Two and a half years ago, mission-shaped church was published and Archbishop Rowan Williams appealed for the church in the 21st century to become a mixed economy. He said, “We need traditional churches alongside many different fresh expressions of church,” something the outgoing President of Methodist Conference, Tom Stuckey, echoed during his year of office.

“It is clear to me that the churches are engaging at every level with the challenge of mission shaped church” says Steve Croft, “and we still hear each week of new initiatives at local level. Our new DVD offers a flavour of these initiatives.”

The Fresh Expressions team believes that the main need for the church today is high quality training and resourcing for ministry in fresh expressions.

Pete Pillinger, Methodist Missioner, tells us, “It’s as if the whole church is learning to do something new at the same time. The training has to be for the whole people of God, not simply the ordained ministry.”

To help with this, a series of Vision Days is planned to take place across the country in the next year. “We want to give people in every part of the country the vision for beginning fresh expressions,” said Andrew Roberts, another Methodist team member.

A one-year training course is planned for teams of lay people and clergy from parishes and circuits. The course will happen over two Saturdays, a residential weekend and ten evenings and is based on a very effective model in Lincoln. Norman Ivison, Director of Training and Events, is hopeful that the course will begin in six centres in January 2007.

Fresh Expressions are drawing together theological colleges, courses and centres so that we can draw on the best wisdom available in developing training. Two of the key centres of excellence are Cliff College and Wilson Carlile College of Evangelism.

There is a sense that the churches in different parts of the world are watching the Church of England and the Methodist Church with great interest. As Expressions goes to press, Bob and Mary Hopkins are touring Australia and New Zealand with George Lings of the Church Army, sharing some of the lessons learned in the UK. The team regularly receives enquiries from the United States, Canada and from northern Europe which is proof of just what is happening here.
Fresh expressions of church are already permeating just about every aspect and corner of the Methodist and Anglican Churches.

Only 15 months after the concept was launched in London by Archbishop Rowan Williams, the impact of a Spirit-led surge in confidence and enthusiasm for growth, development and change is considerable.

The Archbishop of Canterbury continues to make upbeat references to the work of the Fresh Expression network at every level – community, parish, deanery, district, diocese and nationwide.

In interviews on ITV and in the Guardian Dr Williams emphasised the importance of a mixed economy church where new congregations could flourish alongside more traditional ones.

Dr Steve Croft, Archbishops’ Missioner, has had his first meeting with Archbishop John Sentamu about the distinctive flavour of many fresh expressions in the Northern Province.

“The Archbishop asked some excellent questions and was very keen to know more,” said Dr Croft.

Meanwhile many diocesan bishops are ensuring that Fresh Expressions is on the agenda of synods, conferences and evangelism days right across the Church.

Cathedrals and sector ministers are doing what they can to ensure that Fresh Expressions has an opportunity to take root in a wide variety of cultures and places.

Methodism has also embraced the idea of new ways of being church and there are many examples of rural and urban expressions emerging within the Methodist districts.

What is a fresh expression?

Archbishops’ Missioner Steve Croft defined a Fresh Expression as follows in a recent article in the Church of England Newspaper.

“A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church. It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples.

It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church for its cultural context.”

Worthy of a relationship with Jesus...

The Net Church in Huddersfield meets on most Sundays at Almondbury High School, and is connecting with unchurched people in the region.

To help make the connection, the church is providing a range of service ideas which are not only engaging with people, but are providing a relaxed environment where nobody feels under pressure or uncomfortable.

After being invited to the Net Church, Jim, a member of the congregation, felt engaged by what he had seen, telling us, “It was spoken in a language I understood and offered an antidote to my previous church experience.”

“My wife is a Christian and occasionally I have spent an hour totally disengaged in a church, the whole thing irrelevant to me. Everything seemed pointless and trivial. The Net Church offered me something completely different,” he added.

The Net Church believes that it must constantly try to be relevant to today’s culture and consider how it appears to non-church people.

Jim sums up this commitment, when he tells us: “The word God has become part of my vocabulary, and the church has become a family rather than a place of boredom.”

“After attending a couple of courses I realised I was worthy of a relationship with Jesus.”
INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Requests for information and correspondence with churches and communities from all over the world are now part of life for the Fresh Expressions team.

Every day, when messages and emails are answered, it is normal to find a request from Helsinki or San Diego; at the time of writing, a church in Brittany has been in touch and a Canadian congregation has requested further information on what we are doing.

Bob & Mary down under

Bob and Mary Hopkins visited Germany just a few weeks before the start of the 2006 World Cup (no connection there!) and were shortly on their travels again with George Lings visiting Australia and New Zealand. The work of Fresh Expressions and the vision of Archbishop Rowan is being shared across the world.

Fresh Expressions Australia

Churches in Australia are getting ready to launch their own versions of the Fresh Expressions initiative with much of the material currently used here being used.

Fresh Expressions spokesman Rob Marshall said: “Any search of the worldwide web concerning Fresh Expressions produces startling results and is a sign of blessing and thanksgiving that new congregations and communities are emerging across the world.”

“It is enormously encouraging to see what is happening in Australia,” he added.

Twickenham visit

Overseas visitors to the UK are keen to learn about Fresh Expressions whilst they are here.

Ian Mobsby and Steve Croft recently spent time with a group of Lutheran Pastors from Scandinavia who were keen to take home with them some of the workable models of fresh expressions. They were told about the vision, activity and future planning relating to the mixed economy of traditional and new congregations working together.

Meanwhile, mission-shaped church has been translated into German and will be published there later in 2006.

International media

An increasing number of media enquiries come from journalists all across the world doing features on how churches are countering dwindling numbers and a lack of vocations.

Many enquiries are coming in all the time including some recently from the Middle East, Spain, Italy and Portugal.

Fresh Expressions in schools: A missing chapter

Steve Croft argued that there is a missing chapter in mission-shaped church when he addressed the annual conference of Diocesan Directors of Education in June.

Speaking to delegates from across the country, he told them “more work is needed on how fresh expressions can develop in Church schools.”

“There are many good things happening already,” he added. “Church schools offer a very supportive community in which to begin a fresh expression.”

The address was well received and proposals are in hand to develop a new piece of thinking to integrate the best ideas in The Way Ahead (the 2001 report on the future of Church schools) and mission-shaped church.

Alicia joins the team

We were delighted to welcome Alicia Baker to the Fresh Expressions team earlier this year

Alicia has been seconded from the Diocese of Chelmsford and her main project with us is a piece of research on what is happening in inner city and outer estate areas.

Alicia, in the fourth year of her curacy in the East End of London, told Expressions: “Sometimes people think that fresh expressions of church are only happening in the suburbs, but in fact, lots of good things are happening in inner city areas.”

Keep up with the website to learn more about what Alicia is doing, as she adds more stories.
Hope project.
and so set up the Valley of ex-offenders, its homeless, community, its people, its someone had to help this area, and realised that when meeting people from the area, and learnt this out from it.

There is no hope, no way that there is no vailing feeling in the area, and a pre rate in the area, and a pre

There is a lot of hopelessness and crime, much of which is drink and drug related.

There is a high suicide rate in the area, and a prevailing feeling that there is no hope, no way out from it.

Ralph Upton learnt this when meeting people from the area, and realised that someone had to help this community, its people, its ex-offenders, its homeless, and so set up the Valley of Hope project.

“As Christians it’s really about listening to people, trying to see where they’re at and then trying to point them to God,” he tells me.

Ralph isn’t just listening though, the project is actively getting out into the community and helping out: “We gave out 40 food parcels at Christmas to people in dire straits. The feedback we’re getting is that folk were reduced to tears just because of a few groceries.”

“Hehe we are in 2006 in one of the richest countries in the world and yet some are in that sort of state,” he adds.

Currently the project is feeding people into local churches and communicates the Gospel at Christmas and Easter. Ralph wants to increase this spiritual side, not so that it’s overtly there, but that it is clear.

He feels that there is some way to go to make this worshipping community come to fruition, but certainly feels that a start has been made.

“We have had people come through the project who have shown a real interest,” he says. “One of our clients said this Christmas that she saw us as a real family - for many, we’re probably the closest they’ve come to family, to belonging.”

Ralph tells me that although a lot of the people haven’t rejected God, they haven’t rejected the Church. Indeed, a recurring theme he hears is that church doesn’t play a role in their lives.

The question he is asking is, “How do we go about bridging the gap – the one between us and the people?”

He tells me: “On the whole we deal with quite a hard group of cynical people, yet they have a real interest in things spiritual.”

“The churches that are really seeing growth today are the ones getting involved in social action, so we’ve just got to get out there and do it!”

There can be little doubt that Ralph is getting out there and doing it.

One of the most exciting parts of the site is the regularly updated training section, looking at the different courses and training events that are on offer. Use this section to find out ways in which we can help you in your thinking, planning and developing of fresh expressions.

An important part of the training section also looks at the vision days we hope to run in the future. For further information on these vision days, or anything to do with Fresh Expressions, visit us at www.freshexpressions.org.uk

These are just a few snapshots of a continually developing website and we urge you not to miss it.
What will hold us together?

Verywhere the team speaks to people about fresh expressions of church we have received a warm welcome (so far). People are ready to accept the need for different ways of being church which begin where people are.

But one question comes up almost every time I speak to a group of church leaders. “If there has to be so much diversity, what will hold us together? Is there a danger that we will pull apart and become different churches?”

It’s a vital question. My answer has developed a bit over the last six months (and is still developing) but here it is in brief. It is an answer – so far – for the Church of England. I think the Methodist one needs to be different.

First, there is every sign that fresh expressions of church and traditional parishes are in fact holding together very well. There seems to be no desire on the part of either to move apart. This part is true of Methodism as well. Mission is now one of things that unites us across different traditions.

Second, what we have in common may not be the look and feel of our worship, the cultural style, the kind of place we meet or any of the outward aspects of church life. What is holding us together is a set of common values about what we believe as Anglicans and especially what we believe about the church (our ecclesiology).

Where will you find those values? That’s been the hard part. I think they are so deep inside us its actually quite hard to isolate them. The best list (and this is work in progress) for me comes from the work done by the Anglican communion over the last hundred and twenty years.

When you think about it, the Anglican communion has had to work out what holds very different churches together in very different cultural contexts. Somehow the communion has had to distil the essence of Anglican ecclesiology into a simple set of values.

In 1888 there were four (the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral). I’ve revised one of them slightly and added a fifth (based on recent work in the Communion on mission) to give five values which, I think, are holding the Church of England together and will hold us together as we become more outwardly more diverse:

1. A commitment to Scripture
2. A commitment to the denominational sacraments of baptism and eucharist
3. A commitment to listening to the whole of Christian tradition and seeing that tradition expressed in the historic creeds.
4. A commitment to the ministry and mission of the whole people of God and to the ordering of ministry through the threefold order of deacons, priests and bishops.
5. A commitment to the mission of God to the whole of creation and to the whole of our society as defined and described in the Anglican Communion’s five marks of mission.

This is very much work in progress. Perhaps you can improve it. I’d like to know what you think. And I’d like to know what Methodists think would be a similar set of values for the Methodist people.

Dr Steve Croft

Good news in Chichester

The Diocese of Chichester is offering a one-stop shop for people who want to know more about what is happening in the region.

On their Diocesan website, they have drawn together every fresh expression in the area, and a quick look through the list suggests that things are really taking off.

From The Garden, a small Christian community exploring life, spirituality and theology in a local pub, to Eden, a youth congregation in a rural setting, the Diocese has an encouraging number of creative initiatives.

The list is taken from our very own directory and if your Diocese wishes to do the same, just visit www.freshexpresions.org and take a look through the directory to see what is happening near you.

The patron saint of Fresh Expressions

If you had to choose a patron saint for fresh expressions of church, who would it be?

My nomination is Barnabas (originally suggested by Lee Townsend, a vicar in Kent). We read in Acts 11 that when the early disciples were scattered by persecution, some of them came to a place called Antioch.

They spoke about Jesus not only to Jews but also to Gentiles. God was at work. For the first time ever, many people who were not Jews turned to the Lord.

It was an early fresh expression of church, showing that from the very beginning, the gospel has crossed boundaries.

This news was reported back in Jerusalem where the apostles looked around to see whom they should send. They chose Barnabas.

Barnabas travelled to Antioch. He saw the grace of God at work and “he rejoiced.” It takes special gifts to recognise God at work in new ways and not be jealous, afraid or worried about what others will think. It takes a special goodness to rejoice in something new and to give out the right kind of encouragement.

Barnabas taught the new Christians that they couldn’t do it all. He went to find Saul and together they helped to build a different kind of church – one not based around temple worship or Jewish patterns. This was a new church, one which became the springboard for spreading the gospel to Cyprus, modern Turkey and Greece.

All across the country, we are seeing people drawn to faith in different ways - from a range of different backgrounds - and creating fresh expressions of church.

Every circuit and parish will need its Barnabas if this movement is to increase and to flourish. Barnabas will be needed in the General Synod and the Methodist Conference, in deanery pastoral committees, in meetings of circuit stewards - everywhere where decisions are taken.

God needs Christians of goodness, full of the Holy Spirit, who are able simply to rejoice, to encourage, to teach and support. You may not be called to establish a fresh expression of church. But you may be called to be a Barnabas.
Exciting times

by The Rt Revd Graham James
Bishop of Norwich

If you want old expressions of church, the Diocese of Norwich has lots of them. With 650 churches serving just 850,000 people, you would think that Norwich might be a fresh expression free zone. It isn’t.

Perhaps it’s because so many of our congregations are small and fragile that Fresh Expressions has been so warmly received. We don’t think what we’ve always done is what we’ll always do.

Examples of this are 4All at South Repps – an interactive service for all ages, or the café church at Ditchingham. In short, you’ll find Fresh Expressions happily existing alongside more traditional church life throughout the Diocese.

This approach to broadening our cultural appeal can also be found at The Gap, a seeker service in Grimston or in Xpressions, an informal multi-media event in Loddon. These are the ventures that are reaching out to people who are currently unchurched.

PROACTIVE

We have been proactive in trying to help clergy and laity alike to be adventurous and realise that small-scale initiatives are valuable. That was one of the messages at our Good News day which hundreds attended at the Cathedral last October.

Since then a cell church conference, jointly sponsored with the Methodist Church, has attracted plenty of interest and another ecumenical initiative has taken place in the Forum, Norwich’s award winning library which hosts the BBC’s local radio and regional television centre. Thousands of people walk through the Forum each day and see The Christ We Share exhibition which we set up during Holy Week. Here, images of Christ are arousing people’s curiosity about Christ.

OPPORTUNITES

We also realise that we will miss costly opportunities if there is no training and support. To combat this, we hope to promote a one-year mission leadership course starting next January. Those involved in enabling Fresh Expressions also held a training day this May.

I well remember leading a parish weekend where all my suggestions for renewing worship and mission were met with “we tried that here and it doesn’t work”. Somehow we are beginning to break that mould in Norwich, and in a word it is exciting.

Where the bishop gives permission to clergy and laity to take some risks for God, he might also learn to live more riskily and faithfully himself.

Fresh Expressions in Italy

On the week before Pentecost, the Roman Catholic Church held a conference near Rome for representatives of its Ecclesial Movements and New Communities from around the world. These are initiatives of various sizes, often lay-led, that have grown up since Vatican II, though some are older.

Pam Macnaughton attended as a representative of Fresh Expressions. ‘It was particularly struck by the things many of these movements have in common: commitments to evangelisation, to the formation of Christians and to the poor.’

While at the conference, Pam did interviews about Fresh Expressions and the Anglican Church for Vatican Radio, an Italian Christian magazine, and the Focolare movement. She also joined thousands of Catholics for the final event – vespers in St Peter’s square on the eve of Pentecost with the Pope.

“I couldn’t even get on a BMX, never mind a skateboard!”

Pete Pillinger on Page 13
A brief snapshot: from a to e

Expressions: the course

Incorporating discipleship

Flowers and flagships

Your comments
See the letters Page 17

Expressions: the course

A nyone thinking of launching expressions: the course is encouraged to sample a course module or get a taste of the induction day, in Lincoln later this year.

You can experience the course being taught and see what the induction day involves on October 16th/17th at the New Life Christian Fellowship.

Through witnessing the course close up, we hope to be able to introduce you to the course content, as well as share practical advice and tips.

It will help guide you through processes such as forming local partnerships, getting to grips with setting up the course and creating effective publicity ideas.

If you are thinking of setting up expressions: the course in your area, we strongly recommend you to get in touch.

For further information, please contact: p.atkins2@ntlworld.com

Paul Bayes is the Church of England’s National Mission & Evangelism adviser.
paul.bayes@c-of-e.org.uk
Archbishop encouraged

Rob Marshall catches a few minutes with the Archbishop of Canterbury to ask him how he thinks Fresh Expressions is moving along.

The Archbishop has just preached to a pretty challenging congregation. The whole Royal Family and most of the government along with the establishment and one hundred members of the public were in St Paul’s Cathedral to celebrate HM The Queen’s 80th birthday and Archbishop Rowan delivered a challenging sermon about the nature of monarchy and life in the United Kingdom.

So I appreciate these few minutes after another hectic week for the Archbishop to reflect on how his vision for a mixed economy of church is going: “It’s moving very quickly and effectively. I think. Certainly in terms of numbers, it’s reached more than we expected, and it’s undoubtedly begun to change the culture of our church. ‘Fresh Expressions’ has entered the language for good!”

Anyone who has challenging questions about the theology of Fresh Expressions and how it rolls out in the traditional sense of “church in Britain” only has to listen to the Archbishop for a few minutes to be reassured about the bigger questions of what the theologians call ‘ecclesiology’.

**EMERGING CHURCHES**

“The tough questions were always going to be about lines of accountability, so that you don’t have different styles in active competition in one area. And there’s also an interesting set of issues around how ‘emerging’ churches see and practice the sacraments,” the Archbishop reflects.

He adds: “Bishops have an unprecedented level of responsibility now for stimulating mission, and I think that’s absolutely right. But that also means it’s important to trust their leadership and work with the grain not against it.”

But I push him a bit further about some of the mild critics who yearn for a restoration of the ‘traditional church’, the ‘church that they knew’, of those concerns that we might be drifting away from the central tenets of what it means to be ‘Christian’ in the traditional Methodist or Anglican sense.

**CONVICTON**

“I think these concerns can be met, and that there is a real theology of the Church that can be stated here – but for those – like myself! – who put a lot of emphasis on the Church being held together by the absolute, objective gift of God in Word and Sacrament, not something that we work out and sustain by our efforts, there is a need to stay close to the conviction that the Church exists because of God, not us, and not to be swept away just by what works here and now.”

One of the most challenging aspects of the job of Archbishop of Canterbury is meeting so many different types of congregation in a variety of cultures. Isn’t, I suggest, variety and diversity also the essence of the Christian life?

Archbishop Rowan is sure that it is: “A good church is always one in which you find huge human variety – age, culture, ethnicity. It’s good to see that human variety being honoured in FE communities. It would be a serious thing if we all became tight and inward-looking interest groups or age groups. We always need the big picture in which to put ourselves – ‘the great multitude no-one can number.’”

**CRUCIAL STAGE**

So on to new challenges. What does the Archbishop see as the next crucial stage of the Fresh Expressions project? “The next big step is seeing how the training of ‘pioneers’ works out, and how that impacts on the training of parish clergy as well. And what’s emerging too are more and more signs of local strategy and sharing, which is going to be absolutely essential.”

I then suggest to the Archbishop that Fresh Expressions is one of the more positive aspects of life in the Church of England which some might be surprised to find is actually leading the way in growth. Is it hard for him to disagree?

**ECUMENICAL**

Finally we move onto the ecumenical dimension and whilst the bishops and clergy of the Church of England are important, surely the Archbishop is delighted by the ecumenical impact: “I said earlier that what the bishop’s ministry involved was bound to change to have a more mission-minded focus, and that’s quite exciting. But what’s involved now with training lay evangelists is of huge importance – and I think the Church Army is going to be crucial to future developments.”

He adds: “The Methodists have been very generous and imaginative. I hope we can go on broadening our base with other churches ready to work with us on this agenda – new churches as well as the historic denominations.”
They didn’t know the purpose of church

Being told that the Church was of no use to the community was a real eye-opener for Joy Adams. Colin Brown talked to her about The Terminus Café and how this expression of church has got into the heart of the community, and made a real difference.

Revd Joy Adams is a self-supporting Methodist minister who lives and works on the Low Edges Estate in Sheffield. Low Edges is a community affected by drug and alcohol abuse, anti-social behaviour and crime.

At the heart of it, is the Terminus Café, a coffee shop and meeting place run by volunteers right at the heart of the estate community. The Café offers a space for quiet, for listening, and for prayer, all held in the unconditional love of God.

It was started in 2000 after the local Methodist Church went out onto the streets to ask people what the main issues facing the community were, and what part they thought the church could play in meeting those needs.

They also said that the church could not do anything to help.

“That made me sit up,” says Joy. “People just didn’t seem to know what the purpose of church was. We did, but they didn’t.”

To help communicate this purpose, Joy took over the premises of an empty shop, and created a community centre alongside a coffee shop. Her project was supported by the four churches in the area, and offered something different to the traditional model that the people had rejected.

Immediately the idea was well received, but not by everyone, as Joy explains: “Everyone said it would be great. Even the police said it was a good idea, but were extremely anxious about where we had chosen. I think they thought we were barmy.”

I enquire why, and she replies simply, “It was one of the most renowned places on the estate for anti-social behaviour.”

Nowadays you get the feeling it is renowned for something entirely different.

After setting up the café, Joy made contact with people on the estate through a drug-user group and visiting needy families.

“Through this approach, more and more people have come to trust what the café does, and they have embraced us,” Joy tells me.

There is now a monthly service of worship and a prayer book for people to use. Bible study classes have also been formed.

“We don’t have to start a conversation about faith with the people who come in. They know who we are and what we’re here for. They want to know more about Christianity and what it might mean for them,” says Joy.

“These people invite us to share their lives and are so open about their own spirituality,” she adds.

She talks me through one example, remembering a young man stood outside the café area crying. She invited him in for a cup of coffee and he began to open up.

“His life was a mess and I asked if I could pray for him. He replied, ‘Oh, Yes please!’ So I prayed simply for him and his issues there at the table. He left, and returned a couple of days later to thank me.”

“He’d gone home and found things were different. His case is a long-term issue and it will take time, but I just think that if we make ourselves available to people, then we can say yes to God who is inviting us to be part of his amazing walk with other people.”

“I also hear that the police are amazed.”

It is simple to register a fresh expression. Just visit www.freshexpressions.org.uk and click on ‘the directory’

Re:generating church: see Page 19
As many congregations grapple with ways of being church in a changing world, we are offering Vision Days to help with the challenges that fresh expressions can encounter.

As well as offering you practical advice, these specially tailored days are designed to help you take things forward with a real sense of enthusiasm.

Alongside multi-media presentations, we will hold discussion groups, specialist workshops and worship.

Our experience has taught us that Saturday is often the best day to hold a Vision Day, and we have proof that they can be an exciting launch pad for all God wants you to do.

You will need to find a suitable venue, advertise the event, and look after some practical arrangements.

If you would like to know more about our Vision Days, please contact:

training@freshexpressions.org.uk

“For the first time I realised what it meant to be church in the village I live. We went away and thought and prayed. The result – a new congregation for children. By the end of the day it dawned on me – any church can be mission-shaped and try new things for God.”

A suggested outline for a Vision Day

1000 Arrival
1030 Introductions and endorsements from church leaders
1045 Moving on in a Mission Shaped Church
1115 Buzz groups
1140 Break
1200 Starting a fresh expression
1230 Buzz groups
1300 Lunch
1345 Workshops
Some examples of workshops held elsewhere
Fresh expressions in rural areas
Youth Congregations
Cafe churches
Older people and fresh expressions
How do we do a mission audit?
Worship in fresh expressions
Discipleship training resources
1445 Worship
1510 Sustaining a fresh expression
1540 Buzz groups
1600 Summing up
earlier this year, we were delighted to announce that a team of over 20 associate missioners have joined the Fresh Expressions team.

Working with Norman Ivison, the Director of Training and Events, they will be available to spend time with groups of churches as they try to determine God’s way forwards for them.

“I am delighted to be working with such a talented and dedicated team, and I’m confident we will rise to the challenge of encouraging this major movement of mission,” said Norman today.

training@freshexpressions.org.uk

Meet the Missioners

Kelly Betteridge (Leamington Spa)
- is an ‘all-age’ adviser. Her vision is to help the church discover what it means to be an inter-generational community.

Dave Male (Huddersfield)
- is soon to move to Cambridge to train pioneer ministers and become a diocesan fresh expressions adviser.

Ben Edson (Manchester)
- started Sanctus 1 and has a passion for those who live in the heart of the city.

Tony Hardy (Stockport)
- heads up C3, a fresh expression based in Stockport, where members are involved in arts and crafts, glass work, music, and digital photography.

Matthew Finch (Downham Market)
- is responsible for 10 churches and aims to help his congregations find new ways of being church.

Phil Bromiley (Calne)
- helped establish a new congregation in a primary school in the town, called The Open Door.

Alison Harris (Chester)
- is a Reader in her parish church and an expert in the spirituality of children.

Zoe Hart (Southampton)
- is a student pastor and helped establish the living room – an alternative church for students.

Ian Mebsby (London)
- leads Mootnet, an alternative worship community and cafe church project.

Lucy Moore (Waterlooville)
- leads Messy Church, a fresh expression for families meeting once a month during the week.

Elaine Lindridge (Gateshead)
- leads a cell church network called Mind the Gap in Gateshead.

Philip Roderick (Aylesbury)
- leads Contemplative Fire, and aims to celebrate the sacrament of the present moment in the beauty of nature.

Pete Phillips (Calver)
- is a lecturer in New Testament and specialises in what it means to be church in 21st century Britain.

Richard Priestly (Kettering)
- is an experienced church planter and specialises in training people to mentor others in mission.

Jane Whitcombe (Wells)
- is diocesan children’s adviser and wants to help people establish new ways of being church for youngsters.

Tim Sledge (Northampton)
- aims to encourage clergy and lay in the Diocese of Peterborough to try new ways of being church.

Sally Thornton (Manchester)
- has produced a documentary for BBC Local Radio on fresh expressions and is currently leading a local course on mission-inspired church.

Mandy Wright (Holsworthy, Devon)
- is a mission adviser and wants to see fresh expressions flourish in the countryside.

Terry Tennens (Colchester)
- has been a national figure in mission accompaniment training for a number of years.

Tony Pattison (Newcastle upon Tyne)
- has been involved in planting a church in a rapidly growing new town and is now involved with a fresh expression in the inner city.

Lynn Trainor (Ascot)
- has led fresh expressions, including those involved in the arts and those working with children.

For any queries on training, please email Norman Ivison, Director of Training and Events at: training@freshexpressions.org.uk
They said it...

“So, in The Da Vinci Code movie you have three alternatives:

1. Get rid of the church and Christianity completely. (Sir Leigh Teabing)
2. Keep it the same, no matter how much society is changing around us. (The fictional version of Opus Dei in the story)
3. Let it grow, evolve and develop – renew it and make it fresh. (Robert Langdon)

I agree with Robert Langdon – I want to see Christianity renewed. We are now living in a post-Christian, post-modern culture, so while the basics of Christianity remain the same, the way they are communicated and celebrated needs to change, just as it has changed many times over the last 2,000 years, and just as missionaries have had to adapt their methods as they seek to bring Christ to cultures that think in different ways to the west.”

Andrew Wooding, Special to ASSIST News Service

Does all of this mean the Church has to abandon what we are doing and all the traditions we love? Not at all!

All the research suggests that, when done well, the traditional forms of church are still helpful and meaningful for up to 40 per cent of the population.

This is a wonderful mission field. We need to continue to develop and grow the Church as it is. There are many ways to do this:

◆ through becoming a more welcoming and open community;
◆ through offering ways for all ages to learn about faith;
◆ through worship and preaching that have depth and relevance;
◆ through inviting people into life-changing discipleship and service.

From Fresh Expressions Witsnlow

“This work has been under the umbrella of the ‘Cutting Edge Ministries’ initiative. Now, in line with the national initiative, the Diocese is working with the term ‘fresh expressions’ to incorporate all the initiatives that come within it. A fresh expression of church is intended as a community or congregation which is (or has the potential to grow into) a church in its own right. It is not intended to be a half-way house or stepping-stone for someone joining a Sunday morning congregation. It is our intention that, under this heading, we will be able to gather and share the great deal of learning that arises from our collective experience.”

The Diocese of Oxford Website

“But a healthy church is a creative church. Fresh expressions of our life and ministry will burst forth to surprise and bless us.”

Bishop John Harrower
Bishop in Tasmania

“Cultural changes require God’s people to be open to fresh expressions of the gospel.”

“When there is a change in culture, that constitutes a fresh calling from the missionary God,” David Coffey said at Epicenter, an event sponsored by the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Cultural upheaval may be “the headache of the traditional church,” but it can become “the heartbeat of the fresh-expression church,” he asserted.

Baptist World Alliance President David Coffey

“Thinking about church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context is only just starting a little bit here in The Netherlands. There are some individuals; a growing group that is thinking about these things. Some people and groups are pioneering, but there is no umbrella organisation or network that these people belong to or are trained or inspired by. There are some friends of mine organising training courses about these things, but it seems that at the moment everybody is doing their own thing on their own little island and nobody knows about each other.”

Urban Expressions in the Netherlands
Answering the hard questions

The sense across the church is that we need to develop a mixed economy. But there are still lots of difficult questions to answer as we make that journey together. Here are some of them (with the beginnings of an answer). Please keep the questions coming.

What is a fresh expression? I hear the word used to describe just about anything.

It’s remarkable how the term has been applied to all kinds of ventures over the last two years. Most of them do fall within the descriptions in mission-shaped church. As a team, we’ve felt the need for a more robust definition to begin to give a more solid centre to what’s happening. Here is our latest definition. We’d love to know what you think.

A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not members of any church.

• It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarna-tional mission and making disciples.
• It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.

Is it right simply to try to reach one group in society? Isn’t the church for all ages and types of people?

The only justification for trying to connect with and serve one group in society (such as young adults or young children and their parents) is if they are not able to connect with the church as it is. One of the really encouraging things I see is that where fresh expressions begin with one group in mind, very quickly the age group begins to broaden and unexpected things happen.

Neither Anglicans nor Methodists believe that a local congregation is the basic unit of the church. We both work with models of church which say that the diocese or the circuit is the basic building block. Within a larger grouping, it makes good sense to have congregations focussing on different areas of mission.

Are fresh expressions of church in danger of taking all the difficult parts out of the gospel to suit our consumer age?

The test of this will be not where a fresh expression begins (where people are) but what grows in the lives of individuals and a community. Jesus says that we are judged by the fruit we bear. It’s vital that traditional churches and fresh expressions think very hard about discipleship. Our aim is not lots of consumer churches but mature Christians. There most encouraging sign for me is the commitment and sacrifice of the people called to begin fresh expressions of church. This is not an easy thing to do. If that cost and sacrifice are at the heart of these new communities I am hopeful that discipleship will be at the centre.

Can fresh expressions have a sacramental life?

For Anglicans and Methodists, you can’t be a church unless you have the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist. For An-glicans and Methodists, they are not negotiable. Some fresh expressions of church begin with the sacraments in place from the start. Others come to the sacraments later in the journey as part of their grown to maturity.

Delegates informed

Members of the General Synod of the Church of England, meeting this summer in York, and delegates to the 2006 Methodist Conference in Edinburgh were due to receive copies of this edition of Expressions hot off the press.

Both bodies have the topic of church growth and development at the top of their agendas and Fresh Expressions staff were keen to make sure that they went back to their dioceses and districts fully informed.

If you would like further copies of Expressions for your church, please email expressions@freshexpressions.org.uk

Get set... go!

In a presentation given to the Bristol District Synod, Revd Pete Pillinger encouraged expressions throughout the District and highlighted new ways of being church, including BMX bike courses, skateboard parks and a high street coffee shop.

Pete, Methodist Missioner to Fresh Expressions, showed clips from the Fresh Expressions DVD and urged the gathering to "support the development of planting new seeds, which will be different, but are hallmarks of the Gospel.”

“Because our society is changing quickly,” Mr Pillinger said. “The Church needs to look at different networks.”

He was quick to assure the Synod that new expressions of church need not be as adventurous as some he had already mentioned, saying: “I couldn’t even get on a BMX, never mind a skateboard!”

Messy church!

Back Page
At the time of writing, the England football team is competing in Germany for the World Cup.

All over the country we have seen houses, cars and gardens bedecked with the flag of St George.

It has also given the church a valuable way of engaging with people who do might not normally let God into their lives.

The Church of England, for example, scored a winning goal by putting prayers for David Beckham and the England team online.

These prayers were an instant hit and registered more than 4,000 hits, representing a 28% increase in traffic to the page.

South-east London shoppers also responded positively to a local church’s call to pray for Sven’s men on the opening day of England’s World Cup Campaign.

Hundreds of copies of special world cup guides and a Christian tabloid were given away to shoppers, who turned up in Eltham High Street to have a chance to see a World Cup Shirt signing and to hold a replica World Cup trophy.

The campaign, master-minded by the Church Army, gave passing shoppers the chance to post prayers to help England’s World Cup Campaign on a giant sized World Cup.

Shoppers posted prayers of support for England and, as expected, Wayne Rooney’s foot featured prominently.

A Church of England spokesman summed things up, saying “You don’t find many atheists during penalty shoot-outs.”

Heavenly help for England

Fresh Expressions Synod: ‘An inspiration’

Just recently, the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Methodist Synod met and took Fresh Expressions as its theme for the day.

Peter Pillinger gave a keynote address in which he shared the vision of Fresh Expressions, and brought Synod members up to date on developments all across the country.

A number of workshops took place through the afternoon, and Synod members met in Circuit groups to discuss how fresh expressions could be furthered in their areas.

The feedback from these sessions was astonishing, and we are happy to report that the suggestions, requests and ideas will keep us busy for months to come.

The response from these developments was also extremely positive. Brenda Shuttleworth, Synod Secretary, said “Pete Pillinger was an inspiration.”

Student party!

When one thinks of a typical student party, a number of rather weird and not-so-wonderful images are conjured up.

Kings Church in Durham is putting on a student house party with a difference and is hosting two days of fellowship, food, teaching, worship and experience of God.

Houseparty 2006 is typical of this lively and charismatic congregation at the heart of Durham which serves both students and residents.

To find out more, visit: www.kingschurchdurham.com

Prayer and a pasty!

As well as been known for great beaches, unspoilt countryside and summer holidays, Cornwall is more often than not associated with the Cornish pasty!

Wadebridge Methodist Church has brought this to life through its twice-monthly Prayer and Pasty service.

It is a short act of worship that takes place in the coffee corner building, and is followed by a pasty, tea and an informal chat.

This idea has helped the church attract a number of people who do not attend the traditional church services.

Fresh Expressions prayers

Please give thanks for:

◆ The way God has inspired and led this initiative, by his Spirit.

◆ The inspiration and support from Archbishops Rowan Williams and John Sentamu and from outgoing Methodist President, Tom Stuckey.

◆ Almost 500 Fresh expressions of church registered so far; for their diversity and relevance to each context.

◆ For those beginning to train as pioneer ministers.

Please pray for:

◆ For fresh expression leaders who don’t feel supported in their local situations.

◆ Graham Carter, the Methodist President.

◆ The ongoing work of ministry division as they work on issues to do with pioneer ministry.

◆ That many towns and cities will begin to set up Fresh Expression Vision Days over the next few months.

Rob Marshall, PR Consultant, takes a look at the media profile of Fresh Expressions on Page 18
A sea change

One of the last places you might expect to see church services is on a lifeboat... until now!

Father Danny Evans has introduced a remarkable idea in Weymouth and is now engaging with the local lifeboat crew, so that services can take place on the boats and on the harbourside.

“It is a great way for the non-churched to see church in action,” Father Danny told Expressions.

Weymouth Lifeboat station mechanic, Hefin Roberts, and his wife Emma, had their children christened aboard a lifeboat and more than 60 people gathered on the pontoon afterwards for a ceremony.

“I just thought it’s a nice thing to do, something different,” said Mr Roberts.

On the buses

Standish Methodist Church in Wigan has found a new way of reaching out to young people, and has put on a bus service with a difference.

The Rock Bus is a double decker bus kitted out with computers, XBOXes, craft, games and a plasma screen. In this entertaining environment, children and young people are worshipping, praying and praising God.

It is currently operating five nights a week and there are plans to introduce a Sunday worship session soon.

Standish Methodist Church is committed to building a worshipping congregation in which each person feels they belong and are valued, and the Rock Bus is proving to be an effective method of doing just that.

A picture speaks a thousand words...

We are currently sourcing photographic images from the many fresh expressions located across the country. These images will be used for a number of purposes; for the website, for Expressions and for other publications we produce.

Do you have any suitable, high quality images available? If you do, please send them to freshx@media33.co.uk

Embracing the Internet

In an age of mass communication, the Internet is going through a boom period and is becoming the medium of choice for today’s busy consumer.

Weblogs, RSS, Wikis and the growth in online news sites point towards a future becoming more and more dominated by the World Wide Web.

The captains of commerce today are aware of this change and are making bold predictions. Alan Rusbridger, Editor of the Guardian has said that by pretending the Internet doesn’t exist, newspapers will “fall off a cliff as the last reader dies.”

Weblogs, or ‘blogs’ as they are more widely known, are making bloggers as powerful as the editors of newspapers or reporters of the news. It is they that are controlling the messages of the media more and more.

That is why it is hugely encouraging to see Fresh Expressions gathering such an impressive Internet presence.

By simply ‘googling’ Fresh Expressions of Church, you get an astonishing 7,410,000 hits.

The official website comes at the top of the list but scrolling down, it becomes evident that Fresh Expressions has made the all-important leap into cyberspace.

Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia which has enormous online importance, features an article on Fresh Expressions, as does answers.com.

Bloggers are picking up on us too. Steve Hollinghurst writes on his blog, on earth as in heaven, about the work of God and how it is expressed and lived out in this new spiritual world and its many cultures.

The Internet shows no sign of slowing down, and is a major movement in the way we communicate. As we go about our own movement in mission, let us keep up to date with the Internet, and grow with it.
Church 4 U is connecting with people who, for whatever reason, are not keen on going to church.

For many people, they struggle to find meaning from traditional services, others might feel uncomfortable and some simply have a habit of not attending.

Ange Whiles, leader of Church 4 U, found all this out when she spoke to people in the community to determine why they did not go to church.

As well as this, she made another, more startling discovery. Despite staying away from church, these people believed in God.

"The majority of people told me that they believe in God, but did not like the formality associated with church. At the same time, they all expressed a need to feel God’s presence," said Ange.

To help them feel His presence, Ange has brought church to them, to their doorsteps in fact, through a series of informal weekly gatherings in people’s homes.

"By going to people’s homes on an informal basis we are helping them worship, but on their terms," she said.

"It has proven to be enormously popular and we can share the ups and downs of our lives, pray for one another, learn from the bible together and help each other to share our faith in the community around us."

As well as weekly gatherings, Church 4 U also meets twice a month on a Sunday evening to come together for a Celebration in the local community hall.

Here the group worships together in a variety of ways; sometimes in a lively and noisy manner, and at other times, in a more reflective, contemplative mood.

There is teaching from the Bible, an opportunity to pray and the challenge to look outwards to those who don’t yet know Jesus.

Ange is committed to keeping worship informal, so that anyone can walk in from the street and feel comfortable with the group.

"There are certain rules that we have followed since the start,” Ange tells us. “Everything is kept simple with no religious language and incomprehensible ritual. We keep it clear and easy to follow."

What certainly is easy to follow, is the success the Church 4 U is having.

One of the big things has been in the area of ‘doing’. We're a very active church in the community and we see this as a key way of working out our spirituality in effective ways.

As a group we do something each Sunday called ‘Good Neighbours’, helping people with tasks such as gardening for the elderly and sharing meals with people.

By engaging with people who are disenchanted with the traditional church we find we are attractive to them because of our outward-looking spirituality.

Prayer is also a big part of our development and a very important part of our work here is to pray – to listen to God and praying for different issues.

How do you listen to God, to one another, and to the people of Stepney as a community of faith?

One of the founding principles of what we do here is our understanding that God is here, present in this community, despite us!
To the Editor,

It is great to see all the creativity, thinking outside the box, energy and imagination in the recent Fresh Expressions DVD. Credit goes to all those involved.

Just a couple of questions that emerged in discussion with folk in the Diocese of Sheffield and during recent training visits to Anglicans in Argentina and Newcastle, Australia.

First, quite a few of these initiatives seem to be aspects of church rather than church per se. Would it be worth Anglicans, in particular, flagging up the idea of the local church as the diocese rather than the congregation?

In short a diocese is the locale of church under the oversight of the Bishop with congregations as missional communities. This would enable many Fresh Expressions initiatives to be part of the local church rather than being expected to carry all the freight of local church?

Secondly, how can we avoid the temptation of franchising models of church?

Cultivation rather than imitation might be a way forward. This involves looking at what happens in one context, learning from it and then discerning what the conditions for growth might be for different experiments in cultivating Christian community elsewhere. This goes further. The Gospel might well be described in the language of JB Metz to be sustaining of ‘the subversive memory of the crucified Messiah’. In this the church revolves around a memory of Christ’s death and it does so as a community of believers that break bread together. In what ways is Fresh Expressions attempting to do this?

I write as DDE for Southwell which is working ecumenically in mission. As the previous Director of Studies at St John’s College, Nottingham, I have taught mission modules that were broadly engaging with the idea of ‘emerging church’ and in this I worked with Mike Moynagh and also with Bob and Mary Hopkins.

Let me put four inter-connected practical theological questions – I am interested in your answers and those of practitioners:

1. There is an impression that fresh expressions are much more common in more prosperous or middle class areas – is this so? How much does this matter?
2. The mission-shaped church report is positive about the Homogenous Unit Principle (p. 108-9): is this a good idea? In fresh expressions should we be looking to continue and even reinforce the fragmentation of our society? Or can there be a process to overcome that?
3. In creating fresh expressions for niche markets are we simply buying into a consumer mentality? Or is there a deeper theological justification? Does waving the term ‘incarnation’ really do it for us?
4. What happens beyond the first generation? This applies to leaders who tend to move on more quickly, but also to church communities, as individuals and their families age: can we establish patterns of living which enable fresh expressions to become more fully all age, and to grow into a more representative body?

More questions than answers, and questions which can be asked of the whole church, but how does the fresh expressions movement answer? Does it have something distinctive to offer?

With my prayers for all you are doing, Yours in Christ,

Gavin Wakefield
Deputy Warden, Cranmer Hall
St John’s College, Durham

Revd Canon John B. Thomson
Director of Ministry
Diocese of Sheffield
Church House
95-98 Effingham Street
Rotherham S65 1BL
Email: john.thomson@sheffield.anglican.org

If you would like to contribute to the letters page, either email: contact@freshexpressions.org.uk

Or write to: Letters to the Editor, 15 Fyfield Road, Oxford, OX2 6GE
Please give your full name, title, address and email when corresponding.
One of the most upbeat and encouraging articles on the rise and rise of Fresh Expressions appeared during the Spring in The Tablet.

Victoria Coombe, a former religious affairs correspondent from the Daily Telegraph, was commissioned to write a piece for the Roman Catholic weekly on how the Church of England was finding new ways of being church. The piece was ebullient and confident: “Fresh Expressions seems to be reaching people who have fallen away from the Church and is gradually penetrating the unchurched generation that is uncomfortable with the buildings, rituals and music associated with a Sunday morning service.”

Confident Culture

Speaking to lots of different expressions around the country Victoria discovered a confident culture and unexpected ecumenism which perhaps she had not expected: “Fresh Expressions has certainly injected some enthusiasm and hope into Methodist and Anglican Churches and relaxed the boundaries between the denominations.”

Steve Croft’s monthly column in the Church of England Newspaper has helped connect the movement to the mainstream church.

He writes regularly about theological issues arising from fresh expressions but has also used the slot for pastoral and devotional pieces.

The Church Times has also reported hard news stories and the advertising pages are littered with pastoral posts most weeks which make reference to “responsibility for fresh expressions” in parishes or deaneries.

The Methodist Recorder has been in touch regularly since the last edition of Expressions. Outgoing Methodist President Tom Stuckey has been a great supporter of the ecumenical dimension and the Recorder has been true to its title - recording developments on a regular basis.

Documentary

Sally Thornton, of Studio File, produced an excellent documentary for BBC local radio stations during the Spring. Local editors and programme planners have a choice as to whether or not to use such material but it was well broadcast and well received.

BBC Religion and Ethics in Manchester are in constant touch with the Fresh Expressions media office and we have talked about many programme ideas, using both the traditional slots and one of two more radical ideas.

www.freshexpressions.org.uk continues to be visited by thousands of people of every week. There have been some technical issues to deal with but generally speaking the website is the first port of call for all those coming across fresh expressions for the first time.

Pam Macnaughton, the web editor, is encouraging links between the official site and as many dioceses and districts as possible and the Church of England website now has a prominent link.

The mainstream religious affairs correspondents of Ruth Gledhill, Jonathan Petre and Stephen Bates continue to receive lots of information about Fresh Expressions but, and it is understandable, Fresh Expressions (because it is quintessentially a good news story) is only really news when Archbishop Rowan makes reference to it. But the interest is there and it is strong.

Steady Flow

At diocesan and district communications level there is a steady flow of information going on and local newspapers report what they receive when fresh expressions take off in neighbourhoods and parishes.

So there is lots to report and many good news stories. The media office of fresh expressions has a lot to tell and inspires great interest across the board.

They said it...

“Expressions: the DVD is another useful resource that has just become available. Diane Louise Jordan introduces stories of 14 churches that are experimenting with new ways of reaching their communities...This DVD could be used in church services to show short clips to celebrate what other churches are doing and also expose our congregations to other ways of doing things.”

From the Baptist Times, May 2006 Juliet Kilpin
A n electronic guide to fresh expressions will be available in the autumn to help promote the sharing of good practice throughout Fresh Expressions.

The guide will come in the form of an online knowledge resource, and provide a honey pot around which learning networks can form.

Available in the Autumn, it is designed for a range of users; from people wanting to get started through to trainers, researchers and pioneers.

Containing four sections headed: Foundations, Starting a fresh expression, Developing and sustaining a fresh expression and Supporting fresh expressions, it will chart the process of an expression, sharing insights with the user at every stage along the way.

**MAINTAIN VISION**

"It is vital that we share the load, maintain vision and offer one another mutual support," said Michael Moynagh, Fresh Expressions Missioner.

"This online resource will help drive forward with good practices and eliminate bad ones that aren’t as effective," he added.

**BLAZE A TRAIL**

We are aware, of course, that many pioneers prefer to blaze a trail rather than follow others, but we hope to create a culture of good practice, spread through trainers, mentors and networks of various kinds.

This emerging culture will result in a range of comments accumulating on a particular issue, which others can read. The editor is then able to revise the content in light of these comments.

This follows many of the basic patterns that drive the latest Internet phenomenon of blogging.

"In allowing people associated with Fresh Expressions to lead the conversation, it helps us gather valuable knowledge," said Rob Marshall, Communications Officer for Fresh Expressions.

**OPEN FORUM**

"We won’t have a huge unedited conversation like in a blog, but we are encouraging the idea of an open forum containing insights, experience, thoughts and ideas," he added.

"This provides us with a perpetual question and answer session," said Mr Moynagh. "With knowledge created by users and an author or editor, who will turn users’ comments into a coherent whole."

Eventually, a small consortium of Christian organisations is expected to take over the ownership of this online knowledge resource, so that it becomes a gift to the wider church from Fresh Expressions.
expressions - of entertainment, a service who are both outside and inside. The Well, the launch of Sheffield’s no surprise for Kinder to become disciples. This who responded to the call began with the people of church are just that – fresh expressions of what makes church in an informal approach to church in a relaxed café environment.

A trial run of “The Well” saw the congregation almost double, and led Kinder Kalsi, to make The Well permanent.

Sunday fun factory!

Church Army Evangelist Kinder Kalsi spearheaded the launch of Sheffield’s first café church, The Well, to help connect with those who are both outside and on the edge of church life.

Based at St Bart’s Church, Langsett, it offers worship and prayer alongside an informal approach to church in a relaxed café environment.

A trial run of “The Well” saw the congregation almost double, and led Kinder Kalsi, to make The Well permanent.

already there has been a bouncy castle, puppet show, a clown and even an escapist. With a growing number of people attending, here is a case of, as has been said, “A healthy church is a growing church.”

If there were any doubt about that, the Gospel writers follow the story of Peter’s confession with the story of Peter’s big mistake. He cannot understand how the Messiah should suffer and die. This shows he still had a long way to go in following, learning and growing.

INSTITUTION

I fear that over the generations we have made the Church itself “the rock”. The institution with its rules and structures has become the foundation of Christianity.

It is my belief that the time has come for us to rediscover that the real basis for our Christian life is our discipleship, our desire to follow the way of Christ in the world, not our structures or our creedal and doctrinal statements.

DISCIPLESHIP

The Church as an institution is failing to carry people’s discipleship any more. It was summed up for me by a young woman, working for a church agency, who said to me: “I fell in love with Christ when I was a teenager and still love him, but I can’t stand the Church.”

There are thousands of people like that who have left the institutional church who would still follow, learn and grow if they could genuinely find Christ. Fresh expressions of church need to be ways of enabling people whom the institutional church has failed - in developing their discipleship and in letting people hear the call of Christ rather than the demand to believe a particular doctrine.

Following is about a way of life, not a set of beliefs. Learning is about discovery, not being told or instructed. Growing is about becoming, not having arrived. None of this requires belonging to an institution.

It may well happen within the institution, but often it may be achieved better outside it. It requires belonging to one another and it can happen wherever and however people meet together.

I know there are other signs of being church, but it all begins with discipleship.

No surprise for Kinder

Church Army Evangelist Kinder Kalsi spearheaded the launch of Sheffield’s first café church, The Well, to help connect with those who are both outside and inside. The Well, the launch of Sheffield’s no surprise for Kinder to become disciples. This who responded to the call began with the people of church are just that – fresh expressions of what makes church in an informal approach to church in a relaxed café environment.

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