The Church of England and the Methodist Church are making significant changes at national level to keep in step with what is happening locally.

KEY DECISIONS

Over the last year almost every Anglican Diocese has debated the report, “Mission Shaped Church”. Many have set up small steering groups and new appointments to guide their thinking and forward planning.

“Having given the report a warm welcome, many dioceses are now moving on to a second stage - serious implementation of the proposals in Mission Shaped Church” said Paul Bayes, Mission and Evangelism Adviser to the Archbishops’ Council.

The Methodist Conference of 2004 resolved to pay particular attention to encouraging fresh ways of being church. “There are many different signs now that Districts and Circuits are engaging with this agenda,” said Pete Pillinger, the member of the Connexional team seconded to Fresh Expressions.

FUNDING

Funding is being made available to support these new initiatives. The Church Commissioners have proposed creating a permanent stream of mission funding to every Diocese. Resources are being made available to Methodists through changes in the rules for Circuit and District Advance Funds.

Canterbury and Liverpool Dioceses have allocated half a million pounds each to their Mission Funds. Chichester has invested £300,000. Oxford’s Cutting Edge ministries now supports around a dozen innovative projects. Durham, Salisbury and Peterborough have all launched new funds in 2006. Others will follow later this year.

TRAINING

The Fresh Expressions team have now spoken to over 7,000 leaders at training events since the initiative was launched in 2004 and have met with over 500 practitioners who are engaging in fresh expressions of church. By the end of 2005 the team will have worked in all but four mainland dioceses and about one third of Methodist Districts.

Expressions is the newspaper of Fresh Expressions

Fresh Expressions was set up in 2004 as an Archbishops’ Initiative with the support of the Methodist Council of Great Britain.

Our aim is to resource the growing movement of fresh expressions of church in every Anglican Diocese and Methodist District and beyond.

Copies of the first edition of Expressions are available free to members of your congregation. To obtain copies for your church please email the number required and the address to expressions@freshexpressions.org.uk.
Hope for the Hopeless

Jane was living in a shed, pregnant and addicted to heroin. She and her partner really needed help - and hope!

Church Army evangelist, Ralph Upton, set up the Valley of Hope project to do just that, providing practical care in the Rhondda Valley for those leaving prison or struggling with drug and alcohol or mental health issues.

They wouldn’t go near a church, but through the care and the love offered to them, they can feel the gospel for themselves. Some come to faith, with one man asking to be baptised recently, all are touched.

As Ralph says, “We are there for those who have reached the end of the line. Helping them to find purpose and dignity is only what Jesus would have done.”

Mission 21

Mission 21 is a major ecumenical conference on church planting and fresh expressions of church to be held in Sheffield at the Philadelphia Campus of St. Thomas’ Church. Be there if you can!

The organisers hope that there will be 800 delegates from every denomination and stream in the United Kingdom.

Speakers include Bishop Graham Cray and Martyn Atkins, Principal of Cliff College. The Fresh Expressions team are leading a series of workshops to enable those who come to tell their own stories.

You can book online at www.mission21.org.uk

Mission 21 conference runs from 8-10 March 2006

Standing in a village with a Songs of Praise presenter, we had just filmed a great story about a local woman who had started a Christian youth centre.

“I’d like to get a bus-load of bishops and show them what’s going on right round the country,” I said. “Why don’t you make a DVD?” she quipped. Little did I realise that two years later, I’d leave the BBC, work for Fresh Expressions and do just that.

So after two decades in broadcasting, I’m looking forward to heading up training for Fresh Expressions and sharing some of the exciting new ventures that are springing up. And I haven’t given up that bus idea either!

Norman Ivison, Director of Training and Events, and former BBC TV producer

Website

There’s lots more to find out at: www.freshexpressions.org.uk

Informal Worship

In a small village in Buckinghamshire, ten people of different ages gather in the morning. Some have been in the building for a while, setting up. Others have just arrived, looking nervous. They are the ones leading this week, an informal, interactive worship event, 50 minutes long. The sermon is just five minutes. After it there are groups for anyone who wants to join in – for quiet prayer, for discussion, for questions, for children, and for teenagers.

I am delighted to be working for Fresh Expressions in the area of Discipleship. This role fits perfectly alongside my work as Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury Methodist District Mission Enabler. Previously I worked for three years as a Director of the Salfine Trust. Before that I served in two circuits. Prior to ordination I worked for Ford as a financial analyst.

What book are you reading at the moment?
A biography of Stirling Moss

Where do you usually worship?
Kinver Methodist Church

Where did you go to school?
Oakridge Primary, Walton High, Stafford

What is your favourite hymn?
Townend’s version of The Lord’s my Shepherd

Which Christian Festival Means Most to You?
Easter, Jesus rose and I was born (1963)

What hobbies do you enjoy?
Motorpress, squash, football, Kylie Minogue

Describe “my media”.

What is your hope for Fresh Expressions?
That those younger than me will find Christ

How do you relax?
Beautiful wife, great son, sport, long walks.

What is your favourite bible story and why?
Joseph, God’s grace through changing colours.

5 minutes with Andrew Roberts

Step by step Learning

How can you ensure you get the best possible learning experience when you ask the Fresh Expressions team to help you?

1. Think about where you are now. Have you really got to grips with your local culture and networks? Do you need to do some more research or are you ready to start something new?

2. Think about who needs the training. It might be better to train those who have a passion for trying new things, rather than simply your church council or local leaders.

3. Think about what you need. Are you exploring how to become a mission-shaped group of Christians or do you need help with a specific fresh expression which is almost certainly unique to you?

4. Think about the practicalities. How long have you got? Could the sessions be ‘one-offs’, over a weekend, or form a six week course?

5. Think about who else you can involve. Can you work with other churches in your region to get a sizeable group together? That is a good use of limited resources and increases the chances of learning from one another.

6. Get in touch with the core team. Email them on contact@freshexpressions.org.uk

From the BBC to Fresh Expressions

We are looking forward to heading up training for Fresh Expressions and sharing some of the exciting new ventures that are springing up. And I haven’t given up that bus idea either!
Mixed Economy

- ‘Confident’ Archbishop

Dr. Williams, writing in an article for Expressions (see centre page spread) stresses that “new forms of church life need at times the pool of centre page spread) stresses that “new forms of church life need at times the pool of

Whilst stressing the ecumenical nature of Fresh Expressions (a partnership with the Methodist Church is one of the clearest signs of the effective working of the recently signed Covenant) Dr. Williams also believes that the Church of England itself is “in many ways, well placed to become a mixed economy church.”

Archbishop Rowan has made Fresh Expressions one of his central themes for his first five years at Canterbury.

He says: “one of the central insights behind Fresh Expressions is its vision and its method is looking: looking and listening with expectation and respect.”

And within the context of a mixed economy of the church as people know it and the new forms of church there is the central importance of teaching the faith.

“I understand theological education as the whole process of helping people to mature in their faith, their mind and heart,” he writes.

He adds: “Fresh Expressions is ambitious because it is a vision for the renewal and reconstruction of the Church of England and other historic churches in this country.”

Xpresso!

A congregation of over 40 people are meeting in a multimedia café church in Lincoln for coffee, doughnuts and modern music. This is Xpresso 6:15.

Xpresso 6:15 is “church” for a group of Christians who enjoy the ability to move around without fear of adverse comment and who seat themselves not in rows, but at round tables.

Xpresso! was born to cater for teenagers from the Boys Girls Brigades. It has turned out to be far more popular than that.

Some of the congregation never attend any other form of church. For them, Xpresso! with its multi-media approach, modern music and multiple-choice worship is the best place to meet God.

New Christians at Mind the Gap

Across the country people are coming to Christ through the lives and ministries of fresh expressions.

Norma (pictured below) had no church connection until she encountered Mind The Gap (MTG) in Gateshead. Through MTG she joined an Alpha course where she became a Christian. This is Norma’s story:

“I became a follower of Jesus Christ three years ago. I had a drink problem, my home was full of rage and violence – at one stage I thought I had killed my husband. I lost my family to drink. Three months after asking Jesus to come into my life, I was controlling my drinking habits. Three months after that I was not drinking at all. Today, I have not had a drink for two and a half years. Jesus saved my life! I have my family back, my home is now filled with love and peace and hope in Jesus who died for us that we would be free in His love”.

Norma is now a cell leader at Mind The Gap.

Helen too had no Church background. This is her story of how her life changed when she found Jesus through the ministry of Mind The Gap.

“My Christian walk started three years ago. I was very depressed with an alcohol problem. I cried out to God and He answered my prayer. When I heard and understood the story of the cross and how Jesus died for all the bad things I had done and still do, it was the most significant day of my life. I realised that the love He showed me at the cross was not based on performance. There have been very difficult times but it’s knowing that God (if I let Him) is in all things working them out for good.”

Led by Methodist Ministers Elaine and Steve Lindridge MTG was born in 2001 with a vision for reaching and retaining the 18 – 40 age range.

Weekly cell groups
Seeker events for the curious
A monthly celebration service
Alpha Courses (34 people are on the latest course)
Methodist President offers Encouragement

Methodist President of Conference, Tom Stuckey, set a seal on the involvement of the Methodist Church in Fresh Expressions in his keynote address to the Methodist Conference this year.

In his address, he emphasised two priorities, one of which was “to encourage us to develop fresh ways of being Church.”

Tom is supporting the development of fresh expressions of church during his year in office as the ‘successor of John Wesley’.

Tom’s support is not just words. He is Chair of the Southampton district where, with his encouragement, many circuits have designated time specifically for the development of fresh expressions.

How is Fresh Expressions funded?

Fresh Expressions is an initiative of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, supported by the Methodist Council.

The funding for the initiative comes from gifts made by individuals, trusts and other bodies. Our major funding is through the Lambeth Partnership which exists to support the Archbishops in their ministry and which financially supports initiatives they choose to take. Fresh Expressions is therefore a gift to the church in this time of change.

The Methodist Church contributes the costs of one team member. The Church Army have seconded one half-time person to the team.

For further details of these initiatives, please look in the features section on www.freshexpressions.org.uk
The Lord is here!

The gospels tell the story of the storm on Lake Galilee. It should have been a simple crossing. A squall strikes the boat. Suddenly, there is danger.

In a matter of moments, the disciples come to the end of their resources. They wake Jesus and ask him to save them. In a moment, Jesus has rebuked the wind and the raging waves. There is a calm. Jesus turns and asks the disciples: “Where is your faith?”

The story isn’t there to show us how to avoid difficulty and danger. It’s in the bible to teach us how to behave in a storm.

As a church, we find ourselves in difficult times. We face a massive task. We can feel we are at the end of what we can do. We are buffeted by strong winds. The world is changing around us.

What can disciples do in a storm? We have a choice. We can allow ourselves to be overcome by waves of anxiety, or failure, or blame. If we do, then the worst predictions being made about the church may come true.

Or we can remember, very simply, that Jesus is with us. That God’s mission is unchanging. That each of us is called to play a part. This is a time for faith and a time for commitment.

What can we do? Every one of us can pray. Every one of us can offer the little we have to God. Every one of us can play our part in serving our neighbour, in strengthening our local churches, in starting fresh expressions of church, in teaching the faith to a new generation.

The renewal of the church begins as we remember that Jesus is with us.

Dr. Steve Croft

Fresh News

Goth Music
The Goth Eucharist in Cambridge caters for a small group of people who meet for an evening once a fortnight. There is normally a specially written Eucharist and the atmosphere is created with candlelight, and the playing of contemporary goth music, ranging from U2, Nightwish, Evanescence to hard core rock and mainstream goth music.

Maybe...
maybe is a small creative Christian community in Oxford. Words like grace, space, wonder, grit, resistance, laughter and presence hint at what it hopes to become.

The desire is to look for and encourage signs of Christ’s surprising life in the local and network communities.

Using the website

Don’t miss finding out more about the Fresh Expressions initiative by visiting the website at www.freshexpressions.org.uk.

As always, the best way to get an overview of the site is to simply browse and check out the different sections. You will soon find the latest news, developments and stories. Take a look at the directory section and you will see just how much is going on around the country. We have over 300 fresh expressions registered there.

When you have had a good look round, you may want to become more directly involved. So, try the following:

1. From the home page, click on ‘log in or register’. That gives you the chance to register with us as an individual. Once you have done that, you can receive our quarterly newsletter, keeping you bang up to date.

2. When you have registered individually, you also have the option of registering a fresh expression that you are working on. Just fill in the forms to register.

When you’re done, your information goes to be checked by a member of staff – because we have had some interesting spoofs.

In due course, you will receive an email to let you know that your fresh expression is up there on the directory. Using your log in password, you can get back to your entry to update it as things change.

Once a year we will check with you that the registration is still current.

In coming months, we will be developing the site. The resources section will be expanded. We will also be providing a wealth of helpful material, ideas, stories, contacts and networking opportunities for those starting up fresh expressions.

That way, we can support each other in taking risks to join in with the new things God is doing.

PLEASE LINK US to your church, district or diocesan website.
www.freshexpressions.org.uk
Training Sessions

From February Fresh Expressions will have a team of Associate Missioners throughout the country available to lead training sessions and come alongside to help wherever they can. They won’t be ‘experts’ but they will be people who have practical experience of new ways of doing things and a track record in helping others to learn.

Initially three broad areas of training will be on offer:

- Introduction to Mission-Shaped Church (how to explore the possibilities).
- Taking the first steps (how to begin a fresh expression).
- Training for discipleship in fresh expressions (how to encourage life-long commitment and sustainability).

We hope the training will be fun and interactive and can offer a whole range of opportunities from workshops and presentations to conferences and quiet days. We promise to tailor-make the courses to meet your needs (see page 16) and we normally work with groups of churches and ecumenically whenever possible.

We’ll also point you to other help available, including the Fresh Expressions website, and people who can come alongside and help you in very specific ways. We are committed to ensuring that training is ongoing too, realising that changing direction can often take time.

If you want to talk to us about specific training needs please email: contact@freshexpressions.org.uk putting Training Request in the subject field.

Getting Started

Every single person can make a difference within their local church, and here are just a few ideas:

1. Gather two or three people together and agree to Pray Until Something Happens (PUSH).
2. Get fresh expressions on the agenda of every church gathering from house groups, childrens’ teams, school governors, womens’ meetings and gardening groups.
3. Get hold of a copy of Expressions for every member of the congregation.
4. Buy 20 copies of Moving On and sell them with the church magazine.
5. Order a copy of the new DVD and show it wherever you can.
6. Hold an event for your circuit, deanery of group of churches.
7. Listen to what’s happening in your community. What is God doing? How can you join in?
8. Encourage your church to set up a small task group to work out how to take things forward.

9. Go and visit some fresh expressions of church in your local area and tell others about them.
10. Find out what other churches in the area are doing and see if you can find partners.
11. Write fresh expressions into the job description of your next minister, vicar, curate or youth worker.

There are lots more ideas in Moving On in a Mission Shaped Church.

Skateboarding and Spirituality

Legacy X3 was opened in 2005 as an extension of the Legacy Youth Congregation. It is an 8,500sqft purpose-built, indoor skate park with youth centre. The £40,000 timber ramps are suitable for BMX, skateboarding and inline skates.

The Centre now attracts well over 250 young people a week.

Male spirituality is a major theme. Lads engage in spiritual warfare, complete with battle music and warpaint, allowing them to use their physical strength and masculinity to express themselves in passionate, heartfelt prayer.

Human Beatbox

Christian Beatbox Community is seeding a Christian network community in the existing humanbeatbox.com community. This secular web site is owned and run by a Christian and has 9900+ members. The CBC (Christian Beatbox Community) includes a forum for Christian beatboxers, web evangelism on the existing boards, and the beginnings of discipleship.

It is early days!

The CBC is led by Rev Gavin Tyte and is supervised by the Bishop of Southampton.

For further details of these initiatives, please look in the features section on www.freshexpressions.org.uk

FreshX FAQs

Steve Croft answers frequently asked questions about Fresh Expressions

See Inside Back Cover
Church Army Support

Steve Croft this week paid tribute to the enthusiasm and support of the Church Army for Fresh Expressions.

As well as benefiting from many other manifestations of the Church Army in the core team, Fresh Expressions is also benefiting from many other manifestations of the Church Army’s work.

“I frequently refer to the work of George Lings of Church Army’s research unit, The Sheffield Centre, as well as a number of Church Army evangelists when giving everyday examples of fresh expressions of church in action. Church Army is one of the very few centres of expertise in the field of fresh expressions of church and as such is hugely important,” said Dr. Croft.

He added: “The work Church Army is doing with its key projects and pioneering evangelists will make a very positive contribution to this objective and help many more people find faith and engage positively with the work of the church”.

Disturb the slumbering Church

Lord Carey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, agrees that it is important to “disturb the slumbering Church”.

Delivering the Amersham Millennium Lecture 2005, the former Archbishop of Canterbury said that it was important to improve our record in supporting national church initiatives.

“I think back over my time and the frustrations I felt when so little was given by the national church to the opportunities presented by the Decade of Evangelism, by the failure to support and continue the Times of Our Lives which was such a great success and failure to support the Youth Evangelism Fund.”

Instead, and with Fresh Expressions clearly in mind, Lord Carey suggested that “Missionary Leadership by bishops and all in authority in the Church will require new ways of operating.....”.

Pioneer Minister Guidelines published

As Expressions went to press, the Church of England published new draft guidelines for Ordained Pioneer Ministers.

The guidelines open up the possibility for ordinands to focus on beginning fresh expressions of church during their training and the equivalent of their curacy.

The guidelines have been in preparation for about a year and a wide range of people have commented on them in development.

A copy can be downloaded from the fresh expressions website www.freshexpressions.org.uk/training/opm

Norwich - Excited by Mission

Over 600 representatives from across the Diocese came together recently in Norwich Cathedral to hear presentations by Steven Croft, the Archbishops’ Missioner and Team Leader of the Fresh Expressions initiative, to suggest ideas and thoughts about how to share the Good News of the Gospel.

“The Cathedral Day brought encouracement, generated energy and aroused fresh expectations of what God can do through us. I was delighted by the response. The test of the day lies in its fruits for the gospel,” said the Bishop of Norwich.

He added: “We’re hoping that everyone went away with new confidence to express God’s loving presence in their particular situations, perhaps saying ‘We could do that!’

South Coast Expressions!

Methodists will be celebrating and exploring New Forms of Church on Saturday April 29 to Monday May 1 2006 at Sarum College in Salisbury.

To inspire & stretch imaginations with glimpses of where God has led the Church in different contexts. Speakers of experience and expertise will guide the thinking:

Steve Croft - Archbishop’s Missioner. Team leader of the Freshexpressions.
Tom Stuckey - President of Methodist Conference 2005/6.
Philip Richter - Deputy Dean Of Studies at STETS (Training for ministry).
Barbara Glasson - founder of community gathered round the making of bread in inner city Liverpool.

There will be workshops with local leaders from within and beyond the Southampton district, as well as opportunities for participants to share stories, aspirations and questions.

More details are available at: www.themethodistchurchsouthamptondistrict.org.uk/
How should the media respond to Fresh Expressions? And does the Church itself expect anything other than a predictable mixture of cynicism and despair from those who are perceived, rightly or wrongly, as simply being out to describe the demise of the Church?

You will be pleasantly surprised to learn that there is a tremendous amount of interest and genuine fascination amongst the media for Fresh Expressions.

Many of the national correspondents, whilst perhaps seeing it as a last gasp attempt to halt declining attendances, are prepared to see the wisdom and the vision of the Archbishop of Canterbury in celebrating a mixed economy.

This is matched by local and regional reporters who are in touch on a daily basis with one question or another.

A culture of misunderstanding, often fear, on the part of the churches in trying to find ways of communicating their message to the media in a breaking news environment where sex and controversy is more sellable as a news commodity than a message of love and forgiveness, is a grim landscape.

Relationships are not always as they might be. Proactive is mostly reactive when it comes to the media landscape.

But seeing so many people finding new ways of being Christians in worshiping communities alongside existing, more traditional churches, suggests to the media that all is not lost for the churches. And they are excited by this.

Despite the danger of Christianity becoming a "no go" area for many editors and journalists, because we can no longer presume the majority of an audience to be inherently Christian - Fresh Expressions reminds local, regional and national correspondents that the Church is stirring - that is has confidence in its roots.

As in sport and politics, readers, viewers and listeners become tired with culminating negativity. They are suspicious of an underlying agenda when they read only one side of a story.

Along with and alongside the many good things happening in the dioceses, districts, parishes and churches of this country - there are increasing numbers of fresh expressions which provide proof of growth and change.

They are true signs of a church for the 21st century and we MUST tell this story with confidence and colour.

Fresh Expressions is building strong links with the media because the media is keen to know what is going on. They are fascinated by the idea that the rumour of decline is not the whole story - not by far.

A few weeks ago, after telling a BBC producer about my commissioning to the Fresh Expressions team, she said quite innocently: "Oh; a fresh expression of Christianity to the masses through the media. Now that would be something."

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Confidence and Colour

by Rob Marshall
Media Adviser

They said it...

The Church should not apologise for who we are and the Truth that shapes our identity. But the language we use to express those things needs to speak to, rather than alienate, those who have grown up rarely crossing the threshold of the Church. These fresh expressions of Church and the removal of exclusive language give validity to the faith experience of not just some people, but all people. It says that we no longer expect you to walk into our buildings and speak our words on our terms.

Joanna Jepson (The Times)
New Christians at Riverside Church in Hull

Mom will you come with me to the new church at the community centre?” were the words of my 10 year-old daughter following her time at a summer holiday club.

Rebecca had enjoyed herself so much I decided I would go and sit in – I quite enjoyed singing anyway! I soon realised that the Bible’s message was impacting my life.

“I’ve managed without Jesus so far”, I stubbornly told myself. Yet the church was so welcoming like nothing I had known before; the enthusiasm seemed to be rubbing off and I felt part of something new and exciting. After a few months and Christianity Explored course I finally “gave in” and trusted my life to Jesus.

I now thank God that Riverside Church was planted in my community. It made it so much easier for me to make the most amazing and important decision I have ever made.

Riverside Church is a plant from St John’s Newland which is trying to connect with a community of four housing estates of 5000 people.

The aim of all of this, is to resource a growing movement of the Sprit. All over the country people are stepping out in faith and beginning new Christian communities.

“Neither the Father nor the Son nor the Holy Spirit said ‘OK, now we are finished’”, said Bishop Nicholas Freuda.

“Project”, said Bishop Nicholas Freuda.

“Neither the Father nor the Son nor the Holy Spirit said ‘OK, now we are finished’”, said Bishop Nicholas Freuda.

Exciting times

NEW MINISTRIES
Both the Church of England and the Methodist Church are reviewing structures and training for ministry to support fresh expressions of church.

In the Methodist Church, there are reviews of diaconal ministry, the ministry of evangelist and of foundation training.

The Church of England has produced new draft guidelines for Ordained Pioneer Ministry. New guidelines on pioneer lay ministry will follow in the Spring.

“The aim of all of this”, said Steve Croft, is to resource a growing movement of the Spirit. All over the country people are stepping out in faith and beginning new Christian communities.

At every level, the Methodist Church and the Church of England want to resource and support this movement”.

“We have good news to proclaim – good news of forgiveness, of love, of hope, of the transformation of society. The signs are that we are beginning in different ways to go to where people are and let church happen”.

NEW STRUCTURES
The new General Synod will debate a new Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measures which will enable the legal recognition of fresh expressions of church within more flexible structures.

Cornerstone Church is a church plant, from Holy Trinity Church, Leicester, with no building. It started from two cells in Sept 2001, but now has more.

In 2004 weekly services started in the local pub and a weekly after-schools club has run for more than two years in the local primary school. There is a retired people’s meal monthly at the local City Farm, from which has recently sprung an Enquirers’ Group.

I live in Clitheroe with my wife and two teenagers and am an Associate Minister at St James’ Church. I worked as a teacher in Hull and then trained for the ministry at Trinity College, Bristol. After a curacy I began to work for the BBC making religious programmes for local radio and then BBC TV. Most recently I have been a producer on Songs of Praise.

5 minutes with Norman Ivison
Norman is Director of Training and Events
et me take you back about 25 years to my days as a curate, and introduce you to somebody called Renee.

She lived in the council estate where I was a curate. She was married to a blind man and that produced its own problems and challenges and she was a person with an enormous appetite for learning and developing. One of the things which fed this appetite, she discovered, was the Bible.

On the estate she organised a little group of about five or six women like her, youngish married women from the council estate who met once a week for Bible study and prayer.

Now Renee occasionally came to the parish church and we became quite good friends, and I remember the parish church and we became quite good friends, and I remember the awful moment at which I thought, no, under no circumstances should I go along to this Bible study group because you will kill it stone dead.

You will be attempting, I said to myself, you will be attempting to turn it into a parish church activity, and surprising as it may seem, it may just not have the same level of appeal if that's how it's branded. And so I think, to my eternal credit, I left it to Renee.

**RISK-TAKING**

Now 'leaving it to Renee', you might say, is one of the principles of Fresh Expressions. That's to say, it requires of the supposedly mainstream, a spirit of generosity and risk-taking – watch to see what God is doing – a fundamental principle which we've repeated so many times in talking about Fresh Expressions, find out what God is doing and join in as best you can. Don't try and take over and don't come at it with too many presuppositions, because what the church is, is, if you like, shifting under our feet all the time.

So one of the central insights behind Fresh Expressions in its visions and its method is looking, looking and listening with expectation and with respect. What is God doing? Because God is gathering people to witness and to work for his kingdom in all sorts of ways that are not captured well or not captured at all in the statistics or the headline stories.

And that is one of the great challenges that lies before us.

It is, though, only half of the story. Fresh Expressions of church life, those spontaneously generated Christian communities that seem to arise in all sorts of non-parish church contexts, are a wonderful sign of what God's up to.

They also need resourcing, the sharing of good practice and experience, networking around the country and a measure of conversation and interaction with the historic mainstream churches for the good of both sides.

The historic mainstream needs these challenges and witnesses and questions that come from new expresions. New forms of church life need at times the pool of experience that the historic churches have. Neither needs to be trying to impose its patterns on the other, which is why I've often spoken of a mixed economy church as the ideal that we're looking to.

The Church of England is, in many ways, well placed to become a mixed economy church. It has a network of its schools. It has a network of generosity towards all those new moves. New forms of Christian coalition, the new events, Christian happening, together, committed together, and people to do this for us. And I think we can offer in resource and experience as a bishop in Wales where two things really came to the fore.

First, in a way, is anybody's guess? Lots of different things happen, lots of different things have happened over the course of Christian history, and that's the point at which we need a lot of patience, a lot of imagination, a lot of generosity.

**CRYSTALLISE THE VISION**

Why Fresh Expressions then in this particular form? It's an attempt to crystallise in practice that vision of what the mainstream church might be – confident enough in itself to be generous, that is to give support, nourishment in prayer and practical ways to those new forms of Christian coalition, the new events, Christian happening, Christian discovery that are around.

Not attempting to take over and dominate all of this but to offer what we can offer in resource and experience and we've been extraordinarily well blessed in finding just the right people to do this for us. And I think we have a team here and a leadership here of outstanding excellence with just the gifts we need for this.

When I first became Archbishop I was asked what my priorities would be as Archbishop. And I said there were two things really, one was to find some way of helping the Church of England to be galvanised into this kind of generosity towards all those new movements and experiences and expressions of church life that were arising.

And I said that partly because of experience as a bishop in Wales where

“theological education is the whole process of helping people to mature in their faith, mind, heart”
Looking, Listening, Respect

about renewal and reconstruction for the Christian Churches in this country.

ENGAGING

Over a period of ten years this routine and prosaic experience turned out to be rather more generative than I could have believed. And by the time I left there were six or seven very, different new expressions of church life, so much so that tightly strained relationships with the parochial system, but happening, engaging with the problems, not running away from them, finding ways of working and living together.

And I thought that’s really the vision I want to stand for and witness to in the Church of England.

The second priority I set at that point was to do with theological education, which when you put it in those terms somehow doesn’t get people standing cheering on their seats in quite the same way. And yet I understand theological education as the whole process of helping people to mature in their faith, in mind and heart.

The process of helping people mature in their faith in mind and heart, because that’s what theology is for in the Christian community. It’s not an ivory tower enterprise, it’s not a spare time activity, it’s about nourishing people into maturity. And one of the ways that can be done of course is through good theological literature – hence the institution of the Lambeth Book Prize. I think this year with Bishop Tom Wright’s amazingly accessible and as well as amazingly profound book on the resurrection, we found just the kind of thing we were looking for to recognise as part of that work of helping people to mature in their faith.

AMBITIONS

Over the last 18 months to two years, the projects which seemed large, ambitious and vague have become large, ambitious and concrete. I think the practice, the actual experience that the Fresh Expressions team are building up is no less ambitious than the vision as it started.

It’s ambitious because it’s a vision for the renewal and reconstruction of the Church of England and other historic mainstream churches in this country. It’s a bid for the ‘mixed-economy’ church, for a church which is confident and grateful for what the parochial system and the congregational system can offer and courageous enough and free enough to see what else is going on and welcome it and learn from it and support it. So it is ambitious, it is large scale but it is becoming very concrete.

At this moment over 300 examples of Fresh Expressions of church life have been registered, and that in a relatively short time is, I think an extraordinary tribute both to the reality of what God is doing in and around the church and to the work of Steve and the team in drawing together information about what’s happening. 300 examples and, here is the statistic that perhaps is most worth pondering, these examples of new styles of church life have involved in various ways 20,000 people.

LARGER PICTURE

We’ve every reason to believe that what we know about so far is in fact only a relatively small part of a larger picture, and I think it’s fair to say that we are discovering all the time how large the picture is. So we have good reason for approaching this with confidence and hope and gratitude.

I think we’re at a moment in the development of our historic churches in the United Kingdom where God has opened to us a door of opportunity and people are beginning to ask very penetrating questions about faith in the public sphere.

Religion is a matter of considerable public debate and interest - more than we could ever have imagined say five years ago. For some people it’s a matter of fear and anxiety as if the – to borrow an image from the historian Peter Brown – as if the rising tide of religious faith was somehow staining the white walls of a pure secular society.

But of course there is no such thing as a pure secular society. We don’t, whatever people say, live in a secular society. We live in a society that doesn’t quite know where it gets its moral compass from and yet is aware of being haunted by religious tradition and religiously-based morality. It may often be in revolt against that, it may often think it knows nothing about it, and yet the presence is there. People have been forced back to some more fundamental questions – why do we believe in this way of life that we seem to be so proud of?

EDUCATION

We have also seen debate around the role of religion in education. On the one hand the extraordinary popularity of faith-based schools in many people’s lives; on the other hand a lot of rather chaotic anxieties sometimes in the press about the dangers of religious schools as promoting sectarianism.

Now the opportunity for us as a church is to proclaim very clearly that we stand for a vision of a just and equal and stable society, that we stand for a spirit of listening and discerning along with other religious traditions – not head on religious conflict. The opportunity of saying that we can offer a basis for stability in relationships, the formation of young people’s lives – it’s a huge opportunity.

Fresh Expressions is one way in which I hope and pray the churches can be galvanised to respond to that opportunity and to do what I think God wants us to do at this point in our history, which is simply to fling wide the doors of the church and say here is humanity’s home in the community that God desires to draw together around His Son, in which justice and love and mutual service are as natural as the air we breathe, because the air we breathe is God’s Holy Spirit.

I wasn’t really looking for a job when my husband Jon met Steve at the summer 2004 Anglican Church Planting Conference. The opportunity to be part of Fresh Expressions seemed too good to miss and provides a bigger context for the work that Jon and myself are involved in at New Hope Community Church - a church plant from Greyfriars Reading.

Before Fresh Expressions, I worked full-time as Head of Social Responsibility at the Evangelical Alliance. Having been appointed as PA to the Team Leader, my role is to support Steve and to help establish the growing team. Working three days a week, I am very much looking forward to an additional admin colleague in the near future!

What book are you reading at the moment?

Late-Talking Children

Where do you usually worship?

New Hope Community Church (CoF plant)

Which Christian Festival Means Most to You?

Easter

What is your favourite hymn?

I will sing the wondrous story

Where did you go to School?

The Perse School for Girls, Cambridge.

What hobbies do you enjoy?

Making curtains.

Describe “my media”.

The Today Programme and The Observer.

What is your hope for Fresh Expressions?

That as a Church we will become bold and courageous.

How do you relax?

Cooking for friends.
The Methodist Church
& Fresh Expressions

by Pete Pillinger,
Pete is the Methodist Missioner for Fresh Expressions

In the late 1730s George Whitfield, a friend of John Wesley, had started to preach in the open air to coal miners near Kingswood, Bristol. Crowds turned up to this ‘fresh expression of church’.

His friend John Wesley wrote, “The idea was repugnant to the correct and proper presbyter of the Church of England, who declared that he had not been so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.” (Journal, March 31, 1739, Volume 2, 167).

When George went to America John’s natural inclinations did not stop him taking on the work.

Methodism was born in fresh expressions of church nearly 300 years ago! The most important thing was not decent church order but that people should be able to hear the Good News of Jesus in ways and places which made sense to them. People were not in church buildings so the preacher went to them.

In Victorian times Methodist minister William Booth was led by God to the poor people in the slums of our cities. The Methodist church had become inflexible and did not share his vision, so the Salvation Army – a fresh expression of church – was born.

At the turn of the twentieth century Methodists realised that the people who were going to the music halls were not going to church – so they built the central halls – modelled on the music halls – a fresh expressions of church.

At the beginning of the 21st century we have again realised that we need fresh expressions of church to reach people. We do not know what all these fresh expressions will be like but we must look for them, make room for them and accept them. They are our heritage, some of them may well be our future.

Methodism was born in fresh expressions of church nearly 300 years ago!
Tots’ Praise
An eager assortment of 0-5s and parents gather for a monthly Tots’ Praise. Some look at the display at the front introducing today’s theme.

It begins with songs, and an introduction followed by activities around the church. A story, prayers and some more songs are followed by refreshments and time to play with toys. The adults take away a sheet for further reflection on the theme.

‘Encounter’ will be launched in the winter – our next step for families.

Lunch Club
A lunch club for the elderly has met for a number of years. Throughout this time, a weekly Eucharist would take place beforehand in a separate room.

A change of building has now brought the lunch club and Eucharist into the same space.

Now everyone who arrives in time sings, prays and shares bread and wine – including the cooks and the servers in the kitchen who can’t be in the service but are a part of our celebrating community. All are welcome and no one is ever excluded.

Success at Kidzone
Kidzone is an after school service for children and parents/carers, consisting of songs, Bible stories, craft and quizzes and is taking place in a number of parishes around the country.

In one venue, Kidzone recently celebrated its 5th birthday and this success is been repeated in a number of parishes. Part of this success, is its accessibility to non-church families, with 80% of those coming to Kidzone in one church having no other church connections. Kidzone has become a place of Christian growth for both parents and children.

Coffee Shop Church
Shirley Methodist Church is a large church in the midst of a busy high street. It is an adapted coffee shop which now serves as a café church.

On the first Thursday of every month ‘Space’ gathers in the coffee shop and chapel at 8pm, with coffee and cakes.

The ‘services’ are different every month and use multi-media presentations, food, and objects such as stones or flowers and candles to enable the group to use their senses in worship.

On the third Thursday of each month there is a more reflective, Taizé style service.

Pickering
About ten people have taken to squash into a small, comfortable lounge on a Wednesday evening – laughing, sharing stories, eating together, and studying the Bible together.

Around the town of Pickering, on different nights of the week, three other community groups and two youth cells meet.

Twice a month, on Sunday evenings, the groups come together to celebrate our life in Jesus. They are encouraging each other to make him known in our small rural market town here in North Yorkshire.

This is Church 4 U, a part of Picker-

i-church
i-church is an Anglican Internet Community based on Benedictine principles under the pastoral authority of the Bishop of Oxford.

Community members make a commitment to a rule of life, and belong to small cells, run by authorised group leaders, where they get to know their other pastoral group members at a deep level.

i-church is not meant to replace traditional church, but to support and supplement it.

For further details of these initiatives, please look in the features section on www.freshexpressions.org.uk
Richard and Wendy live on a large housing estate of some 5000 people in the North West and have for years been key members of their Anglican parish church.

He is a lay reader, regularly leading and preaching at services, and she has led Parents and Toddlers. A couple of years ago they got a vision for a new sort of mission on this estate. They built relationships with neighbours at the school gate, over the fence, out and about. A video of Christian testimonies lent to neighbours soon had others asking to see it.

All these contacts have led to regular meetings in a couple of homes where they ask just two questions of a bible passage: What truth do you see? And what are you going to do about it?

Richard and Wendy also have a Sunday morning breakfast in their homes with neighbouring families coming in for cereal, toast, coffee, prayer and cut and paste common worship! In the past two years there have been 16 neighbours converted, three of whom were baptised by the vicar in an inflatable pool in their back garden in September 2005.

Their “Breakfast Church” has been at 8am so that Richard and Wendy could rush off to parish morning prayer at 10.30am. However, in October they were commissioned to concentrate on this fresh expression of church and released from duties at the parish church. Their vision is for a cell on every street!
Mission Shaped Church: Church Planting & Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context
(CHP 2004) ISBN No: 0715140132
Mission Shaped Church has now sold over 19,000 copies and is a milestone report. It was produced by a working party chaired by the Bishop of Maidstone, Graham Cray. The Methodist Church was represented on the working party by Graham Horsley.

The report has a chapter on change, one on the story of church planting and one describing twelve different kinds of fresh expressions of church. It joins these together with sections on theology and practical strategies to take the church forward.

Just about every diocese in the land has now discussed Mission Shaped Church. The recommendations at the back of the book are being taken forward at national and local level.

Moving on in a Mission Shaped Church
Steven Croft, George Lings and Peter Pillinger (CHP 2004) ISBN No: 0715140787

This is a short guide to the thinking behind Mission Shaped Church in 16 pages. It is designed for Church Councils and home groups. Some churches are selling individual copies with their magazine. Featured, are sections on the changes in society, on the gospel and on practical ways forward. The booklet has discussion questions, a one page guide on how to use it with others and points the reader to other helpful resources.

£5 for a pack of 5.

emergingchurch.intro
Michael Moynagh
(Monarch) ISBN No: 0825460689

This is a fast-paced, easy to read guide to the emerging church by a member of the fresh expressions team. It is packed with examples and stories and full of practical ideas. Anyone who wants to explore fresh expressions themes and put them into practice would benefit from reading it. Jason Clark of Emergent-UK comments on the back cover:

“Possibly the best book I have read on an overview of the emerging church. It is so practical. I will be recommending this to everyone I can and will be using it as a workbook with our network leaders”.

Church after Christendom
Stuart Murray
(Paternoster) ISBN No: 1842272926

For centuries, the Christian Church was the dominant force in Western Culture. The age of Christendom is now coming to an end. How can the church prepare to speak from the edge again and to be a minority group in a larger society. This is the best single volume overview of how the church is responding to a whole range of changes. Stuart Murray argues that the future of the church lies in simple, sustainable missionary communities.

A churchless faith: faith’s journey beyond the churches
Alan Jamieson

Alan Jamieson has produced a penetrating study of why people leave churches. He has done this by interviewing a wide cross section of church leavers from evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic churches. Most of the work was done in Australia and New Zealand but the lessons are also relevant to the UK. Jameson discovers that most of those who leave haven’t lost their faith. Many continue to meet with others and are looking for church in a different shape.

Evangelism in a Spiritual Age
Steven Croft, Rob Frost, Mark Ireland, Anne Richards and Nick Spencer
(Paternoster) ISBN No: 1842272926

Equipping your church in a spiritual age
Steve Hollinghurst, Yvonne Richmond and Roger Whitehead
(Paternoster) ISBN No: 1842272926

Two very practical books which aim to help churches engage with people in our wider community who are on a spiritual search. The first is a book of articles arising from research done in the Coventry area on what people are looking for. The second is a brilliant collection of very practical ideas on how to engage people where they are.

Fresh Expressions would welcome being linked to your church or parish website. Please put in a link to www.freshexpressions.org.uk so that more people will be aware of God’s work in the most surprising people and places.
Looking Back

by Bob & Mary Hopkins
Bob & Mary head up the Anglican Church Planting Initiatives

We felt called to church planting in the Church of England from as early as 1974. This was the basis on which we trained together in St Albans from '76 to '79 and Bob has been Non Stipendiary Minister ever since. In 1983 we moved from South East commuter land to UPA (Urban Priority Area) Merseyside to be part of a mission team of seven.

With George Lings and others, we began Anglican Church Planting Initiatives in the late 80s. As well as annual church planting conferences, we tracked the number of these new sorts of churches on a database. The progress was astounding.

Whereas only one or two new churches were planted in the C of E through the 1970s, this rose to one a month in the 80s and by the early 90s it was nearly one a week. With over 400 new Anglican churches on the database it has become clear that this movement isn’t about more churches, but different kinds of churches to respond to our rapidly changing culture.

Some of these new churches didn’t neatly fit into the parish system and in 1992 the House of Bishops commissioned the report “Breaking New Ground” which cautiously affirmed the movement. And crucially, it recognised the need for non-geographic mission churches. But by the millennium, we had cell churches, alternative worship events, café churches, youth congregations, seeker churches, cyber churches and the central question had become “what is church?”.

This led us and George Lings (now of the Church Army’s Sheffield Centre), to head off to Bishop James Jones, then chair of the Board of Mission, to suggest a ten year review of this mission kaleidoscope to learn lessons from the decade since Breaking New Ground. The result was the Mission-shaped Church Report of 2004, which included the analysis of all the fresh expressions of church cropping up.

As it happened we had both worked with the Monmouth diocese under Rowan Williams and helped identify some dozen fresh expressions of church. This had played a small part in forming Archbishop Rowan’s “mixed economy” vision for the future. And in God’s providence, one of the first Reports after he became Archbishop of Canterbury was Mission-shaped Church. This provided the research analysis and the missiological framework to support his vision and in turn played its part in shaping the Fresh Expressions initiative and the team of which we are now proud to be part.

Fresh News

Messy Church!
It’s 3.30 on a Thursday and the mums and toddlers arrive first, followed by the school-age families with grannies, parents or childminders. Boardgames, colouring, and cups of tea are there to welcome them. At 4.00 everyone zooms off round the halls to about ten different craft activities. At 5.00 we dive into church for a fifteen minute celebration service and at 5.15 sit down to a hot meal together. 60-70 people enjoying fun, worship, fellowship and food once a month – it’s Messy Church!

What book are you reading at the moment?
Watching the English by Kate Fox. The Section on Rites of Passage and the English Attitude to religion is fascinating background for Fresh Expressions

Where do you usually worship?
Until recently in various churches in the Bradford Diocese. Just settling into a new home so on the lookout!

Which Christian Festival Means Most To You?
The Feast of the Transfiguration on August 6. The story of Jesus on the mountain top with Peter James & John has been life changing for me.

What is your favourite Gospel and Why?
Mark - because it is the simplest, the earliest and the most straightforward.

What hobbies do you enjoy?
I enjoy travelling a lot - for short bursts to nice cities. Increasingly, I enjoy doing up a small house I have just bought in Normandy where I hope the grandchildren will visit one day!

Describe “my media”.
BBC website, the Guardian, FiveLive and Sky Sports One.

What is your hope for Fresh Expressions?
After years of working in communication I hope that Fresh Expressions will replace negativity with a confidence for the future.

How do you relax?
Oh dear! By catching up on things I haven’t done when I should have done them. Working for oneself is not always as easy as people make out!

What is your favourite bible story and why?
The Transfiguration (Luke 9.28ff) because it talks about how all suffering can be transformed into glory through faith.

Rob is PR Adviser to Fresh Expressions
At the football...
Safe Space in Telford seeks to walk with some of the many people who consider themselves to be ‘spiritual but not religious’.

With the dream of growing communities of people exploring the place of spirituality in life and longing for an encounter with the maker and creator. Safe Space aims to be a home for those who cannot find space in the traditional culture of the church but nevertheless have hopes and fears beyond day to day life.

The group gathers weekly in the heart of community; the football club, the bar, the café, the home.

‘It’s church Jim, but not as we know it’
Crosswise in Hull is different in many ways, facing across the church rather than looking to the front. There’s a warm welcome and a nice cuppa as you arrive. Worship begins with some modern and some traditional songs led by the worship band, then there’s time to learn, either all together, or in age-related groups. Crosswise tries to give space and time to respond to God and for people to pray for each other as the need arises.

One eighty year old lady, summed it recently, when she said: “I love it here you just never know what’s going to happen next.” Amen to that!

Contemplative Fire

Contemplative Fire is there for those who are seeking the God who is other, yet present among us. Combining traditional spiritual exercises and modern settings this is definitely not for the complacent. So if you feel as if your spiritual life is going no-where perhaps it is time to take a walk to the Now-Here.

www.contemplativefire.org

Fresh Expressions Prayer Diary

1. The Fresh Expressions who have registered this week
2. Local church leaders and their responsibilities
3. Fresh Expressions for older people
4. Steve Croft and the Fresh Expressions team
5. Diocese and Districts as they consider fresh expressions
6. Fresh Expressions for infant and junior children
7. Fresh Expressions for single people
8. The Fresh Expressions who have registered this week
9. The national and local media and their response
10. Church conferences on mission and evangelism
11. Fresh Expressions for the poor and destitute
12. National leaders and their spiritual needs
13. Fresh Expressions for refugees and asylum seekers
14. Fresh Expressions for youth and young adults
15. Fresh Expressions for families and single parents
16. The Fresh Expressions who have registered this week
17. The website and its effective use
18. Our Associate Missioners throughout the country
19. Fresh Expressions for youth and young adults
20. The Fresh Expressions Board of Directors
21. Fresh Expressions in rural areas
22. Fresh Expressions in urban areas
23. The Fresh Expressions who have registered this week
24. The training offered through the website and events
25. Fresh Expressions for addicts and those in rehabilitation
26. Fresh Expressions for the middle classes and materially wealthy
27. Fresh Expressions for those leaving prison
28. Archbishops of Canterbury and York and President of Methodist Council
29. Unity across the Church
30. The Fresh Expressions who have registered this week
31. All those who translate the Bible into many different languages

Website
There’s lots more to find out at:
www.freshexpressions.org.uk

I am the job experience girl! I am on a placement with Fresh Expressions as part of my vicar training. I have just started my second of three years at Ripon College, Cuddesdon. When not exploring the local fresh expressions of church I am studying for an MTh in Applied Theology at Oxford.

What book are you reading at the moment?
Distracted Preacher by Thomas Hardy

Where do you usually worship?
At College or with Contemplative Fire

Which Christian Festival Means Most to You?
I like Advent-season of expectation

Where did you go to School?
South Woodham Ferrers, Brentwood and Chelmsford.

What is your favourite Hymn?
Be Thou My Vision

What is your favourite Gospel and Why?
John, he captures the passion and imagery.

What hobbies do you enjoy?
Skiing, Cinema, Theatre and coffee with friends!

Describe “my media”.
The imagination and the written word.

What is your hope for Fresh Expressions?
That it will open the church up.

How do you relax?
In front of a fire with a book.

What is your favourite bible story and why?
Ruth for her courage in leaving her security.

5 minutes with
Adèle Rees
A remarkable journey

Steven Croft took up the post as team leader of Fresh Expressions just over a year ago, and has spent the last 12 months criss-crossing the country, listening to what is happening.

Expressions caught up with Steven at the end of October and asked what kind of picture he has now of the life of the churches.

"It’s been a remarkable journey. Every week new stories come into the website. Every month, I’ve been meeting people who are starting fresh expressions of church.

I am encouraged by what I see. There is a new humility about in the Church of England and the Methodist Church. People no longer think they have all the answers. But that’s combined with a willingness to step out in faith, to take risks, to try new things.

Christian people are restless again in a good way. We are no longer content to sit in our churches and wait for people to come to us. We are no longer content with decline. People seem willing to stop blaming other people and to do something locally.

The church recognises, I think, that the world is changing very quickly. Many people are still able to find life and meaning in traditional churches and that is wonderful. There are many examples where congregations in local churches are growing.

But for many Christians, it’s no longer enough to attract people in from the fringes of our congregations. With many sections of the population we need to start all over again – that’s why so many fresh expressions are being started.

Most of the people who begin fresh expressions of church would say that they are ordinary Christians. Often they don’t have a grand design or a lot of training. They do have a desire to serve their wider community and a longing to share the gospel.

It’s those kind of reasons that inspire people to set up new services in old peoples homes and primary schools, to stand out on the streets talking to clubbers, to spend time with under-fives and their carers, to listen to communities on new estates, to set up cafes and drop-in centres for those right on the edge, to start meeting in homes and pubs as well as church buildings.

None of this depends on getting resources and permission from the centre. For the most part people are simply saying yes to God’s call. But it is very good to see the way districts and dioceses are getting behind this movement. It encourages everyone and it multiplies the effect.

Where will it lead us? I don’t think anyone knows. The Church of England and the Methodist church will look very different in ten years time.

Many people are predicting that the difference will be a sharp decline. I can no longer agree. I think we will see more variety, more creativity, many different shapes and forms of church. I think we’ll have to work very hard at connecting everything together.

But I do sense, above all, new life growing and I’m full of hope. I thank God we live in interesting times!“
FRESH EXPRESSIONS FAQS

How do you define a fresh expression of church?

A fresh expression of church is a new or different way of being church in a changing culture. The term is coined by the Mission Shaped Church Report. It’s taken from the promise made by Anglican clergy every time they take up a new post: “to proclaim the gospel afresh in each generation”.

Is the opposite of a fresh expression a stale expression of church?

No. The opposite of a fresh expression is a mature church. Not every fresh expression has developed all the marks of a mature church. These time to grow. Every fresh expression is on a journey towards maturity.

There is still plenty of life in traditional churches. Our aim is not to grow fresh expressions instead of the traditional churches but alongside them: a mixed economy.

What kind of things are covered by the term fresh expressions?

Mission Shaped Church describes 12 different kinds of emerging churches, and new ones are still developing. They cover everything from new midweek services or different forms of Sunday services, to new communities based on networks of young people or adults. Some are doing church differently through small communities. Some are meeting in different venues, such as café churches.

You can find all of these different examples on the fresh expressions website in the directory. We added two different categories to the list in mission shaped church: fresh expressions for children and fresh expressions of church for under-fives and their families.

So when two Christians meet at a bus stop is that a fresh expression of church?

No – but thanks for asking. A fresh expression is more than just an occasional meeting. Fresh expressions are about being shaped by mission. Any new community will have to be outward looking from the very beginning, not just a different way of meeting together for Christians.

Hasn’t the church always done this kind of thing? It’s not particularly new is it?

Some of the things we call fresh expressions have been around somewhere for a long time (such as midweek services for parents and toddlers or an additional all age service). However, they may be fresh and different in a particular parish or circuit.

Others are a different way of seeing things we have done for a long time. Many traditional midweek activities have been seen as stepping stones into a Sunday congregation. They are now being seen more and more as expressions of church. Therefore they need to build and grow in community, discipleship, worship and mission.

Still others – such as the internet communities or network churches – are really very new. We are still learning how to do them well.

What’s driving all of this? Is it just declining numbers?

Wherever this kind of change is driven only by decline, it is bound to fail. The church in every generation is called to share in God’s mission in loving service and by proclaiming the good news. People need to hear the gospel. We need to engage in fresh expressions for that reason.

Are fresh expressions really reaching people right outside the churches or just those on the edge?

There’s a spectrum. Some are gearing their lives to those who are on the fringe of church life and have some kind of church background. One example would be the all age services springing up at different times, particularly on a Saturday afternoon.

Some are setting their sights firmly on reaching out to those who know almost nothing about the Christian faith and learning how to do that. Almost all are taking as their starting point listening to those who are right outside.

The numbers involved are very small, aren’t they? Is this really a significant movement?

Many fresh expressions of church are small – but so are many traditional congregations. But we have the capacity to develop many thousands of these fresh expressions and that means reaching out to many, many people.

Already the numbers involved across the country are significant. We don’t think we have even a quarter of projects registered on the website yet and already the numbers of people involved are over 25,000.

Is all of this just for the evangelicals?

Not at all. There are now fresh expressions of church in every tradition.

Is it just for wealthy churches in the suburbs with lots of people?

Again, no. Sometimes it’s the most successful suburban churches which have the most difficulty with the idea of fresh expressions. There are many different rural examples now and a growing number in inner city areas.

Isn’t the church called to be one community drawn from every different age group and race and social class? I’m not too sure about starting a church for a particular group.

Sadly, many churches are already made up of one age group, race and social class (white, largely female, over 55) which can make everyone else feel shut out. Sometimes we need to start again for new sections of the community.

However, every fresh expression of church needs to be linked into the wider body of Christ in a whole range of ways. No local church can ever be complete by itself. That way we have the unity but also the differences.

So how will we hold together the old and new in one church?

It’s vital to build strong bonds of connection and to work out how a fresh expression will belong. Sometimes that belonging is to a local church. Sometimes it is to a circuit or deanery, occasionally to a diocese or district.

The belonging is worked out in structures for ministry and governance; in fellowship; in different kinds of partnerships of support and in mutual giving and receiving.

Are there any dangers in moving forward in this way? Haven’t there been scandals in the past?

There are always dangers for the life of the church and one of them is doing nothing at all. There have been scandals in Cathedrals and traditional churches over the last twenty years as well as in different forms of church.

We need to be as wise as we can about oversight and structures – but we are called to move forward.
The way in which Fresh Expressions has caught the imagination of people across the country is a miracle in itself. Of course, the team were optimistic that the initiative would inspire and encourage.

But the truth is that Fresh Expressions has become part of the culture and language not only of the church of the future but the church of today.

Any cursory glance at the Christian media reveals phrases connected with Mission Shaped Church and Fresh Expressions.

There was some laughter in the editorial office of Expressions when we started to realise how many things could be determined as “Fresh”.

But there is absolutely no doubt that the initiative is catching the imagination of many different people and that Fresh Expressions are an essential part of the church of the future.

Wakefield...

Steve Croft went back to the Diocese where he was once an incumbent when he addressed a day conference on Fresh Expressions in the Wakefield Diocese in November.

The publicity produced by the Diocese asked:
- what is church planting, and how does it work?
- refreshing styles of church patterns for young people, children and others
- what is church today, and is mission its core priority?
- ideas, information, encouragement & challenge?
- The Wakefield day has been matched by many other Dioceses who have focussed on Fresh Expressions in recent months.

They said it...

Director of Church Research Unit, The Sheffield Centre said: “A context has arisen that is remarkable. We have an Archbishop who openly makes the fostering of fresh expressions of church one of his two high-priority. At the same time, shorter and more flexible legal processes governing the creation of churches are being proposed and the Mission-shaped Church report has become a best-seller.”

George Lings (Church Army)

Blog it...

Phil is training for the ministry at Theological College:

This is from his blog:

I went to see my supervisor this week and we talked through some of the big questions that could kick off my investigation. One that came out of reading the ‘mission-shaped church’ report was ‘can the Church of England hold within it fresh expressions?’

Can an ancient institution foster and support fresh expressions that are likely to step outside the mould of traditional Anglicanism? Perhaps the primary question is ‘what is Anglicanism’? I have a feeling this question has many answers...

A Fresh Expressions Prayer

Almighty God,
You call your people
To proclaim anew in every generation the good news of Jesus your Son.
By the power of your Spirit
Rekindle in us gifts of courage and compassion
Open our eyes to see your grace at work beyond our churches
Help us to work with you in building new communities of faith
Fresh expressions of your constant love in a changing and uncertain world
For the building of your kingdom and the glory of your name.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

Who’s Who?

Expressions is the newspaper of Fresh Expressions

Fresh Expressions was set up in 2004 as an Archbishops’ initiative with the support of the Methodist Council of Great Britain.

Our aim is to resource the growing movement of fresh expressions of church in every Anglican Diocese and Methodist District and beyond.

Copies of the first edition of Expressions are available free to members of your congregation. To obtain copies for your church please email the number required to the address:

expressions@freshexpressions.org.uk

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5 minutes with Pete Pillinger

I hope Fresh expressions can enable the churches to give permission, to make space for the new things God is doing.

How do you relax?
Watching the world go by through a train window!

What is your favourite bible story and why?
At present, Samuel’s call.