I wouldn't compromise on in that timescale:**

**Preaching the Gospel without restraint and Starting Missional activity asap.** By coming to terms with the context and gig here contextually, I was able to re-frame my approach and decide what were the main things that I wouldn't budge on.

And in doing so, it **forced me to identify the missional opportunities early on** – before even building a team, because other than a weekly lunch for the elderly, there was nothing happening here before we arrived. But within one term of getting the team here we had 3 new missional outputs up and running as well as revamping our Christmas services and outreach...

So **actually we were able to start with mission quickly, before we had any infrastructure or culture set.** Mission was where we were front footed and actually, we're now beginning to see the first shoots of that early work, and the gospel is being preached, which is opening up discipleship conversations and healthy challenge.

## WHAT WOULD WE DO DIFFERENTLY?

**The three main things I would have done differently are around PREPARATION (PREP), PACE & PERCEIVING WINS.**

*Starting with PREP...*

**PREP:**

- For the PREP, I would have been more **CURIOUS** - I would have asked more of the right questions to discern for myself whether this church was ripe to receive a graft (because actually what has transpired here is that it wasn't/isn't)..

**So – curiosity ahead of grafting in/even discerning whether its right to graft**

○ By this I mean:

▪ **Ask more of the diocese with prep;**

- I would have asked diocese more questions:
  - about where the church really was at with regard to finances, change management;
  - to ask them to carry out a full church health survey ahead of me going in;
  - to ask for a full history of the churches leadership over the years – ups and downs etc;
  - to ask whether they'd truly accepted that they were in a state of decline in every aspect of church life – because they have been;
  - to have agreements in place for the change management process that was going to happen;
  - I would have also asked the diocese if they have given the resource church enough support with governance:
    - Meaning:
      - have they helped the RC get their people onto the graft PCC ahead of us grafting in?
      - and have they helped bridge the relationship between RC and the graft PCC and helped mediate a healthy relationship between them early on ahead of a graft?

**PACE:**

- In a nutshell I would have set the pace slower and pushed back more against SDF with regards to timing pressures. This is because the problem is that they set their expectations against a blank canvas model of church planting, rather than a graft-revitalisation plant and you can not have the same timelines or

expectations for them – they're completely different.

- I would have slowed down and held back from being licensed at the graft church and been licensed at our resource church upon landing in Coventry, (until we were ready to fully migrate)..
- I would have also slowed down when we migrated into the church with people from the resource church. From the day we moved to the day we migrated, it was only 9 months; with the way things were set up, this was no way near long enough to build up enough people to come with us or to build proper relationship with the inherited bunch, and we also hadn't built an actual team by then...

### **PERCEIVING WINS** (& *these would be my highlights probably*)

- Looking back, I was too focused on wanting big platform wins and in doing that I was misunderstanding our context and missing out on what God was doing here. The wins I now perceive as wins were never the wins I thought I'd be looking for in planting.
- I've had to learn to meet our people and the area where they're at and where my ministry is at as part of that. And I now see that for us, the wins here are around helping this church to become 'healthy' and the way the Spirit seems to be doing that is by engaging us in the what I call the 'ministry of the 1' – working with one person at a time on their own unique discipleship track and gradually helping people take one step at a time.
- And so the perceived wins here are small – our story is becoming one of a series of consistent small cultural change wins both within the church we've inherited and in the connections being made with the community outside of it:
  - o Example 1) PCC meeting including swearing and saying they don't do gifts changed to buying me a Christmas gift;
  - o Example 2) People saying how they've been hurt by the church (thought only for a small clique) but I can see that we are making a change here. For example someone coming to a Christmas service and saying how it's so good to see that finally the gospel is being preached, that the Spirit is being invited in and that there is visible change....
- These are small wins that at the start I wouldn't have perceived, but have learnt to cherish...

### **SOME HIGHLIGHTS – God moves despite mistakes!**

- Community catching generosity
- Deprived family buying gifts for staff at Christmas from the relationship building of hot chocs etc...
- Team developing having not worked in a church before etc
- People inherited finding their faith again and beginning to actually engage in discipleship, whereas before they'd just been 'attending'