

Fresh Expressions of Church: Fruitfulness Framework report



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RESEARCH



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Executive Summary

The Fruitfulness Framework is a new tool to help Fresh Expression Church (FXC) leaders measure and improve the health and impact of their FXC community. Instead of just counting ‘bums on seats’ the framework asks questions about five main dimensions of participants’ lives: their relationship with God, with self, with other FXC members, with their FXC’s vision, and with their local context.

This report presents the methodology behind this framework, as well pilot responses from 19 FXCs and 218 community members.

Fruitfulness framework results

With God

Our research examined how Fresh Expressions churches influenced three aspects of participants’ relationship with God: (1) their commitment to exploring God, (2) the ways in which they engaged with God, and (3) the extent to which they felt connected to God. Encouragingly, Fresh Expressions seemed to have brought respondents closer to God in all three of these areas. For example:

- While less than half of participants (49 per cent) claimed to feel spiritually alive when they first joined their church, more than eight in ten (86 per cent) said the same afterward.
- Over eight in ten respondents (86 per cent) agreed that their FXC had improved their relationship with God, while almost half (47 per cent) strongly agreed.

With Self

Similarly, the questionnaire dealt with three aspects of participants’ relationship with themselves: the extent to which they desired to be authentic, addressed personal issues, and had seen evidence of the Fruits of the Spirit. Participants indicated that they had seen at least some improvement in each. For example:

- The share who reported feeling peaceful increased from 50 to 87 per cent, while the proportion who felt worthy rose from 49 to 84 per cent.
- Just under nine in ten (88 per cent) agreed that their church had improved their personal life.

With FXC members

The research considered three aspects of participants’ relationship with other FXC members: their desire to empower others in their church, the extent to which they felt connected to other members, and feelings of love and belonging within congregations. For example:

- 95 per cent of respondents saw their churches as safe places in which to have questions and doubts.
- Seven in ten (70 per cent) said they were being disciplined at least monthly – roughly the same percentage which said that they were disciplining others.
- 97 per cent said they feel a sense of belonging frequently in their Fresh Expressions churches.

With FXC vision

Participants reported that they identified with their churches’ vision, and wanted to commit to making this vision a reality. Nonetheless, their actual contributions to their churches often lagged somewhat behind their commitment.

- Although only 42 per cent of respondents thought they had something to contribute before joining Fresh Expressions, 82 per cent agreed that they had something to give at the time of the survey.
- 79 per cent of participants reported wanting to try new things and take risks – nearly double the 39 per cent who said the same before joining a Fresh Expressions church.
- Most participants (88 per cent) said that Fresh Expressions had improved their vision of the church, while only 76 per cent agreeing that it did so in a way that recognised their gifts and skills.

With context

On the whole, participants reported that their relationship with their wider communities had improved as a result of belonging to a Fresh Expressions church. This was especially the case for respondents' ability to share their faith with their communities and for communities' awareness of and support for Fresh Expressions churches. For example:

- While fewer than half of participants (48 per cent) agreed with the statement 'I want to tell others about the difference that God is making in my life' before joining the FXC, three-quarters (75 per cent) agreed with it at the time of the survey.

Learnings and recommendations

To understand the data in greater depth, we also disaggregated it by variables including age, gender, and responses to other survey questions. Our analysis revealed the following trends:

- Participants who felt that their FXC asked them to serve in a way which recognised their gifts and skills were twice as likely to see personal change as those who did not.
- FXC members who felt their FXC had impacted their social lives were also more than twice as likely to have experienced personal change.
- Participants who were new to church (i.e., who had never previously attended church, or who had not attended church in the last two years) saw the most change. These differences derived from the fact that respondents who had not previously attended church tended to give themselves lower scores for the period before they attended an FXC; their scores at the time of taking the survey were comparable to those of other respondents.
- Participants who had previously attended church did score 5-15 per cent higher on measures of spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and reading the Bible.
- Younger congregation members were slightly more likely to experience change than older members. The group most likely to report personal change was respondents between the ages of 25 and 34.
- Churches with a higher proportion of women were slightly more likely to see change across all their members than those with more even distributions. This is likely to be skewed by three or four churches with very high proportions of men or women.

- Respondents from smaller churches reported more personal change. This was only a slight difference, but it suggests that larger churches may not always be at an advantage in helping members grow spiritually.

Conclusions

If FXCs are going to be able to stand up to criticisms of being based "on a defective methodology"¹; there needs to be a robust definition of success as well as a system to capture and evaluate their impact.

The Fruitfulness Framework has in many ways achieved this goal. As the first part of this report showed, through a literature review and practitioner focus groups, a clear set of measurable success outcomes have been created. Similarly, the Fruitfulness Framework is a tool that enables FXC leaders to measure their communities growth and change across these outcomes.

If you would like to see the Church of England's commentary and information on the Fruitfulness Framework, [follow this link to visit the Church of England website](#), or scan this code:



¹ Davidson, A. and Millbank, A. 2010. *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. SCM Press: London.

Introduction

2

Since its conception, Fresh Expressions of Church (FXCs) have received a variety of endorsements as well as criticism from Christians and established church bodies in the United Kingdom. On the one hand the movement has been praised as a contemporary and highly impactful way to engage with local unchurched and dechurched communities. Whilst on the other hand they have been labelled as an “abandonment of stability for novelty and given liturgy for ‘choice’”, resulting in “banality and pastiche, as well as a frail and atomized subjectivity”.²

However, as is all too common within church and Christian circles, these debates rely extensively on subjective criteria and vague and varying definitions of success. Here there is no clear definition, with measurable outcomes, as to what a successful or unsuccessful FXC might look like. Similarly, when evaluating whether these outcomes have been achieved, arguments resort to the subjective realms of philosophy and theology (as in Davidson and Millbank’s critique of Fresh Expressions¹), or to high-level outputs, ‘bums on seats’, and anecdotes (as in Church Army’s ‘Evidence about fresh expressions of Church in the Church of England’ report in 2015).³

Whilst both types of evidence are valuable in their own right, they must be appreciated in combination with clear definitions of success, as well as clear robust impact evidence. This is what the Fruitfulness Framework, and this report, aim to do.

Fruitfulness framework

Based upon an extensive literature review, as well as several workshops with FXC practitioners, the Fruitfulness Framework is a new tool to help FXC leaders measure and improve the health and impact of their FXC Community. Instead of just counting ‘bums on seats’ the framework asks questions about five main dimensions of participants’ lives: their relationship with God, with self, with other FXC members, with their FXC’s vision, and with their local context.

² Davidson, A. and Millbank, A. 2010. *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. SCM Press: London.

³ Lings, G. 2015. *Evidence about fresh expressions of Church in the Church of England*.

Within each of these dimensions, the framework asks about participant beliefs, behaviours, and experiences.

The framework was used with a pilot sample of 19 FXC communities (consisting of 478 participants) across the United Kingdom. This framework creation and use was done with the following main research questions and research purposes in mind.

Research questions

Based upon an extensive literature review, as well as several workshops with FXC practitioners, the Fruitfulness Framework is a new tool to help FXC leaders measure and improve the health and impact of their FXC Community. Instead of just counting ‘bums on seats’ the framework asks questions about five main dimensions of participants’ lives: their relationship with God, with self, with other FXC members, with their FXC’s vision, and with their local context.

What does a ‘Fruitful’ FXC look like?

A first vital step in measuring success is to be able to define it. For this reason the first main question this project asked was ‘what does a Fruitful FXC look like?’. This question looked at both the large definition of fruitfulness, as well as the specific measurable indicators of this concept.

To what extent are FXCs being fruitful?

Having answered the first question, this project then asked to what extent are FXCs being fruitful? As already discussed, this question was an important one to answer objectively and without specific dogmas having influence, or preconceived conclusions being made.

How can we improve their impact in the future?

Looking to the future of FXCs in the United Kingdom, as well as their relationship with both mainstream Church and secular society, this final question looked at ways to improve the impact of FXCs.

Research purpose

The purpose of answering these questions were as follows:

Provide FXC leaders with a tool to measure and improve impact

Leaders of faith-based organisations often struggle to define success, and therefore objectively know whether it is happening or not. By providing leaders of FXCs with a tailor made Fruitfulness Framework, it enables them to define and measure their success on an ongoing basis. This in turn will drive an improved impact strategy, increase motivation and funding based upon areas of strength, and improve areas of weakness for these FXCs.

Celebrate the collective impact of FXCs across the UK

This project will also enable the UK church to understand and celebrate the areas of strength of FXCs across the UK. Whilst anecdotes of failure and success fill conversations surrounding FXCs, data from this project will enable a fresh perspective and a fair celebration of their accomplishments.

Identify fruitful FXCs to learn from through further research

Finally, data from this project will enable the Church of England to Identify some of the most fruitful FXCs across the country. This will enable them to pursue a deeper understanding from these FXCs of the key steps and tools to creating this success.

Methodology

3

Framework design

High-level literature review

As has been previously described, the first main step of the methodology behind this project was to define what a 'fruitful' FXC might look like. A good starting point for this process involved a high-level review of FXC literature and relevant surveys and studies.

Based upon the original definition of FXCs as 'new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don't 'go to church', there are 'several key features' that unite them.⁴ These four features are widely known as contextual (i.e. listening to people and being alongside them in their culture), missional (i.e. serving people outside church), ecclesial (i.e. forming a church), and formational (i.e. making discipleship a priority) features. Whilst highly conceptual these four features provide a great starting point for any outcomes framework of a FXC. Similarly, within the Church of England, the Greenhouse project empowers new FXC leaders with the 'Listening First Missional Journey' strategy, aiming to keep 'Greenhouse Teams focused and intentional as they work towards their mission goals'. This journey follows a cyclical process of 'listen', 'love', 'community', 'share faith', 'church', and 'repeat'.⁵

Whilst both of these frameworks provide high-level concepts from which to start to define success, there also already exist several sets of indicators and tools to measure some of these outcomes. Within the Fresh Expression movement, one example of this is Steve Taylor's 'Seedling Annual Reflection Tool'.⁶ This tool asks participants to list '1 or 2 things' that they see occurring in their community, ranging from 'listening and connecting' (i.e. Seedling team members spend time in local

⁴ Fresh Expressions. 2021. 'What is a Fresh Expression?'. Available online at: <https://freshexpressions.org.uk/what-is-fx/>

⁵ Church of England. 2021. 'All about Greenhouse'. Available online at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/fresh-expressions/what-greenhouse>

⁶ Taylor, S. 2020. 'Paying attention: The Seedling Annual reflection tool'.

community - walking, praying, listening), through to 'Structures' (i.e. Signs of support and interest from wider church). Likewise, within the Church of England, the Church Development Tool (formerly known as the Big Church Survey) is an annual survey that will be used to measure subjective congregation engagement with their church and their church's mission.⁷

Finally, and looking more widely towards the academic fields of sociology and theology, there is extensive literature on the various domains of an individual's faith. Most recently, Richards et al. completed a factor analysis of 34 aspects of faith to identify key themes.⁸ They then created a metric consisting of three main areas: love of God, love of others, and love of self. These factors went on to form the subscales of their 17-item Theistic Spiritual Outcome Survey (TSOS). Likewise, there are several Christian theological writers (e.g., Mead, 2007; Olthuis, 2006) who have also suggested that relationship with God, relationship with others, and transformation, acceptance, and development of the self are core themes throughout the whole Bible, and thus should be the core themes of this framework.

Focus groups and online questionnaire

Following this high-level review of literature surrounding FXCs a more grounded approach was taken with current practitioners in the UK. This involved conducting two focus groups, as well as an online questionnaire, with 20 current FXC leaders. All leaders were asked to simply define, in their own words, what they felt a fruitful FXC looked like.

Secondly, leaders were provided with a more structural framework to work with, and were asked to think about the changed beliefs, behaviours, and experiences of both FXC leaders, as well as FXC participants. This second approach provided more insightful responses, with respondents highlighting a wide range of key indicators they would expect to see in each of these six main categories.

In total there were well over 100 indicators and concepts that were mentioned by leaders for both FXC leadership as well as FXC participants.

⁷ Church of England. 2021. 'Church Development Tool'. Available online at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/what-we-believe/advent-and-christmas/mission-network-news/church-development-tool>

⁸ Richards, P. Smith, Schowalter, M. and Richard, M. 2005. 'Development and Validation of the Theistic Spiritual Outcome Survey'. *Psychotherapy Research - PSYCHOTHER RES.* 15. 457-469.

Fruitfulness Framework

Based upon the literature review, as well as the focus group responses, the following Fruitfulness Framework was developed. As has been previously described, the framework revolves around five main dimensions of participants' lives: their relationship with God, with self, with other FXC members, with their FXC's vision, and with their local context. As the following table shows, these dimensions are each rooted in the core features of a FXC.

DIMENSION	FRESH EXPRESSION	CONCEPTS AND DESCRIPTION
With God	Formational	Members are committed to following God. They are growing as disciples of Jesus through their contact with the Fresh Expression. They describe themselves as a Christian and own this as part of their identity. They are growing in faith and knowledge in how they relate with God.
With Self	Formational	Members are flourishing personally. They are addressing issues in their own life, addiction, debt, mental health, etc. They experience inner joy, peace, hope etc.
With FXC members	Formational	Members are connecting, including, listening, and supporting each other spiritually and emotionally. They are able to ask for support from each other. Members experience a high level of belonging and acceptance from one another. They feel valued and challenged.
With FXC vision	Ecclesial	Members are committed to the vision and the practices of their FXC. They intend to become disciples of their FXC, as well as contribute their time, skills, and resources to developing contextual spiritual practices.
With context	Missional and contextual	Members are made up of individuals who do not normally attend church. They seek to fit and reach the culture of their local context. They engage the local context, both socially and spiritually. They feel equipped and confident to speak about their faith with others, and are happy to invite people to events or services at their church. They are able to relate theology to the secular.

A more detailed description of this framework is shown below. For each of the key concepts described within each dimension, a measurable (or set of measurable) indicators is provided in the final column. It is from this column that the resulting Fruitfulness Framework questionnaire can be developed.

DIMENSION	CONCEPT	INDICATOR
With God	Commitment to exploring God	Commitment to explore following God and to follow the Holy Spirit (beyond just curiosity).
	Engaging with God personally	Meaningful and personal engagement with God outside of the communal times (Bible, prayer, meditation, worship).
	Experiencing connection with God	Experiencing God's presence, closeness, connection, as well as a thankfulness towards God.
	Causal question	The extent to which their FXC is influencing this area.
With Self	Desire to be authentic	Desire and ability (developed over time) to trust, be honest, and be authentic.
	Desire to be vulnerable and humble	Desire to be vulnerable, humble, and learn from failure.
	Addressing personal issues	Addressing issues in their own life, addiction, debt, mental health, etc.
	Experiencing fruits of the Spirit	Experiencing inner joy, peace, hope etc.
	Causal question	The extent to which their FXC is influencing this area
With FXC members	Desire to empower FXC members	Desire to include, share power with, empower, and grow, other participants. Not being 'precious' about role.
	Desire to be relational and reflective	Desire to reflect on themselves, and desire to understand their impact and potential impact upon others.
	Connecting with other FXC members	Connecting, including, listening, asking for help, and supporting each other spiritually and emotionally.
	Experiencing love and belonging	Experiencing that they can show up and be completely themselves, feel accepted as who they are by the community.
	Causal question	The extent to which their FXC is influencing this area.
With FXC vision	Desire to commit and participate	Desire to contribute and take part with their FXC through a variety of resources. Knowledge and belief that they have something to contribute.
	Desire to be adventurous	Desire to be adventurous, and experiment, and try new things.
	Developing contextual practices	Contributing to their FXC with their skills and talents, as well as with their attendance and time. Contributing to their FXC with finances and material support and donations.
	Contributing to their FXC	Contributing to their FXC with their skills and talents, as well as with their attendance and time. Contributing to their FXC with finances and material support and donations.
	Experience growth and vision of FXC	Experiencing a strong sense of purpose, vision, and growth.
	Causal question	The extent to which their FXC is influencing this area
With context	Vision for local contextual impact	Vision and desire for God to work through them and impact the local community.
	Sharing God with context	Sharing about the difference that God is making in your life (developed over time)
	Connecting with context	Connecting, including, listening, and supporting the local reached and un-reached community spiritually and emotionally
	Seeing local context responding	Local community knows their FXC exists, is asking questions, is asking for help, and feels welcome and listened to by their FXC.
	Causal question	The extent to which their FXC is influencing this area

Impact evaluation design

Having designed the framework from which to measure success the next key stage of this project was to design the methodology for measuring impact. This involved choosing an evaluation methodology, defining the key research population, and developing a reporting system that would be useful to leaders on the ground.

Retrospective pre-test design

Given that FXCs have been established for a while across the country, as well as the need to avoid response shift bias in responses, a retrospective pre-test design was chosen for this project.

An RPT administers both the pre- and post-test measurements after the intervention. This approach asks participants to assess their skills, knowledge, or personal qualities as they were before joining, or just after joining, the FXC and as they are at the point of taking the assessment.

This approach has been shown to be as robust and accurate as a longitudinal design. Indeed, in their review of the literature, Rong Chang and Todd Little (2018), from the College of Education, Institute for Measurement, Methodology, Analysis, and Policy at Texas Tech University, conclude that “pretest data collected at the posttime provide a highly reliable and valid reflection of participants’ true preintervention levels and thereby provide very precise estimation of participants’ perceived changes due to the programme effects” (2018, 10).

However, RPTs are not immune from their own forms of potential bias. With this design, there was a danger that responses would bias towards social desirability or confirm respondents’ own desired journey of transformation. Since respondents want there to be a change in their lives, and know the FXC wants to see change, there was the potential that their baseline measurements would be exaggeratedly low, while their current measurements would be exaggeratedly high.

With this in mind, the wording of the questionnaire and the method of delivery were consciously designed to avoid social desirability bias.

Firstly, all responses were advertised as confidential and anonymous, with the FXC leader never being able to see responses from individual participants. Secondly, the research invitation letter, as well as subsequent emails, made it clear that this was a space to make responses as brutally honest as possible. Participants were strongly encouraged to be critical and explicitly warned against writing what they thought the FXC “wanted” to hear. Thirdly, the research was conducted by an external, non-religious organisation to add a level of objectivity and external critique.

Population and sampling

Whilst focus groups had highlighted that both leaders and participants of FXCs were important stakeholders when it came to measuring success, there was a general consensus that participants were the priority in this process. With this in mind, the Fruitfulness Framework methodology was designed to be administered by FXC leaders and completed by FXC participants of their community.

In early 2021 a wide range of FXC leaders across the country were notified that there would be the opportunity to take part in this research. With a limited number of 50 places available, leaders were invited to sign-up to the process via the Fruitfulness Framework website. Over several weeks all 50 places were taken by FXC leaders who were then given the specific instructions to administer the online questionnaire with their communities.

Ethical concerns

A vital step in finalising the methodology and questionnaire was to ensure high ethical standards.

Given the highly personal nature of the research, there were several ethical considerations and precautions that were taken in line with the British Sociological Association’s Statement of Ethical Practice.

Firstly, all data collected was voluntary. Participants were given the option of not partaking in the research in the retrospective surveys.

Secondly, to create a “safe space” to allow participants to be completely honest, all questionnaire data collected was anonymous and stored on encrypted hard-drives.

Thirdly, if participants were experiencing any forms of hurt and life difficulties and this was brought up through the research process, participants were directed to the Samaritans charity for counselling and support.

Demographics



218 people responded to this survey, representing 19 FXC churches from across the country.



Of those giving a binary gender, 71 of respondents were female, and 29 percent were male.



9 percent of respondents were under 25, 12 percent were over 65. The most common age band was 35–44 with 29 percent of respondents.



88 percent of respondents were white.



25 percent of respondents had attended their FXC for 5 years or more. 50 percent of respondents had attended their FXC for 2 to 4 years. 25 percent had attended for less than 2 years.



29 percent had not been a part of a church in the last 2 years prior to joining the FXC, and these respondents are analysed separately in a section towards the end of the report.

Response rate and representativeness

Out of the 50 leaders who signed-up to take part in the research, 19 actually pursued the opportunity and circulated the online questionnaire with their communities. From these 19 FXCs, a total of 478 participants were approached by their leader to complete the online questionnaire. 51 per cent of these participants responded and completed the questionnaire.

There was a trend towards early responders being more enthusiastic to report positive personal change than those who responded later. This was true both at the church level (churches who responded first in the sample) and at the member level (members who responded first within their churches). This means that there is likely to be some bias in the data towards those who have seen change and that those who did not respond are likely to have had less encouraging experiences than those who did. It is therefore not correct to say that this data perfectly represents all FXC churches in the UK, or even all of the churches who responded - except for the limited number of churches who received responses from 100% of their congregation members.

This being said, given the lack of bias in response based upon gender, age, and geography of FXCs and participants, the following results can be seen as indicative of the changes that are occurring in the lives of participants across the country.

National results



With God

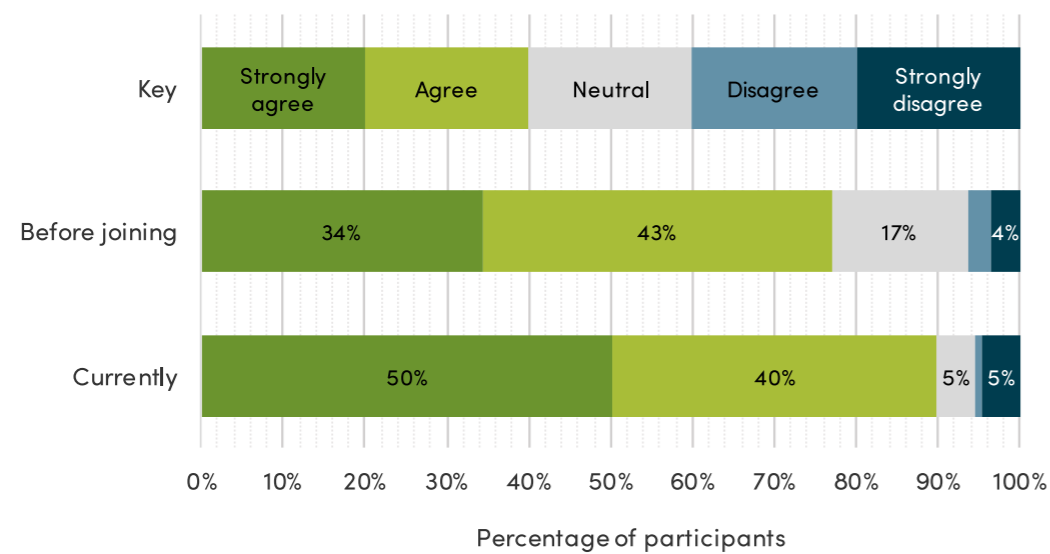
Our research examined how Fresh Expressions churches influenced three aspects of participants' relationship with God: (1) their commitment to exploring God, (2) the ways in which they engaged with God, and (3) the extent to which they felt connected to God. Encouragingly, Fresh Expressions seemed to have brought respondents closer to God in all three of these areas.

Commitment to exploring God

While only 77 per cent of participants said that they wanted to explore their faith in God when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church, 90 per cent agreed by the time they took the survey – with one in two respondents (50 per cent) strongly agreeing.

'I want to explore my faith in God'

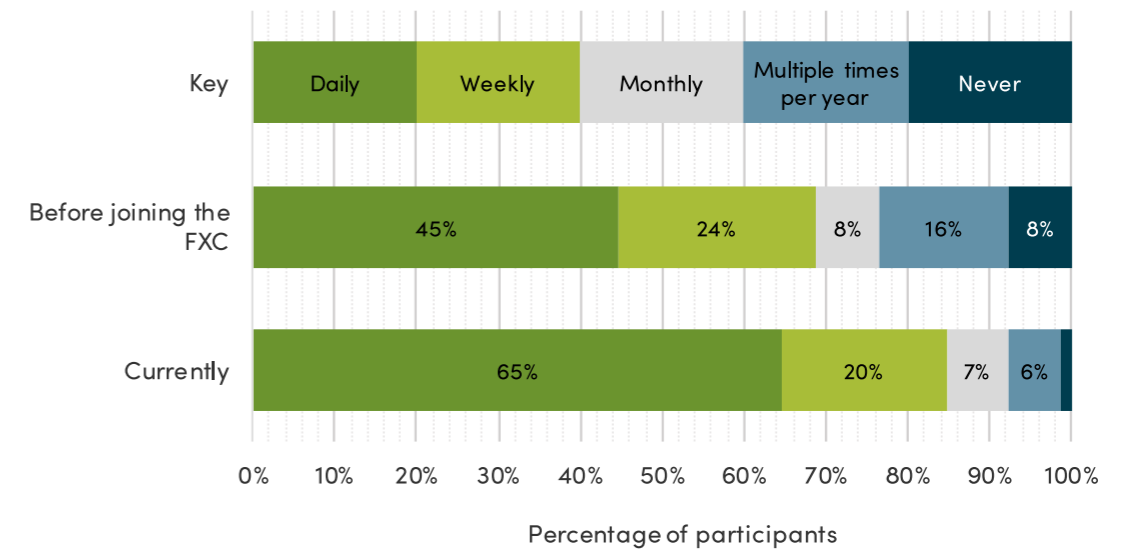
The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want to explore my faith in God'



Engaging with God personally

'I pray personally'

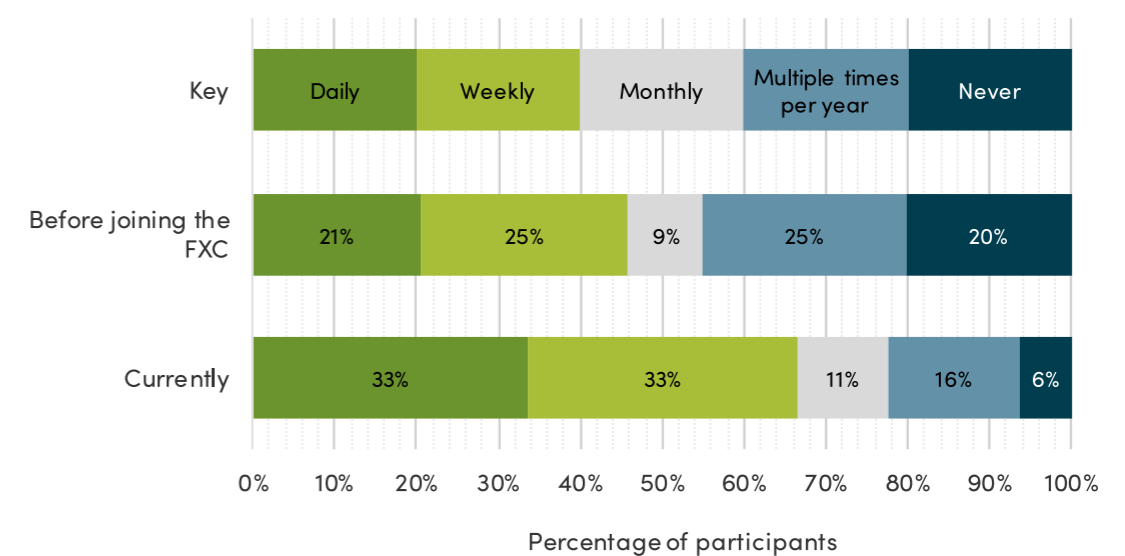
The graph shows the frequency that participants prayed



These respondents had also begun to change how they related to God, with 65 per cent praying daily after joining a Fresh Expressions church (as compared to 45 per cent at the point of joining), and nearly two-thirds (66 per cent) reading their Bible at least once a week. This represented a 20-percentage-point increase on the proportion of respondents who had previously read the Bible weekly.

'I read the Bible'

The graph shows the frequency that participants read the Bible

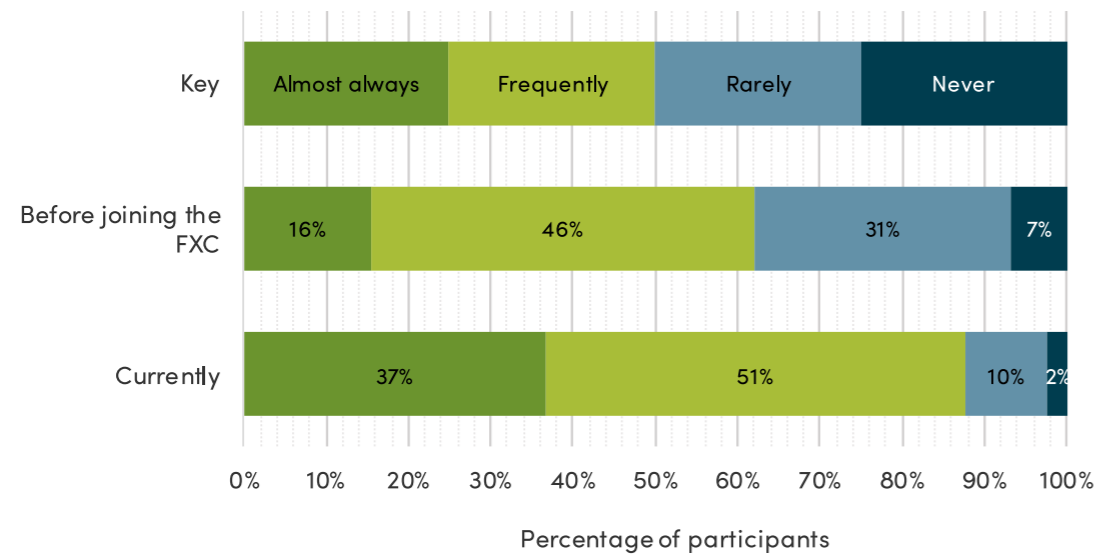


Experiencing connection with God

Perhaps as a result of spending more time praying and reading the Bible, the extent to which participants felt connected to God had also markedly increased. After joining a Fresh Expressions church, participants found it easier to see the difference God had made in their lives, and more frequently felt spiritually alive and aware of God's love.

'I could see the difference that God has made in my life'

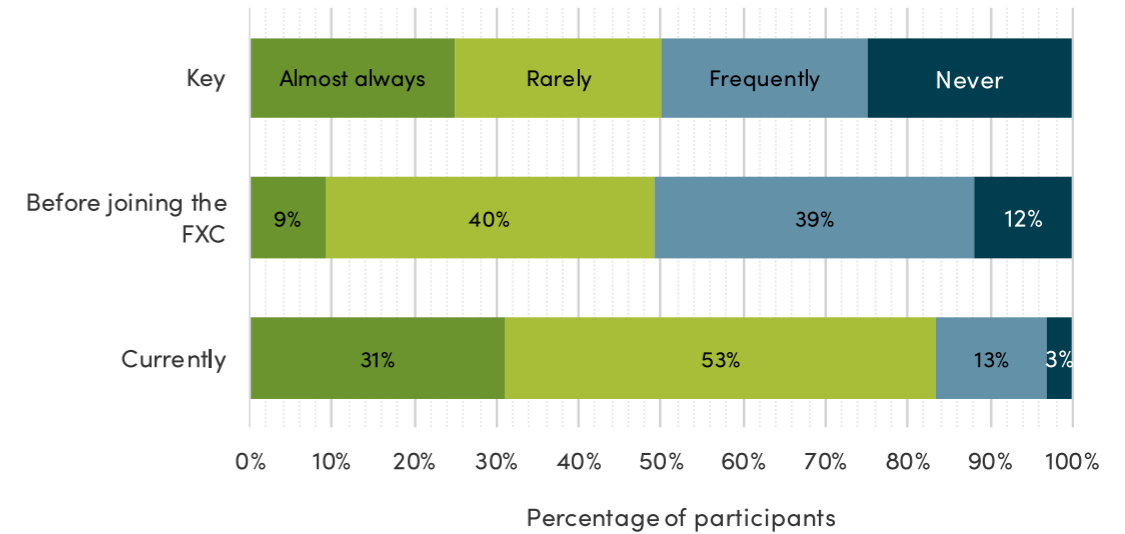
The graph shows the frequency that participants could see the difference that God has made in their lives



Some of these differences were remarkable: while only 62 per cent reported seeing the difference that God made in their lives when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church, 88 per cent said they could see this difference currently. Likewise, while less than half of participants (49 per cent) claimed to feel spiritually alive when they first joined their church, more than eight in ten (86 per cent) said the same afterward.

'I felt spiritually alive'

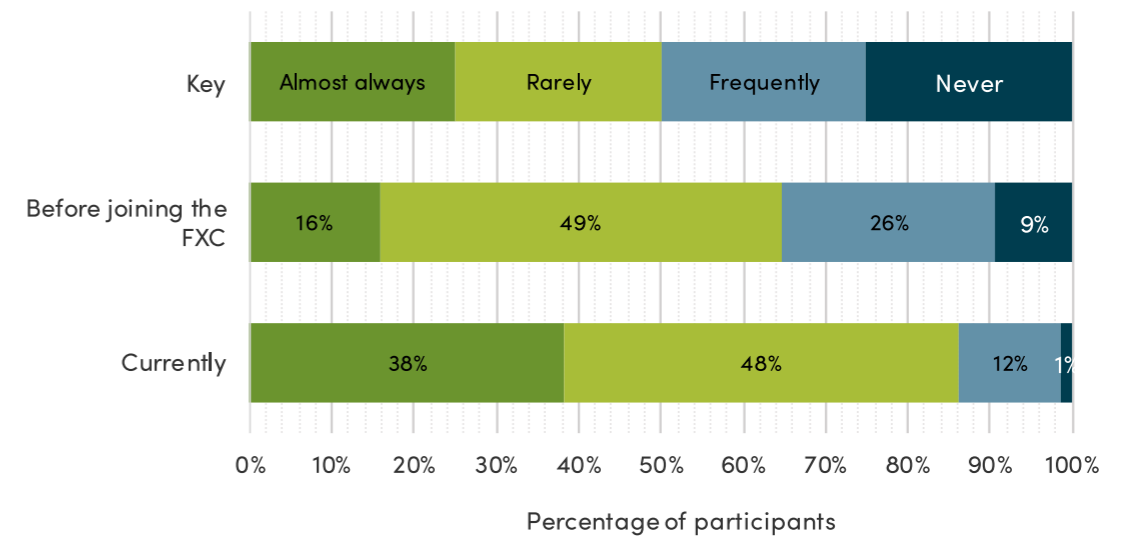
The graph shows the frequency that participants felt 'spiritually alive' during a typical month



Interestingly, this transformation was most evident in the share of respondents who said they "almost always" experienced these markers of closeness with God. The proportions who said that they almost always could see the difference that God had made in their lives and feel God's love more than doubled, while the percentage who said they almost always felt spiritually alive more than tripled – from 9 per cent at the point of joining a Fresh Expressions church to 31 per cent at the time of the survey.

'I felt God's love'

The graph shows the frequency that participants felt 'God's love' over a typical month

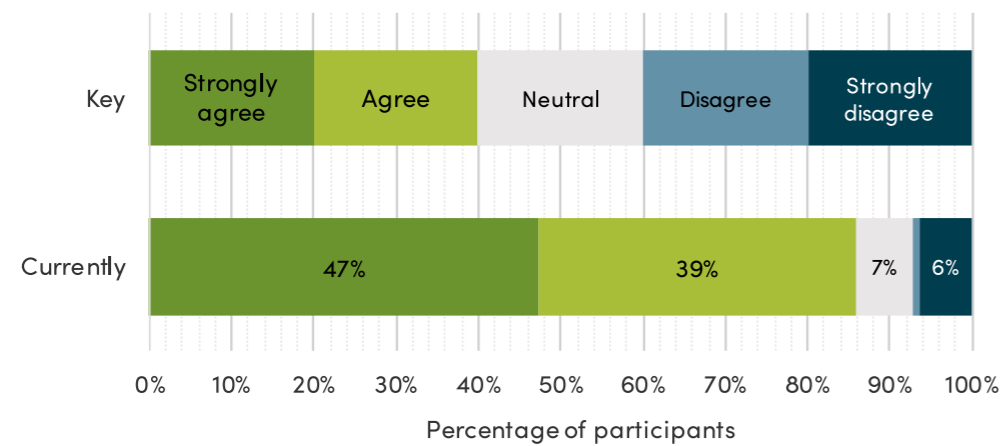


Causality

Perhaps most encouragingly, participants attributed many of these changes in their relationship with God to their Fresh Expressions church. Well over eight in ten respondents (86 per cent) agreed that their church had improved their relationship with God, while almost half (47 per cent) strongly agreed.

'My FXC has positively impacted my relationship with God'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC has positively impacted my relationship with God'



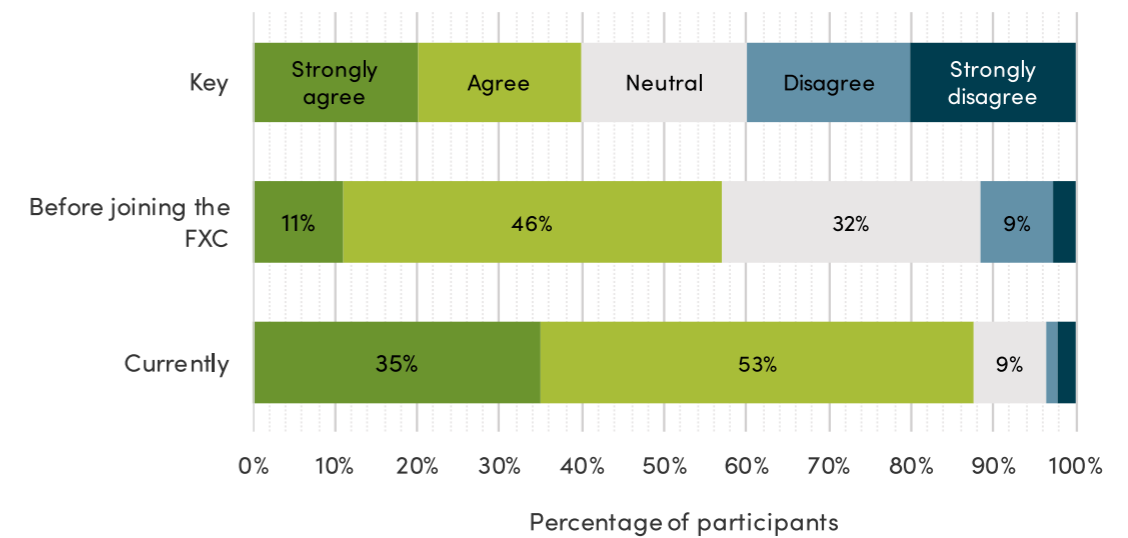
With self

Similarly, the questionnaire dealt with three aspects of participants' relationship with themselves: the extent to which they desired to be authentic, addressed personal issues, and had seen evidence of the Fruits of the Spirit. Although success was more marked in some of these areas than others, participants indicated that they had seen at least some improvement in each.

Desire to be authentic

'I want to be open with others about who I really am'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want to be open with others about who I really am'

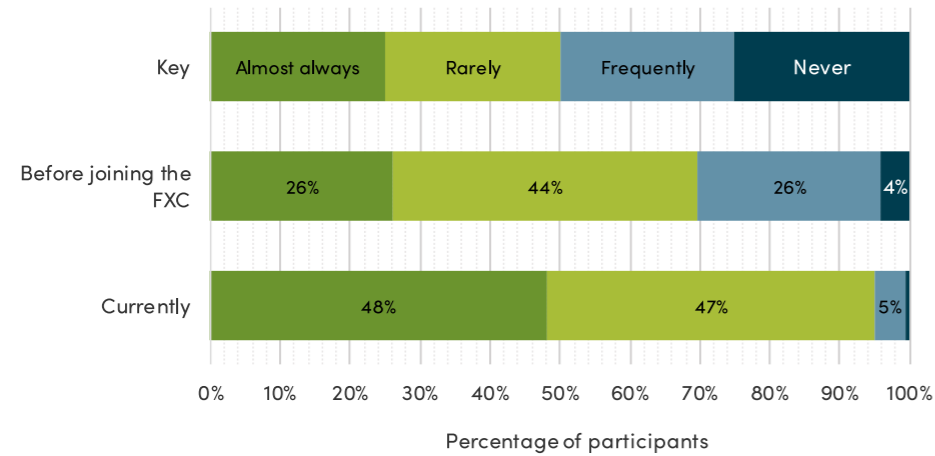


This improvement was particularly noticeable in the proportion of respondents who wanted to be open with others about who they really were. Whereas just 57 per cent of participants agreed with this statement when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church, nearly nine in ten (88 per cent) agreed by the time they took the survey. Strikingly, the share of respondents who strongly agreed that they wanted to be open with others more than tripled, from 11 per cent at the point of joining Fresh Expressions to 35 per cent currently.

Addressing personal issues

'When they come up, I work to deal with the difficult issues in my life'

The graph shows the extent that participants were dealing with the difficult issues in their life (such as problems at home, mental health, addiction)

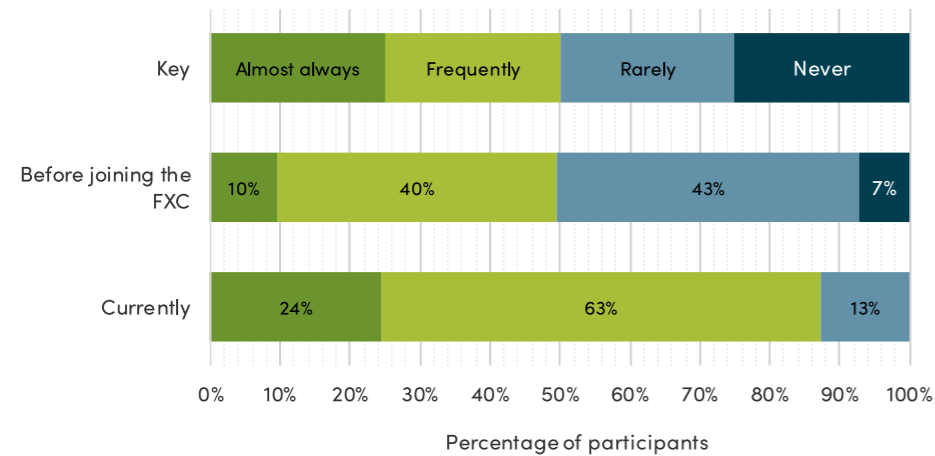


There were also smaller differences in the proportion of respondents who said that they dealt with difficult issues in their life. Whereas seven in ten (70 per cent) said they did so frequently when they joined a Fresh Expressions church, more than nine in ten (95 per cent) claimed to do so currently. The proportion who described themselves as almost always dealing with difficult issues also increased, from 26 per cent to 48 per cent.

Experiencing Fruits of the Spirit

'I felt peaceful'

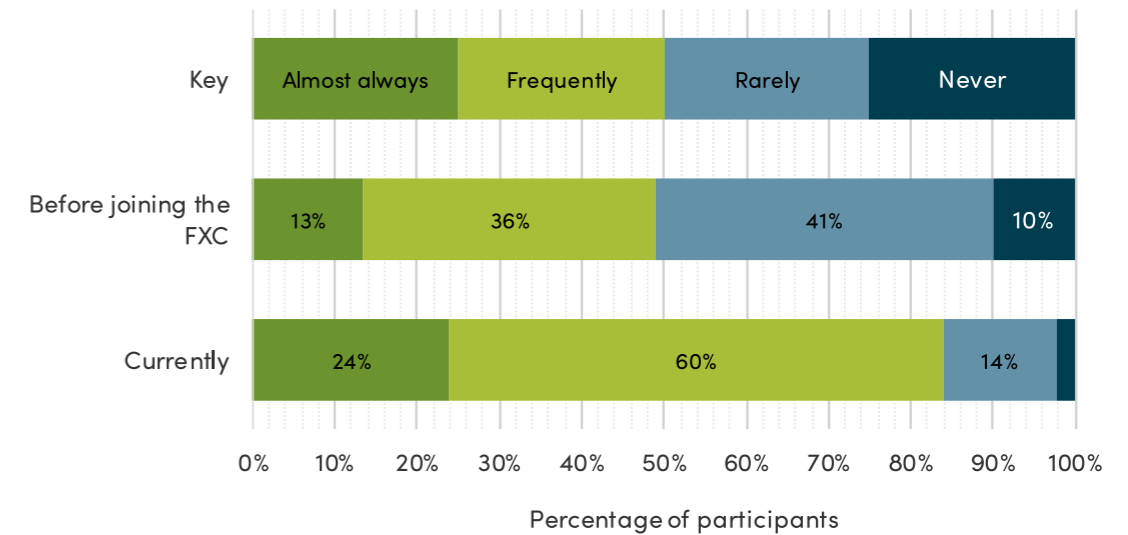
The graph shows the frequency that participants felt peaceful during a typical month



Furthermore, participants said they had improved on several measures designed to assess the Fruits of the Spirit. Most compellingly, the share who reported feeling peaceful increased from 50 to 87 per cent, while the proportion who felt worthy rose from 49 to 84 per cent.

'I felt worthy'

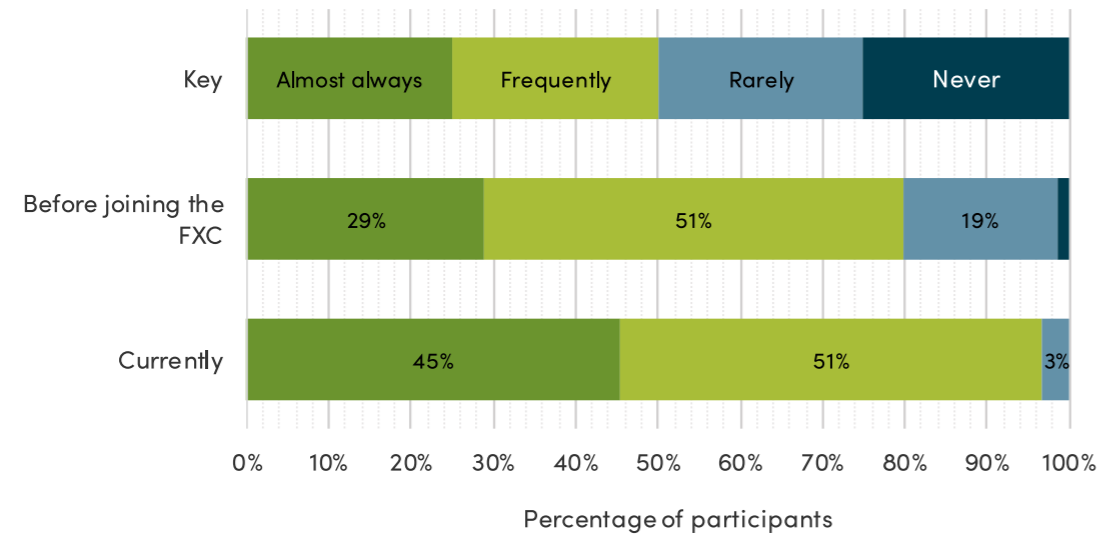
The graph shows the frequency that participants felt 'worthy' during a typical month



There was less change in the proportion who reported that their behaviour was in line with their values: although this rose slightly, from 80 to 96 per cent, most respondents seemed to believe that they were living in accordance with their values before joining a Fresh Expressions church.

'My behaviour was in line with my values'

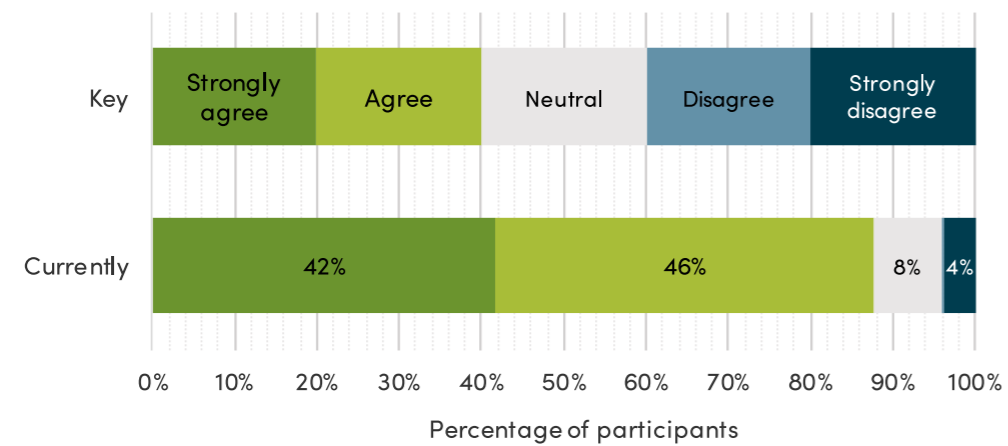
The graph shows the frequency that participants felt their behaviour was in line with their values during a typical month



Causality

'My FXC has positively impacted my personal life'

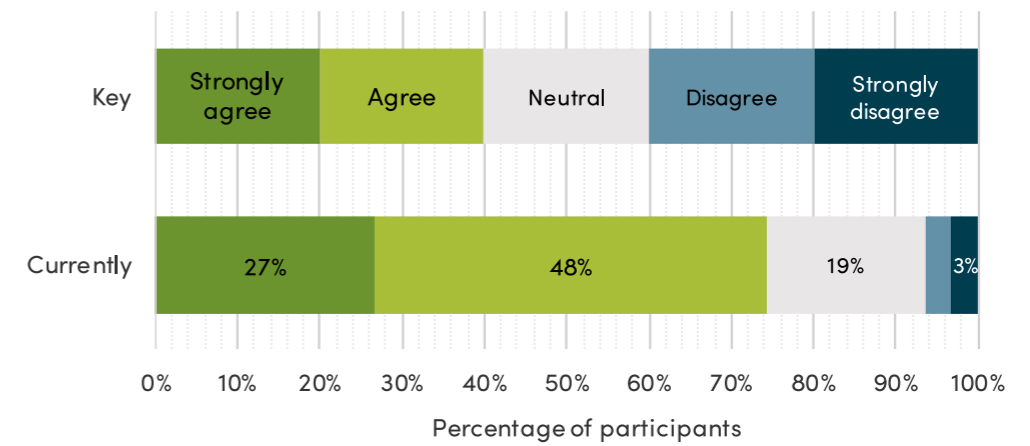
The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC has positively impacted my personal life'



Once again, participants thought their church was responsible for much of the change described above, with just under nine in ten (88 per cent) agreeing that their church had improved their personal life. Respondents were somewhat less certain that their churches had equipped them for trying life circumstances: only three-quarters (75 per cent) agreed with this statement.

'My FXC equips me for life's major challenges'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC equips me for life's major challenges (e.g. parenting, relationships, sickness and death)'



With FXC members

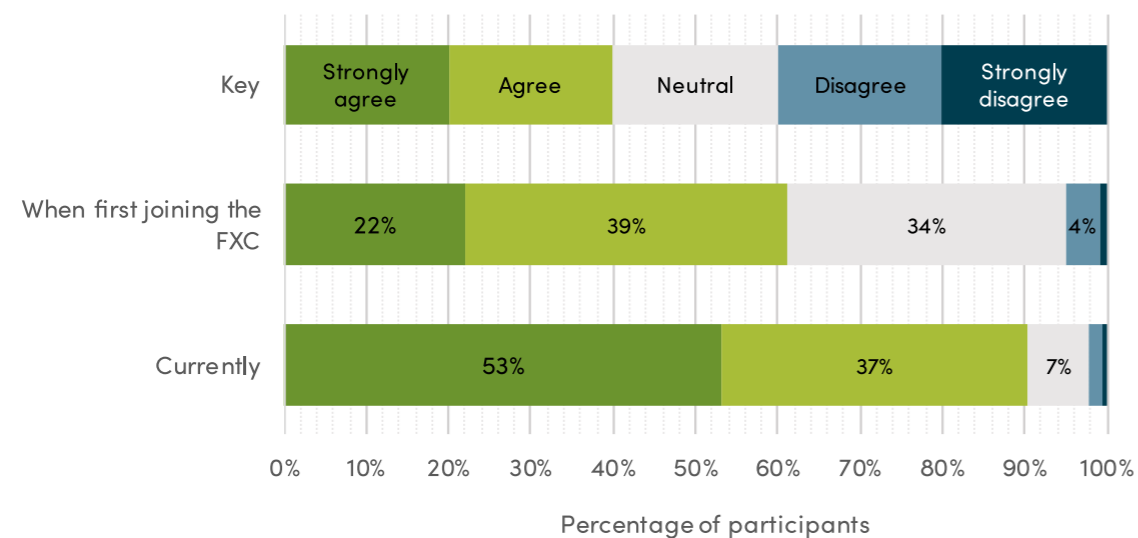
As in previous sections, the research considered three aspects of participants' relationship with other FXC members: their desire to empower others in their church, the extent to which they felt connected to other members, and feelings of love and belonging within congregations. Participants had grown in most of these areas since joining a Fresh Expressions church, although there was more limited progress on some measures of love and belonging.

Desire to empower FXC members

Our data showed clear improvement in the percentage of people who wanted others in their church to grow and take part in activities. While just over six in ten respondents (61 per cent) agreed with this statement when they joined a Fresh Expressions church, nine in ten (90 per cent) agreed at the point of taking the survey.

'I want other people in my FXC to grow and take part more'

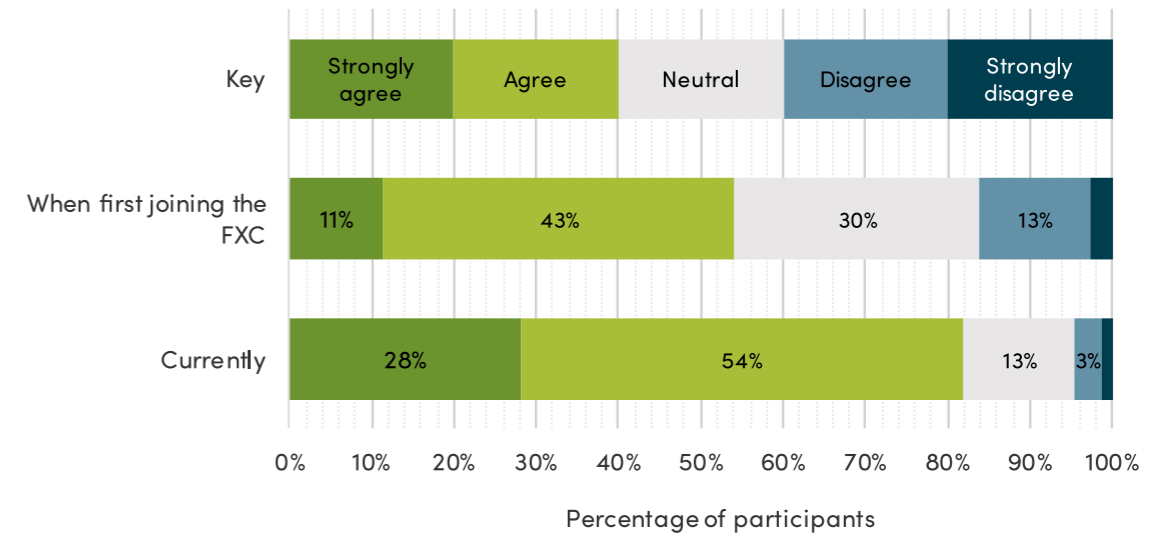
The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want other people in my FXC to grow and take part more'



Participants had also become more open to being corrected by other members of their community, with 82 per cent saying they wanted others to challenge them if they did something wrong – a 28-percentage-point increase on the share of respondents who said they would have been open to correction when they joined a Fresh Expressions church.

'I want others to challenge me if I do something wrong'

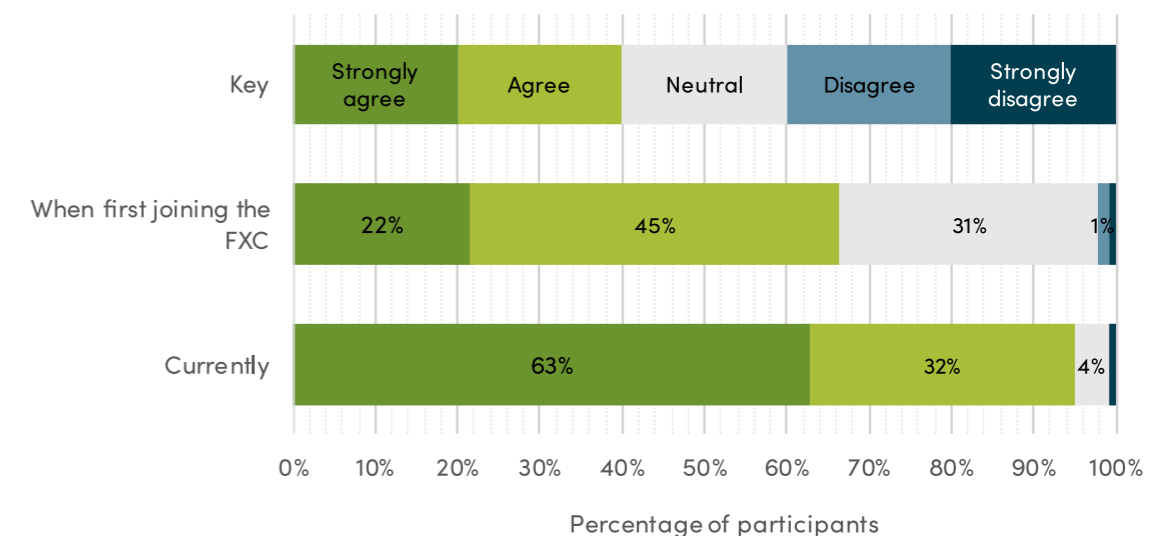
The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want others to challenge me if I do something wrong'



Perhaps as a result of this trust in other community members, 95 per cent of respondents saw their churches as safe places in which to have questions and doubts – another 28-percentage-point improvement. Impressively, the proportion of respondents who strongly agreed with this statement nearly tripled – from 22 per cent at the point of joining a Fresh Expressions church to 63 per cent currently.

'My FXC is a safe place to have questions and doubts'

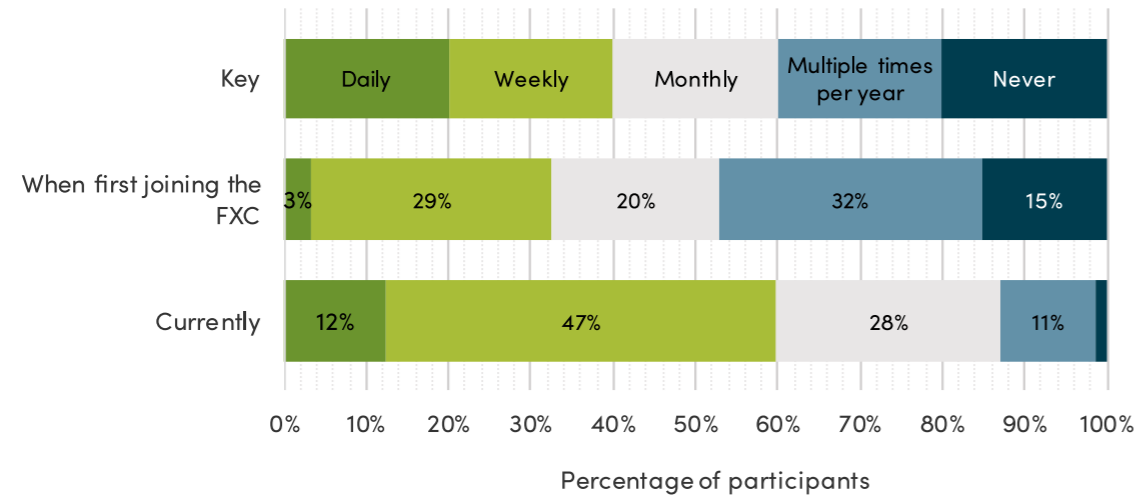
The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'my FXC is a safe place to have questions and doubts'



Connecting with other FXC members

'I have a meaningful conversation with another member of my FXC'

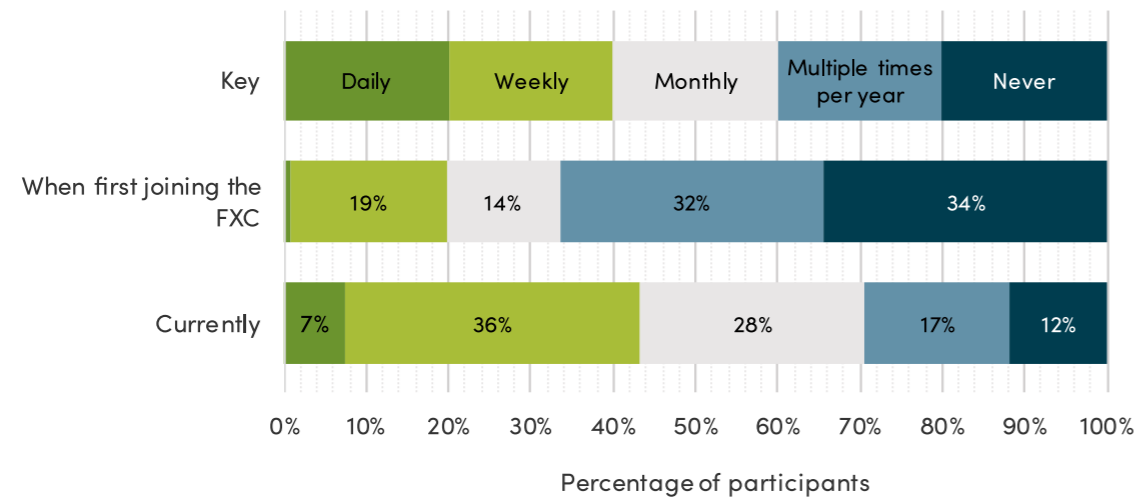
The graph shows the frequency that participants had a meaningful conversation with another member of their FXC



Most participants had regular, meaningful conversations with other members of their church. The proportion who had these conversations at least monthly rose from 52 to 87 per cent after joining a Fresh Expressions church, while the share who had these conversations daily quadrupled, from 3 to 12 per cent. As these figures indicate, members of Fresh Expression churches seemed to be genuinely involved in each other's lives.

'I meet other members of my FXC to help them grow in their lives'

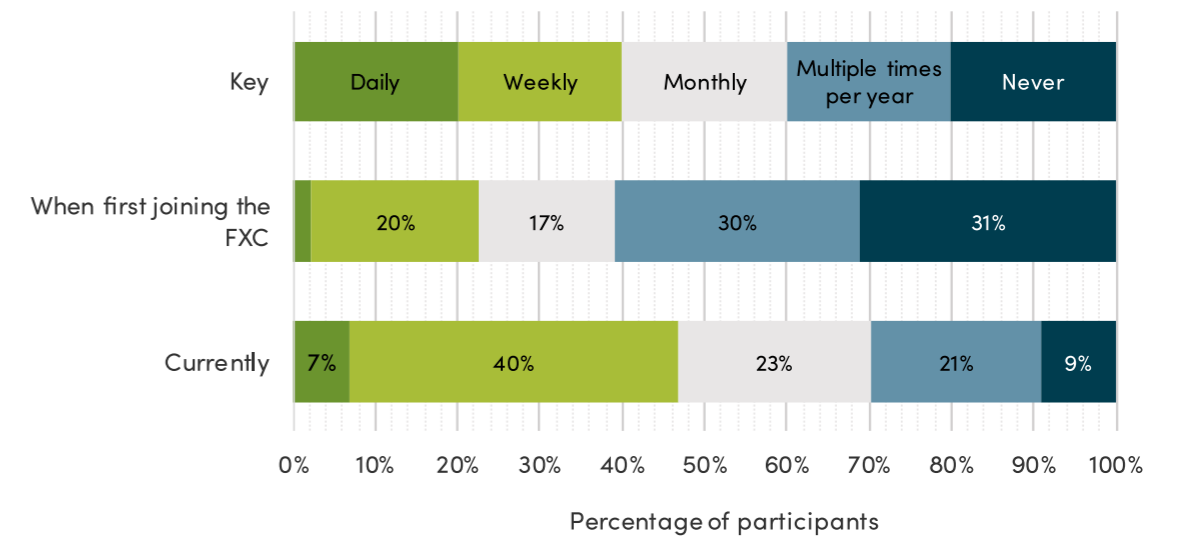
The graph shows the frequency that participants met other members of their FXC to help each other grow in their lives and faith



Respondents also seemed invested in helping other members of their church grow in their faith, with seven in ten (71 per cent) saying that they met with others at least monthly for this purpose. (An impressive 43 per cent also claimed to be discipling other members of their congregation at least once a week.) This represented an improvement on the percentage who had met with others when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church: previously, only 34 per cent said they met with other members their church at least monthly – the same proportion who said that they had never met with other members of their church at all.

'I meet other members of my FXC to help me grow in my life'

The graph shows the frequency that participants met other members of their FXC to help themselves grow in their lives and faith

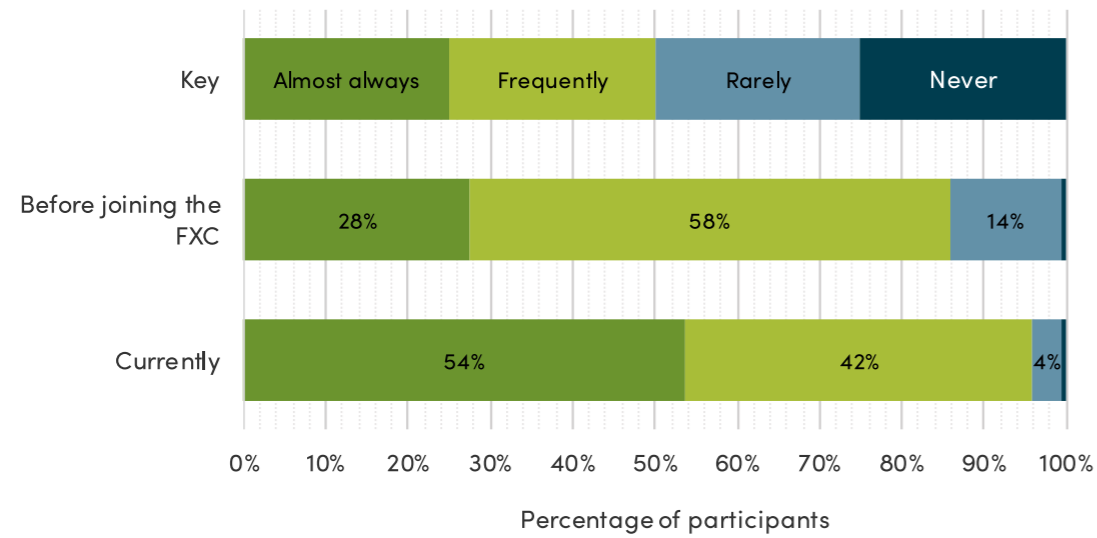


In addition to discipling others, participants were also being disciplined by other members of their congregation. Seven in ten (70 per cent) said they were being disciplined at least monthly – roughly the same percentage which said that they were discipling others. Once again, this constituted a significant improvement on the 39 per cent of participants who said that they had met others for this purpose when they joined a Fresh Expressions church.

Experiencing love and belonging

'I felt like helping others'

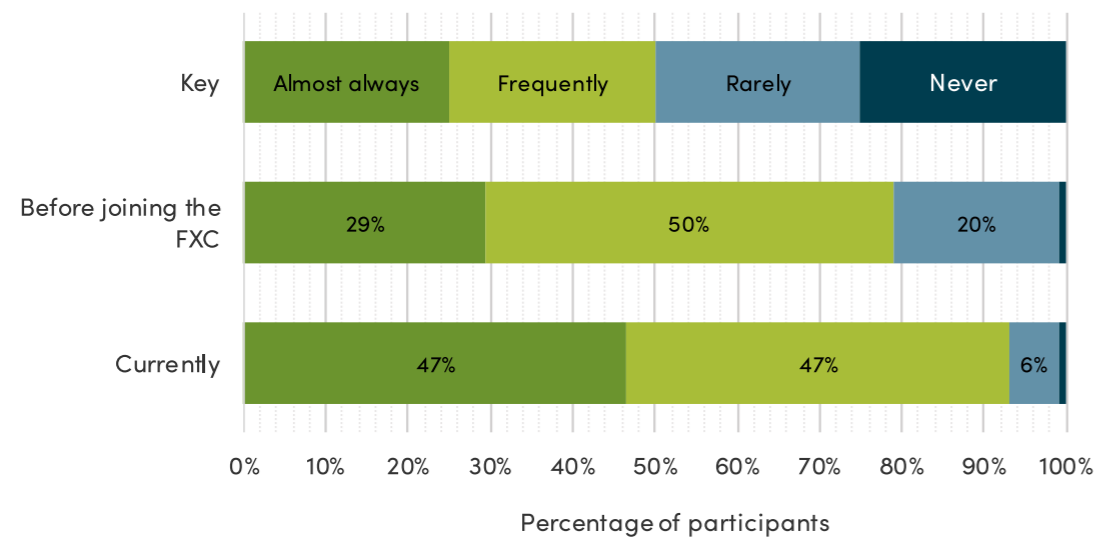
The graph shows the frequency that participants 'I felt like helping others'



Although a high percentage of participants (96 per cent) said they at least frequently felt like helping others, this percentage was also high (86 per cent) at the point of joining a Fresh Expressions church. However, there was a marked difference in the share of respondents who said that they almost always felt like helping others, which nearly doubled from 28 to 54 per cent.

'I had feelings of love toward others'

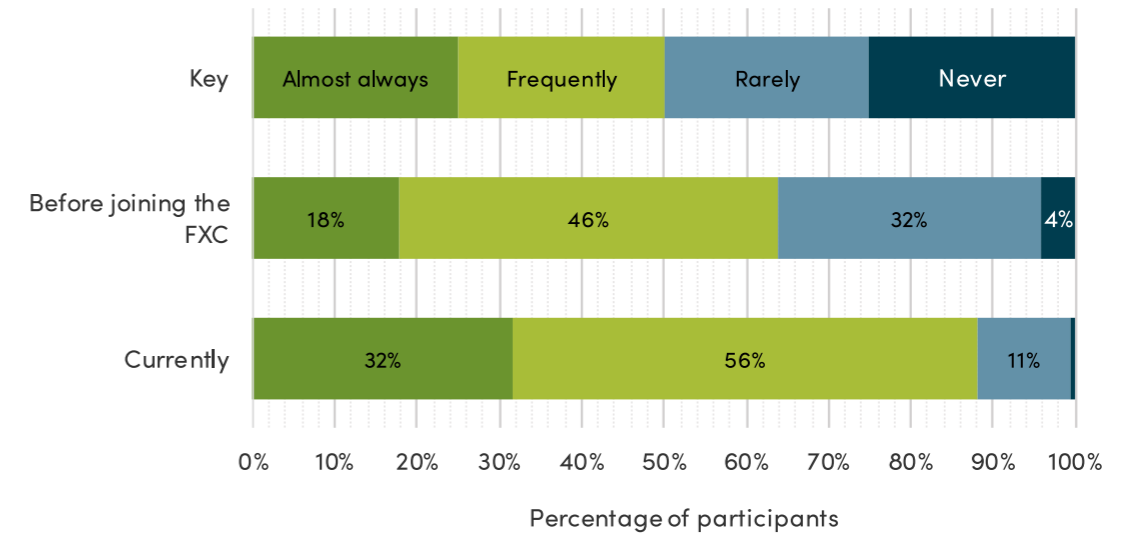
The graph shows the frequency that participants 'had feelings of love toward others'



Changes in participants' feelings of love towards others were somewhat limited. The proportion of respondents who had these feelings at least frequently rose from 79 to 94 per cent, while the share who had them almost always increased from 29 to 47 per cent.

'I felt forgiveness toward others'

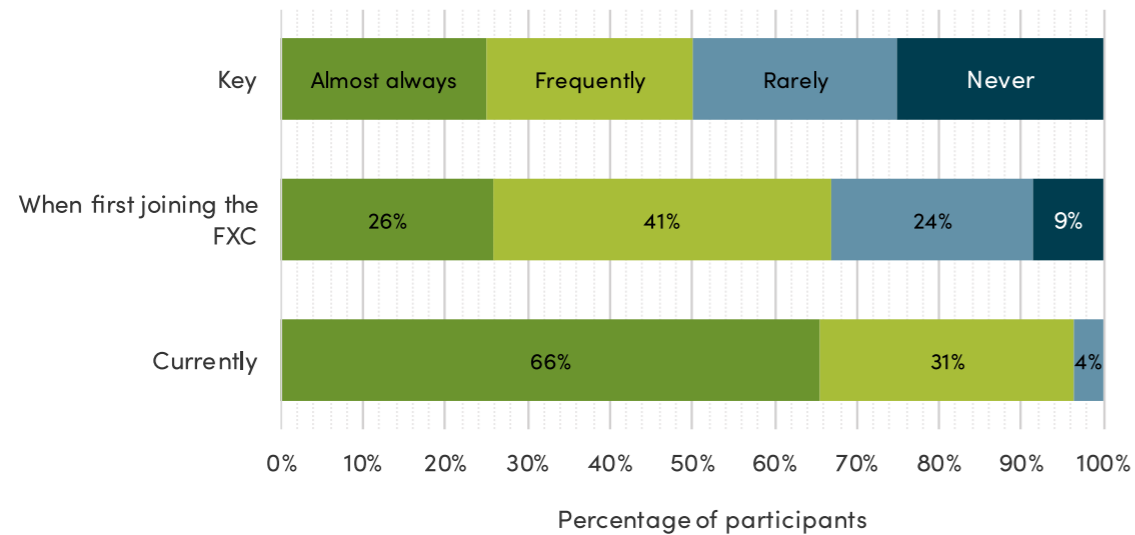
The graph shows the frequency that participants 'felt forgiveness toward others'



Improvements in respondents' feelings of forgiveness towards others, however, were slightly more marked. While only 64 per cent of participants said they frequently felt forgiveness for others at least frequently when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church, this figure had risen to 88 per cent by the time of the survey. The proportion who said they almost always felt forgiveness had also increased appreciably, from 18 to 32 per cent.

'I feel a sense of belonging with my FXC'

The graph shows the frequency that participants felt a sense of belonging with their FXC

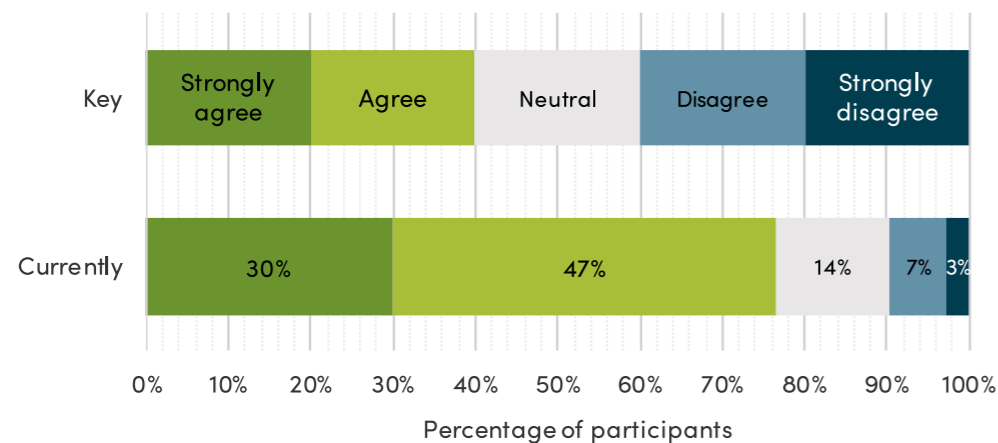


Encouragingly, participants tended to feel a sense of belonging in their Fresh Expressions churches, with 97 per cent saying they felt this way at least frequently. Once again, this improvement was clearest for those who said they “almost always” felt a sense of belonging: this share of participants more than doubled from 26 to 66 per cent after joining a Fresh Expressions church.

Causality

'My FXC has positively impacted my social life'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC has positively impacted my social life'



Despite these improvements, however, only 77 per cent of respondents felt that their Fresh Expressions church had enhanced their social life. This relatively low figure may reflect the fact that previous questions concentrated on whether Fresh Expression churches had improved participants' relationships with other members of their church. Although Fresh Expressions did seem to build relationships between church members themselves, it may not always have aided their relationships with others they knew.

With FXC vision

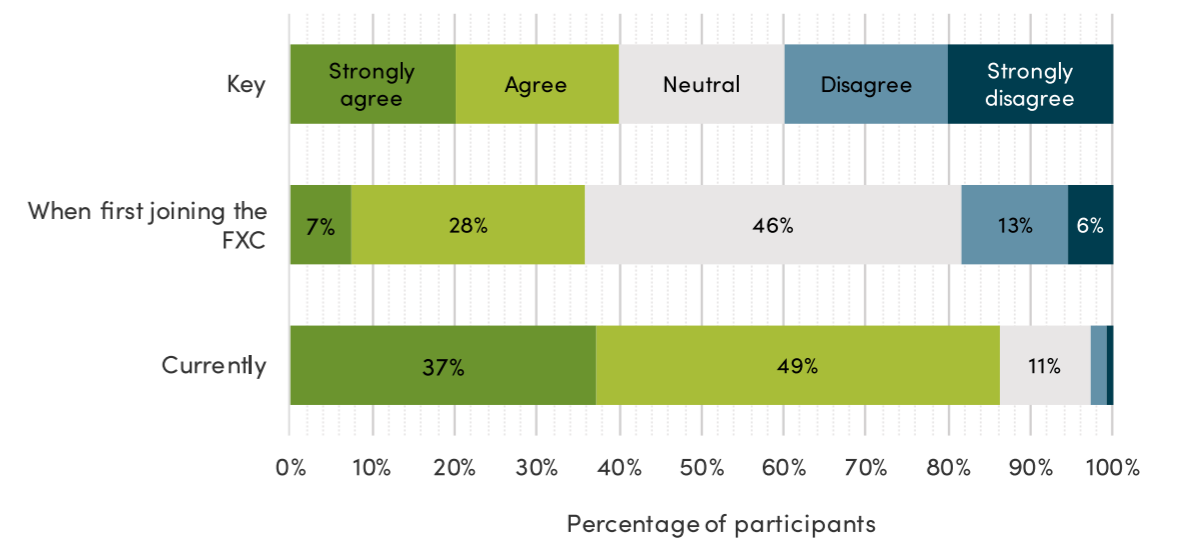
Participants reported that they identified with their churches' vision, and wanted to commit to making this vision a reality. Nonetheless, their actual contributions to their churches often lagged somewhat behind their commitment, and showed only modest increases in the amount of time, money, and energy that they were willing to dedicate to their churches' vision.

Desire to commit and participate

Not surprisingly, respondents were much more likely to understand their Fresh Expressions church's vision after they had spent some time at the church. Whereas only 35 per cent claimed to know this vision when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church, this proportion had increased to 86 per cent by the time of the survey.

'I know the specific vision of my FXC'

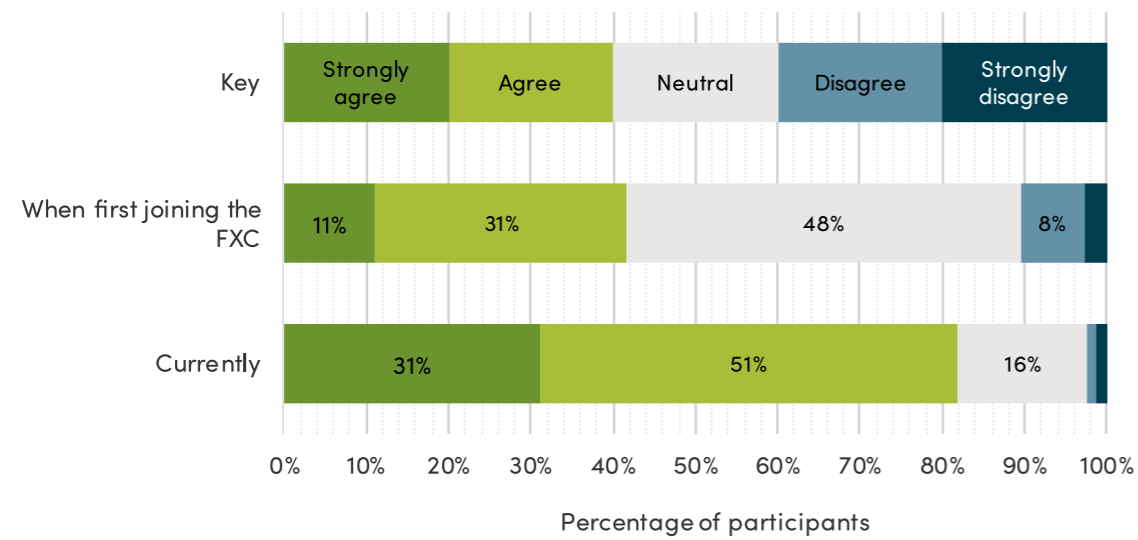
The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I know the specific vision of my FXC'



Participants were also considerably more likely to feel that they had something to contribute and to want to try new things after joining a Fresh Expressions church. Although only 42 per cent of respondents thought they had something to contribute before joining Fresh Expressions, 82 per cent agreed that they had something to give at the time of the survey. Likewise, 79 per cent of participants reported wanting to try new things and take risks – nearly double the 39 per cent who said the same before joining a Fresh Expressions church.

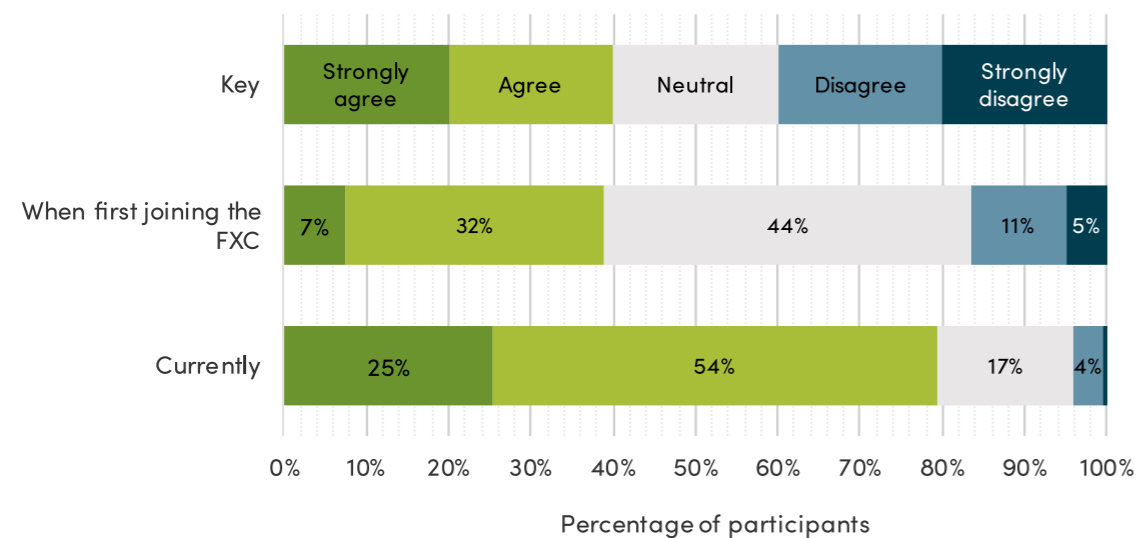
'I have something of value to contribute to my FXC'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement I have something of value to contribute to my FXC'



'I want to try new things and take risks in my FXC'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want to try new things and take risks in my FXC'

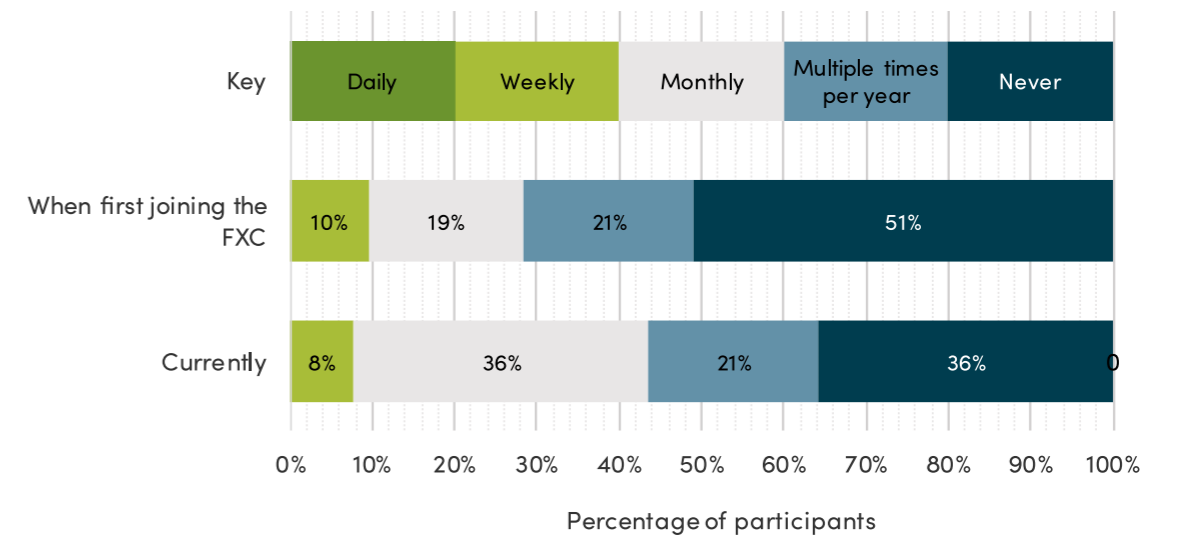


Contributing to their FXC

As described above, however, identification with the vision of Fresh Expression churches did not always translate to tangible contributions of time and money. Although the proportion of respondents who gave money to their church at least monthly increased from 29 to 44 per cent, 36 per cent of participants continued to not give at all.

'I give money to my FXC'

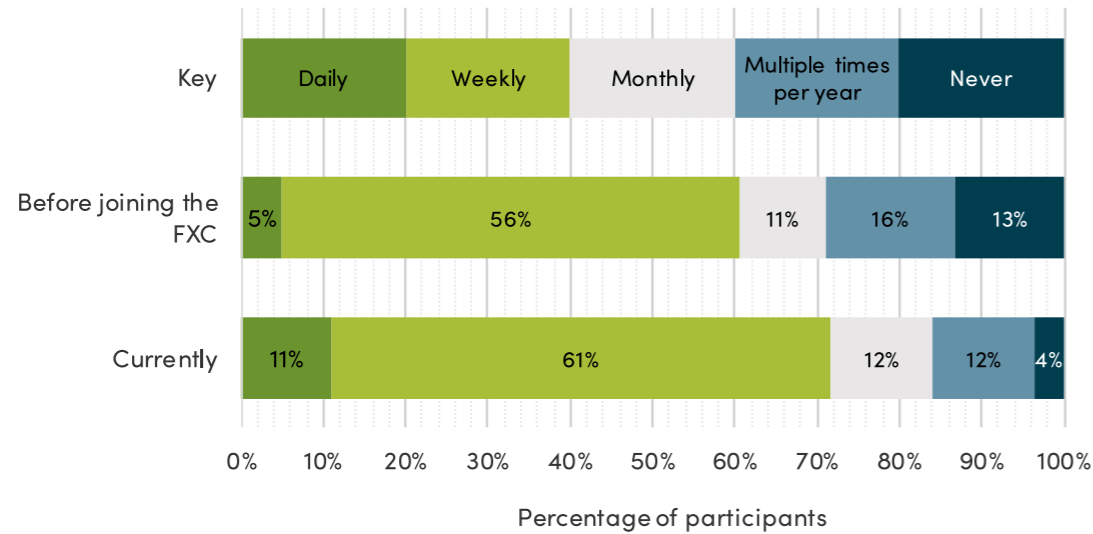
The graph shows the frequency that participants gave money to their FXC



Gains in the share of participants who attended church at least weekly were also relatively modest: while 72 per cent of respondents said they attended church weekly, 59 per cent had already done so when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church.

'I attend church worship, either physically or online'

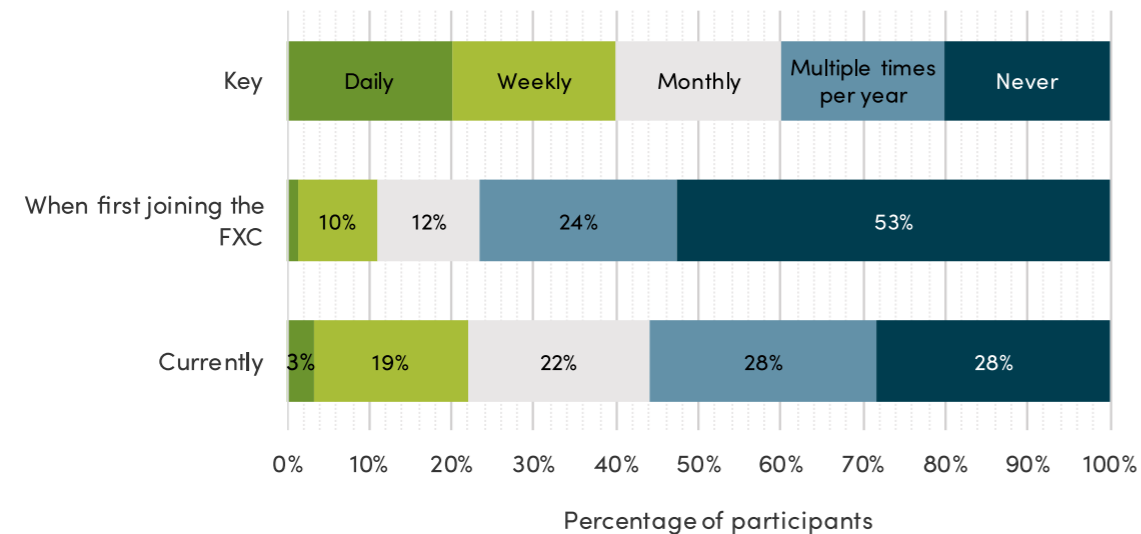
The graph shows the frequency that participants attend church worship, either physically or online



Data on the proportion of respondents who took part in planning, preparing, and leading activities, however, were more encouraging: two-thirds of participants (66 per cent) did so at least multiple times per year, an improvement on the 47 per cent of respondents who planned, prepared, or led activities when they joined a Fresh Expressions church. A high percentage of respondents (44 per cent) also claimed to be involved in leading in these activities at least monthly – nearly double the rate of monthly involvement at the point of joining a Fresh Expressions church (23 per cent).

'I take part in planning, preparing and helping lead an activity in my FXC'

The graph shows the frequency that participants took part in planning, preparing and helping lead an activity in their FXC

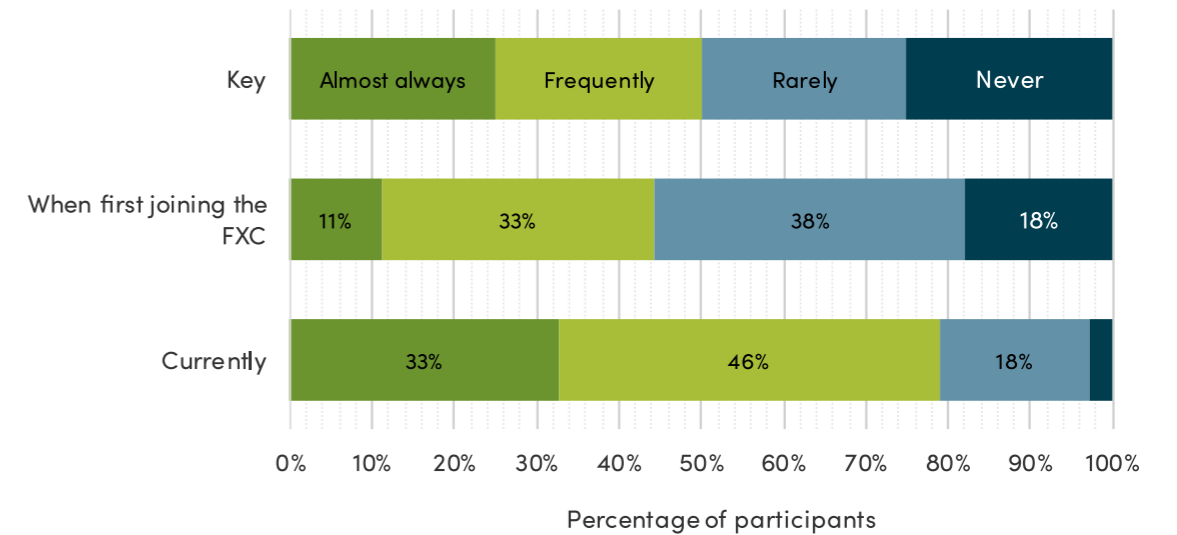


Experience growth and vision of FXC

Perhaps relatedly, participants were much more likely to report an increased sense of purpose after joining a Fresh Expressions church, with 79 per cent of respondents feeling that they at least frequently had a sense of purpose, as compared to the 44 per cent who agreed that they had a sense of purpose when they first joined a Fresh Expressions church.

'I felt I have a purpose in my FXC'

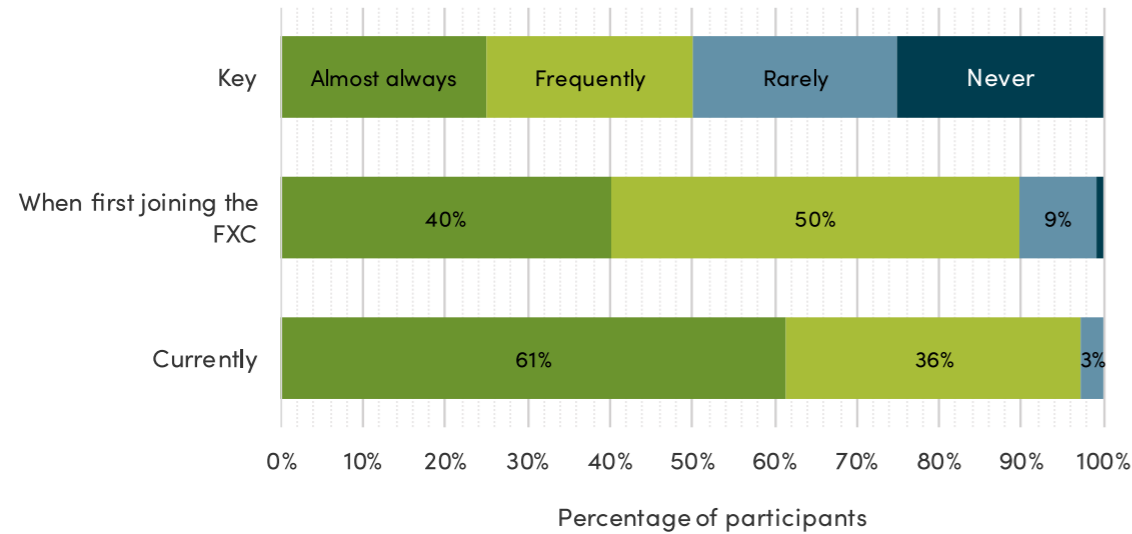
The graph shows the frequency that participants felt they have a purpose in their FXC



Interestingly, while Fresh Expressions did not appreciably increase the share of respondents who “frequently” wanted to make the world a better place, it did raise the proportion who wanted to do so “almost always” – from 40 to 61 per cent. Although Fresh Expressions was not responsible for respondents’ desire to do good in the world, that is, it did seem to help them live in accordance with that desire more consistently.

'I wanted to make the world a better place'

The graph shows the frequency that participants wanted to make the world a better place, during a typical month

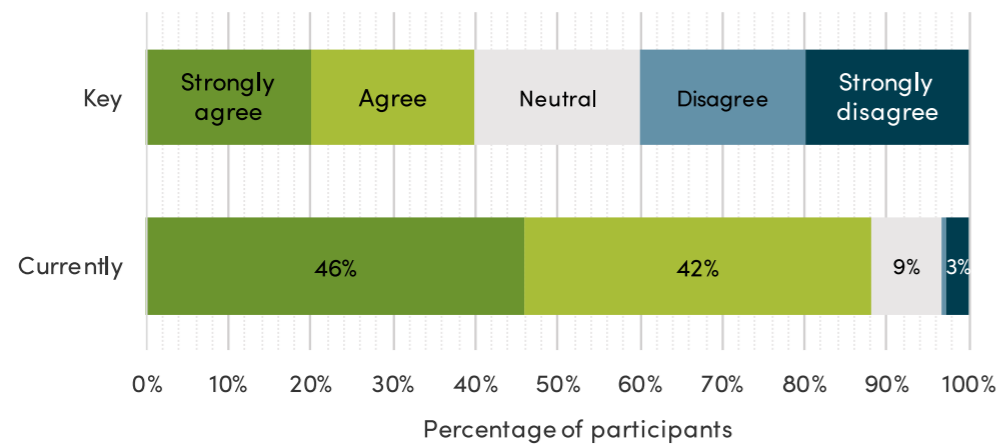


Causality

Furthermore, most participants (88 per cent) said that Fresh Expressions had improved their vision of the church. Respondents did, however, offer fainter praise for how their Fresh Expressions church asked them to serve, with only 76 per cent agreeing that it did so in a way that recognised their gifts and skills.

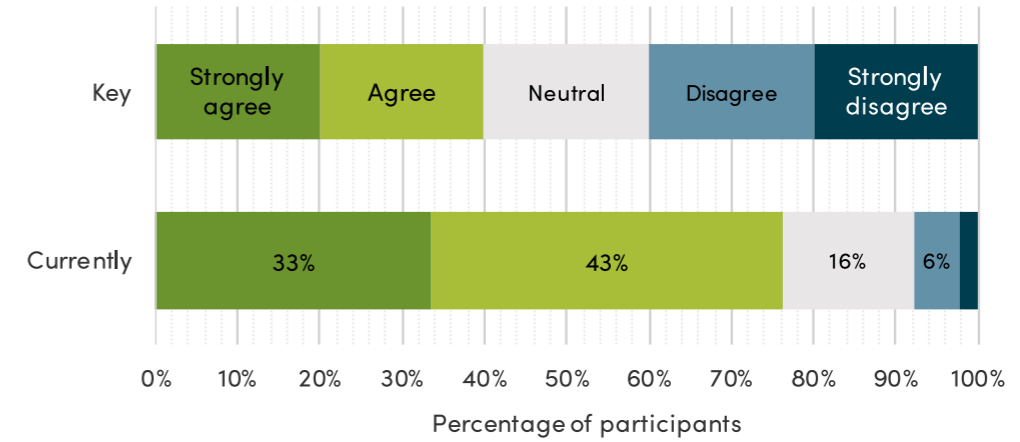
'My FXC has positively impacted my vision of church'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC has positively impacted my vision of church'



'My FXC asks me to serve in a way which recognises my gifts'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC asks me to serve in a way which recognises my particular gifts and skills'



With context

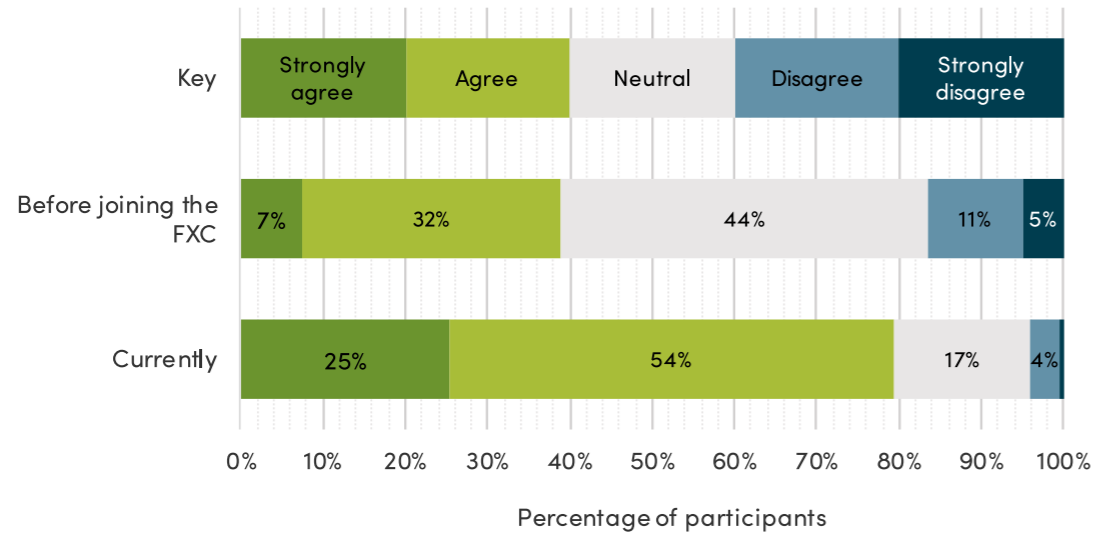
On the whole, participants reported that their relationship with their wider communities had improved as a result of belonging to a Fresh Expressions church. This was especially the case for respondents' ability to share their faith with their communities and for communities' awareness of and support for Fresh Expressions churches. Participants did not, however, report large changes in the extent to which they volunteered in community activities or spent time with people from their area.

Sharing God with context

Respondents were much more likely to be interested in telling others about the difference God had made in their lives after joining a Fresh Expressions church: while fewer than half of participants (48 per cent) agreed with this statement when they joined their current church, three-quarters (75 per cent) agreed with it at the time of the survey.

'I want to tell others about the difference that God is making in my life'

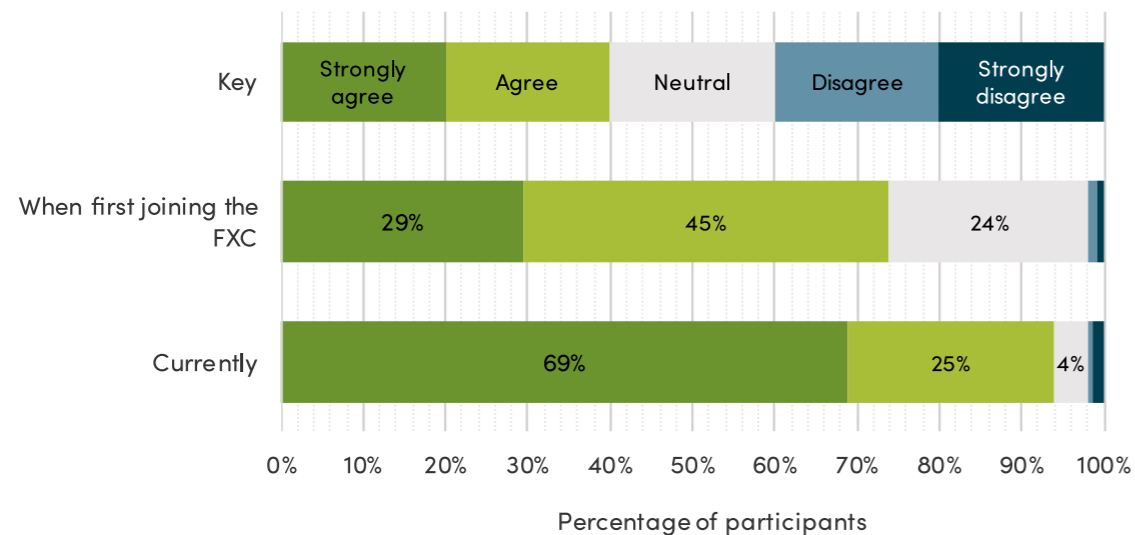
The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'I want to tell others about the difference that God is making in my life'



Respondents also said they had improved at integrating their faith with their everyday lives, and that they were more likely to want to make a difference in their communities. Here, the greatest difference was in the share of participants who strongly agreed that they wanted to make a difference: while only 29 per cent did so when they joined a Fresh Expressions church, 69 per cent strongly agreed by the time they took the survey.

'My FXC wants to make a positive difference in our local context'

The graph shows the extent to which participants agreed with the statement 'my FXC wants to make a positive difference in our local context / local community'



Connecting with context

Since belonging to a Fresh Expressions church, participants had increased the frequency with which they met with people from the wider community, participated in or found out about local community needs, and volunteered in community projects. These changes are shown in the table below.

DIMENSION	PER CENT AT LEAST MONTHLY BEFORE JOINING AN FXC	PER CENT AT LEAST MONTHLY AFTER JOINING AN FXC
Meeting up with people from the wider community	53%	69%
Participating in or finding about current local community issues and needs	48%	65%
Volunteer in a local community project	28%	41%

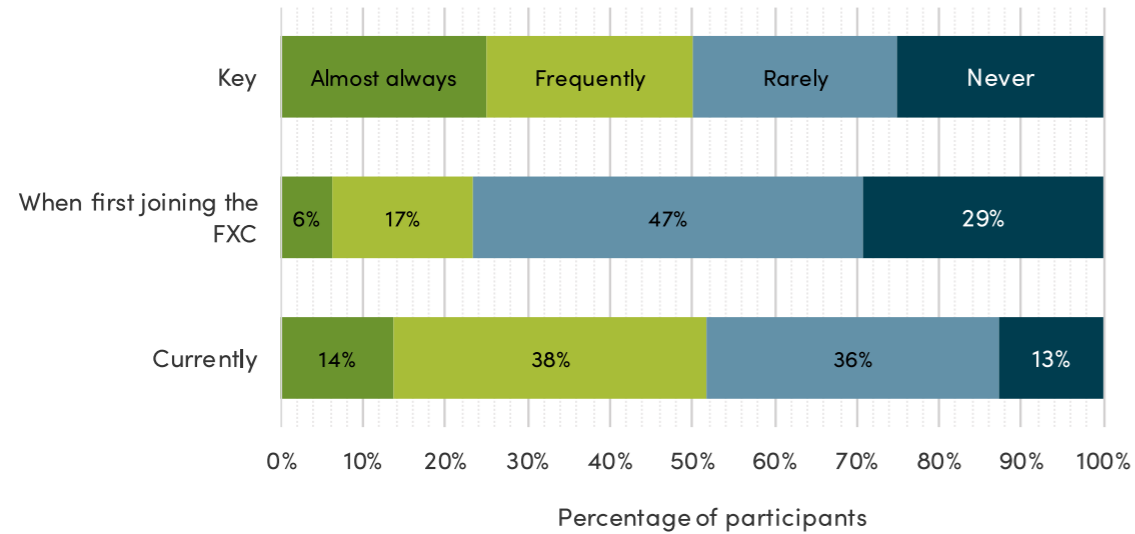
While these changes are not as dramatic as some of the others discussed in this report, they were not insignificant: respondents were much more likely not merely to spend time with others in their community, but to also participate in activities that required an investment of energy, such as volunteering in community projects.

Seeing local context responding

Most participants thought the wider community had responded favourably to their Fresh Expressions churches. Although there was little change in the proportion of respondents who thought that members of the local community were made to feel welcome when they attended church, participants emphasised that their neighbours were now much more likely to know about their Fresh Expressions church and its activities.

'If asked, my neighbours know about our FXC and its activities'

The graph shows the frequency that participants felt their neighbours would know about their FXC

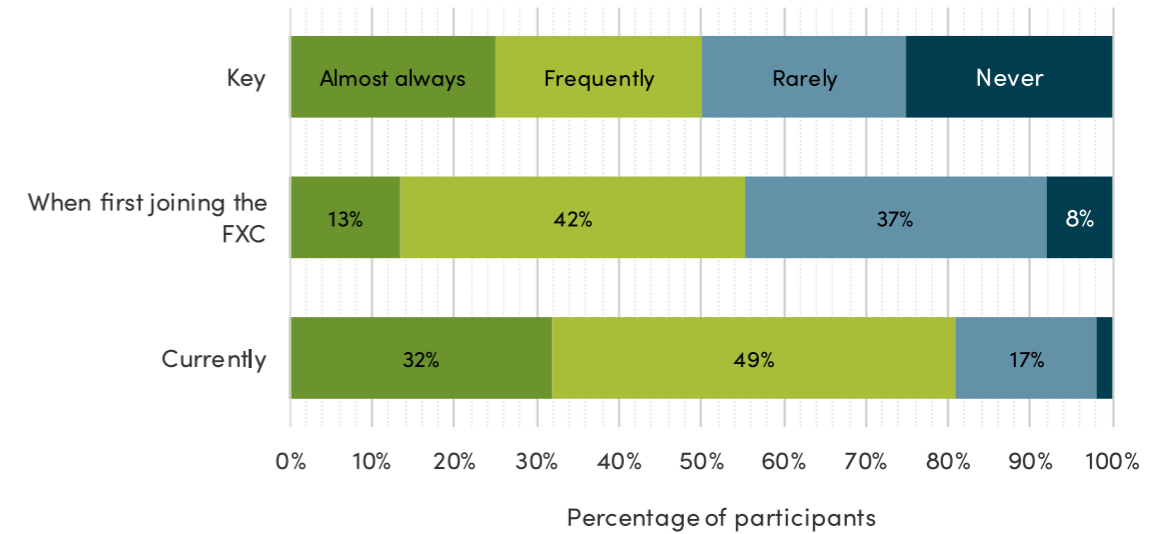


Even this figure, however, remained relatively low in absolute terms: while 52 per cent of respondents now thought their neighbours frequently knew about their church and its activities (as opposed to 23 per cent when they joined their church), this still signifies that just under half of participants (48 per cent) believed that their communities were rarely or never aware of their church.

More encouragingly, participants believed that they were getting to know what people in their community hoped for and needed:

'We know what people in our community hope for and need'

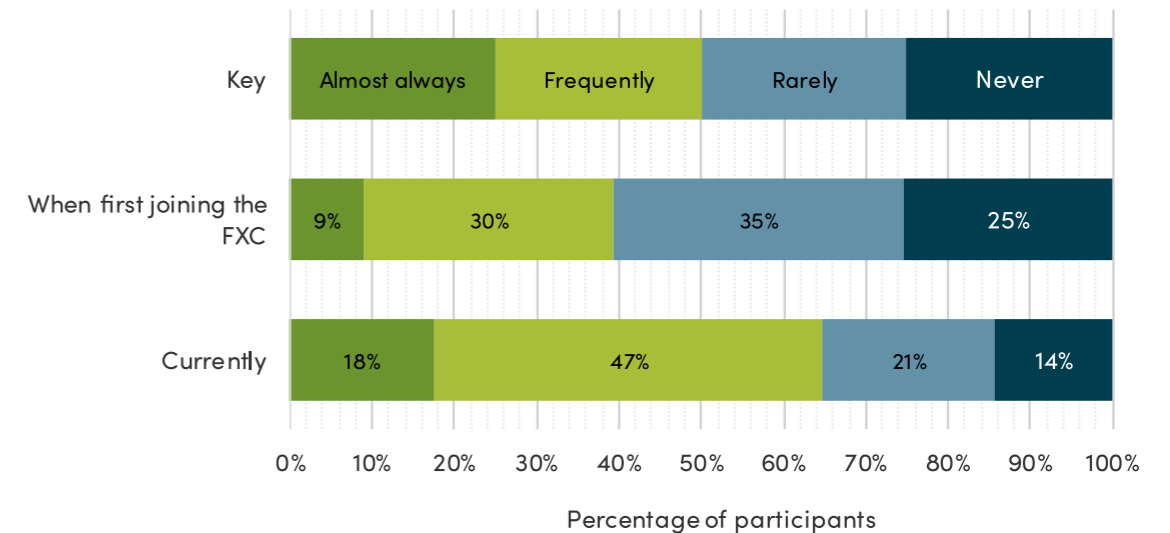
The graph shows the frequency that participants felt they knew what people in their community hope for and need



They could also think of examples when the local community had supported their church: whereas only 39 per cent of respondents could “frequently” think of these examples when they first joined their Fresh Expressions church, this had increased to 65 per cent by the time of the survey.

'The local community has actively supported my FXC'

The graph shows the frequency that participants felt their local community had actively supported their FXC during a typical month

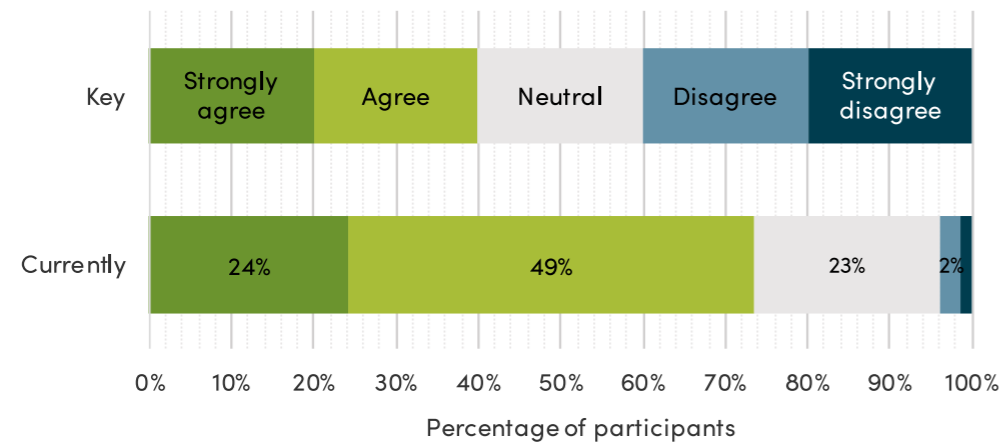


Causality

As above, many participants emphasised that their Fresh Expressions churches had directly caused the changes considered in this section. More than seven in ten respondents (73 per cent) said that their Fresh Expressions church had helped them identify how they could serve God in other areas of their lives – such as in the workplace or through community groups – while another 73 per cent affirmed that their churches had improved how they engaged with their communities. Although these percentages are relatively high, they may still leave room for improvement: 23 and 21 per cent of respondents (respectively) neither agreed nor disagreed that their churches helped them in these areas, suggesting that some Fresh Expressions churches could benefit from helping members connect more effectively with their communities.

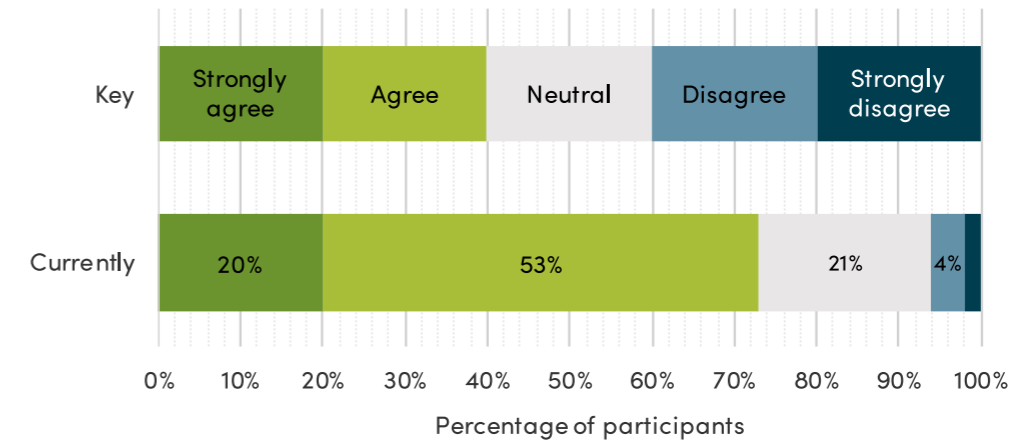
'My FXC helps me to identify how I serve God in wider roles'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC helps me to identify how I serve God in wider roles (e.g. workplace or community groups)'



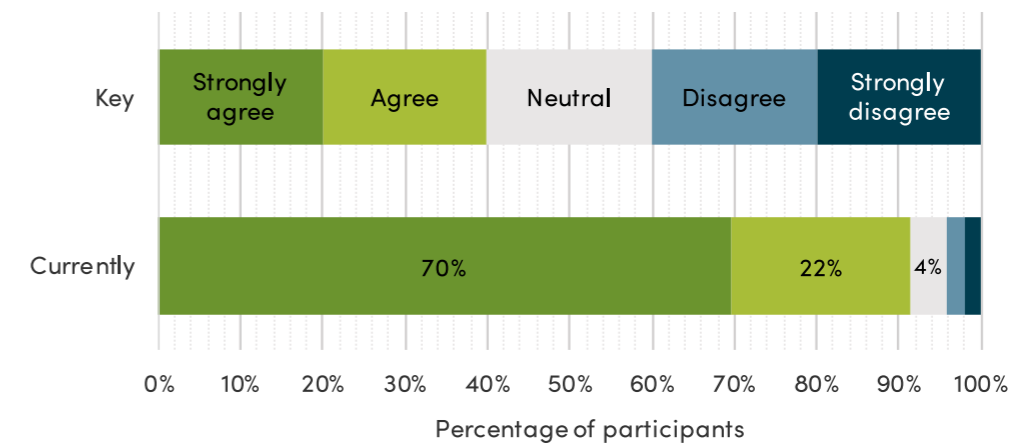
'My FXC has positively impacted how I engage with the community'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC has positively impacted how I engage with the local community'



'My FXC is a place where occasional visitors are made to feel welcome'

The graph shows the percentage of participants who agreed with the statement 'my FXC is a place where occasional visitors are made to feel welcome'



Bivariate analysis

5

To understand the data in greater depth, we also disaggregated it by variables including age, gender, and responses to other survey questions. Our analysis revealed the following trends:

Participants who felt that their FXC asked them to serve in a way which recognised their gifts and skills were twice as likely to see personal change as those who did not.

FXC members who felt their FXC had impacted their social lives were also more than twice as likely to have experienced personal change.

Younger congregation members were slightly more likely to experience change than older members. The group most likely to report personal change was respondents between the ages of 25 and 34.

Churches with a higher proportion of women were slightly more likely to see change across all their members than those with more even distributions. This is likely to be skewed by three or four churches with very high proportions of men or women.

Respondents from smaller churches reported more personal change. This was only a slight difference, but it suggests that larger churches may not always be at an advantage in helping members grow spiritually.

Those new to church

Where possible,⁸ participants were split into two groups for further analysis. Those who did not regularly attend church before and those who did. The former group included anybody who had not regularly attended in the last two years, in addition to those who had never attended.

29 percent of respondents have not been 'part of a church' in the 2-years before joining FXC

61 percent were 'part of another church' in the two years prior to joining their FXC

10 percent did not share information

⁸ 90 percent of respondents gave information on their prior attendance

These groups were analysed further to observe key differences.

In summary, those who were not part of a church beforehand saw the most change. Usually, this was because they scored lower for the period before attending their FXC; for example, they were less likely to engage in spiritual disciplines like personal prayer.

At the time of taking the survey, the two groups' scores were more similar, and in 21 of the 87 survey questions - the two groups averaged the same. These included areas such as bible reading, overcoming difficult life issues, and feeling God's love.

Areas where those who were 'part of a church' before, still scored above new attendees included prayer, wanting to be challenged, some experiences with God and the impact of the church on their social lives. They were also more likely to feel safe to express doubts and more likely to understand how to integrate faith into their lives.

Areas where new church attendees scored above historic members included meeting regularly with other FXC members (including both discipling and being disciplined), being asked to serve, knowing the vision, being full of love and forgiveness toward others, giving money and, involvement in the local community (including helping with voluntary activities in the local community, telling friends and neighbours about the work of the FXC, and meeting up with members from the local community).

To conclude this mini-analysis, the average FXCs has 3 members out of every 10, who were not part of a church beforehand and these members feel that they are more involved in the life of the church - areas such as discipleship, evangelism and serving the local community - than members who were previously part of a church.

This is a fascinating observation; but as these survey answers are all individual opinions of their own involvement (and not based on actual hours served or meetings attended), this conclusion should also be backed up by talking to FXC leaders about their experiences working alongside both groups.

Note again that respondents to this survey are also, on average, more keen and involved than non-respondents (both observed anecdotally in conversation with leaders, and statistically in the decrease in enthusiasm amongst the later respondents) which means that 3 in 10 is likely to be an underestimate as new and peripheral members of the church are less likely to have responded.

Conclusions

6

If FXCs are going to be able to stand up to criticisms of being based “on a defective methodology”,⁹ there needs to be a robust definition of success as well as a system to capture and evaluate their impact.

The Fruitfulness Framework has in many ways achieved this goal. As the first part of this report showed, through a literature review and practitioner focus groups, a clear set of measurable success outcomes have been created. Similarly, the Fruitfulness Framework is a tool that enables FXC leaders to measure their communities growth and change across these outcomes.

Initial results from this tool show that there is significant positive impact in the lives of FXC community members. This is true across the five main dimensions of the Fruitfulness Framework, as has been shown to occur in their relationship with God, with self, with their FXC community, with the FXC vision, and with their local context. Whilst this impact isn’t entirely explained through the participation with the FXC, there is substantial evidence to suggest that FXCs are the main causal mechanism by which this positive impact is occurring.

Results also start to shed light on the keys to creating this impact. Here data suggests that the best action an FXC can take to enable members to experience personal change is to ask them to serve in a way which recognises their particular gifts and skills. Individuals who felt that their FXC did this were more than double as likely to see personal change as those who did not.

Finally, further research and use of the Fruitfulness Framework is recommended to continue to build upon these initial findings.

⁹ Davidson, A. and Millbank, A. 2010. *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions*. SCM Press: London.

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If you would like to see the Church of England's commentary and information on the Fruitfulness Framework, [follow this link to visit the Church of England website](#), or scan the code shown to the left.

Eido specialises in helping Christian organisations to become impact, evidence, and learning focused. By this we mean organisations that have an ability to:

1. Clearly articulate a grounded faith-based impact strategy.
2. Research the needs of their beneficiaries, and measure their impact on their beneficiaries and society.
3. Prioritise quality evidence over anecdote when raising funds, making decisions, and learning to improve their impact in the future.

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