Gradual, inexorable shift

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, believes that Fresh Expressions is about rediscovering what the Church is and he is personally delighted by the progress of the initiative. Rob Marshall writes:

Dr Williams told the General Synod of the Church of England this Spring that Fresh Expressions was “about that gradual, inexorable shift in the whole culture of our Church that has been going on in the last few years”. He was upbeat that this would continue to grow and to develop.

General Synod members were able to chat to members of the Fresh Expressions team who were present throughout Synod offering literature and information. Dr Steve Croft, Leader of the Fresh Expressions initiative, said that the Synod presentation had helped everyone to focus on the cumulative impact of Fresh Expressions across the Church. Dr Croft will take a similar message to this summer’s annual Methodist Conference as confidence builds.

“The point of Fresh Expressions is the point of the Church itself, that is to provide a place where Christ is set free in our midst, if one can use such an expression - and I hesitate to - to gather those that want to be in his company,” said Dr Williams. The Archbishop realises that some people still respond in different ways to the notion of Fresh Expressions and he warned against any shallowness in responding to what was clearly an increasingly important culture: “Remember that this is not a series of scattered experiments, not a series of enterprises in religious entertainment, not God forbid, a kind of dumming down of the historic faith and its requirements so that more people may get vaguely interested.”

Introducing the latest news from Fresh Expressions, Dr Williams commended the initiative: “You are going to read and hear something quite new about the Church, and being the Church of England, not about something marginal, something eccentric, but about the very life blood of who we are and what we are.”

See Page 5 for the full text
New life in Downham Market
by Emma Garrow

An ordained Pioneer Minister

Expressions caught up with Ian Biscoe, training for ordination as a Pioneer Minister next year.

What does pioneer ministry mean to you?

It is my response to a challenge I believe God set me about five years ago.

From my first days as a Christian, being involved in the local church has been a struggle. I read the New Testament, learning about the Early Church, and imagining how that might be today. I often found my experience of church fell short of my hopes.

I was then offered the chance to establish a Christian community in a new housing development. I was shocked to have an opportunity to put my ministry where my mouth was. That is what does pioneer ministry mean to me.

Why ordained pioneer ministry when you’re already a Church Army officer?

The training provided by Church Army was excellent and prepared me well as a pioneer evangelist. With my wife Erika and our four children we planted a fresh expression of church at Heyford Park.

However, this new Christian community became a maturing expression of church. It needed not just an evangelist but also someone skilled at discipling. As these new Christians encountered Christ they also wanted to be baptised, to be married in fresh-expressions-style weddings and to make a formal confession. And we needed to relate to other local churches. Much of this fell outside my understanding and ministry as an evangelist.

Should I move on? Should someone with different gifts join the team? During a process of exploration I gradually sensed God calling me to take on some of these new challenges. With the support of my local team Rector and Bishop I went for selection and training as an ordained pioneer minister.

What is the most exciting thing in Heyford Park?

Being involved in mentoring and supporting the next generation of pioneer ministers.

What are your hopes for your future pioneer ministry?

My hope for Heyford Park is that it becomes a church that is:

- an integral part of church life in this area;
- giving and receiving ideas while working out with others the future shape of church life here;
- staying mission shaped and making disciples;
- creating sustainable and appropriate patterns of worship.

The hope for my own ministry is that I am able to discern God’s call and have the courage and strength to do it.

What are you reading at the moment?

Mission-shaped and rural by Sally Gaze.
Making way for lay pioneers

The Church of England House of Bishops agreed a new set of guidelines on encouraging lay pioneer ministry at their meeting in January.

The guidelines are in parallel with those for ordained pioneer ministry, which were put in place a year ago. They can be downloaded from the fresh expressions website (www.freshexpressions.org.uk/training/guidelines).

“The guidelines are something of a landmark,” said Steven Croft, part of the group that helped to draft them. “They encourage every diocese to develop, resource and encourage lay pioneers in many different terms to begin and sustain fresh expressions of church.”

The guidelines contain guidance on what kind of people are called to these ministries and how to recognise their gifts; on what kind of training is appropriate and how these ministries can be effectively supported. The guidelines also affirm and commend the ministry of Church Army Evangelists: an existing nationally recognised category for lay pioneer ministry. For more details go to www.churcharmy.org.uk.

Book Competition

Win a complete set of all six books (reviewed on page 10) in our Expressions Competition:

How many copies of the report Mission-shaped Church had been sold by 31 December, 2006?

Email your response by 31 March to: contact@freshexpressions.org.uk.

In the event of a tie, the winner will be selected by lot. Details of the winner will be published on the fresh expressions website.

Café Eucharist

Emma Garrow looks at St Thomas’s Groombridge

St Thomas the Apostle’s in the village of Groombridge on the Sussex/Kent border would describe itself as “a eucharistic parish”, says parish priest, Tony Fiddian-Green. As well as weekly services of Holy Communion, Café Eucharist and Brunch Church happen quarterly, Tony is also involved in a termly Eucharist in the village school.

Café Eucharist

“We are trying to establish a celebration of the Lord’s Resurrection every time we meet to break bread,” says Tony. Café Eucharist is a way of doing this that “brings an informality”.

“It’s a fellowship breakfast really with the breaking of bread in the middle,” explains Tony. Those who are not confirmed are able to take a piece of “blessed bread” as in the Orthodox tradition, a practice that makes it easier for regular churchgoers to invite their neighbours to this quarterly replacement of the usual main Sunday service.

Church Eucharist

Non-churchgoers come to these services, held in the church hall, as well as the usual congregation of up to 100, which means as many as 130 people can be present. Tables for eight are laid with cloths and flowers for a simple breakfast of croissants and rolls. The service includes a two-minute talk, the blessing of the other bread and the words of a Eucharistic Prayer. The bread and wine are passed round the tables from person to person.

“The teaching is very simple,” says Tony. “When we talked on the resurrection appearance by the lakeside, we explained that we were also sharing breakfast, and that Jesus is here with us now.”

Brunch Church

Once a quarter, halfway between each Café Church, St Thomas’s stays open after parish mass for Brunch Church.

Brunch Church began as a result of Tony’s contact with a family of musicians living in the village. Though they were not regular churchgoers, he asked them if they would lead a service of music and conversation.

“I attend all the meetings and the event but do not lead anything,” says Tony. “They provide music, reading, a forum and cook the food. Different people come from those who normally go to church, because the group who lead it draw on their own network.”

Around 60 people come to the 35-minute service each time, which, though not a Eucharist, is followed by brunch.

School Eucharist

Tony, who also works as a schools inspector, holds a Eucharist in St Thomas’s village school every term. Tony prepares the children with three preceding classes, which trace the practice of eucharistic fellowship back to the Exodus through to the Upper Room.

“Every time we do it we recapture the stories and they do remember,” he says of the children. However, not all the school children are confirmed.

“Having a school Eucharist would be bewildering for pupils who learn about it then can’t receive,” Tony says.

At each service the children are involved with the prayers, candles, music, readings and the offering, which includes a basket of cracker biscuits or Matzos bread, chosen because of the biblical reference to “thin bread”. Those who are confirmed receive, those who are not leave with a portion of blessed bread and a carton of juice.

St Thomas’s is working out, as Tony says, how to “get together, remember Jesus and break bread” whilst making sure there is room at the table for everyone.
A wisdom greater than Jacob’s

Jealousy and rivalry often break out in families. Siblings compete for attention, affection and resources. Who is the best? Who is the favourite?

In the Church of England and the Methodist Church at the present time, the vision of the mixed economy is becoming a reality. Many different fresh expressions of church are flourishing at local level. Policies and practices are shifting to create room for these new ventures to begin and to grow.

These are really good developments but they present new challenges.

How will fresh expressions of church live together with more established congregations within this mixed economy? Will the traditional churches really give space to fresh expressions and allow them to grow? Or will they look down on their younger sisters and dismiss them as not the real thing? Will fresh expressions of church continue to treat traditional congregations with respect and honour their vital contribution to mission? Or will they become arrogant as they become more established and despise their older sisters in the family?

I heard Peter Nicol speak recently of this danger with great wisdom. Peter has worked within the Church of Scotland for a number of years on mission. He drew my attention to the story of Joseph and his brothers.

It’s a story of family rivalry with a disastrous outcome even though God used it for good. Joseph is sold as a slave; his father thinks him murdered; his brothers live with a terrible secret.

Who is to blame? Clearly the older brothers. They feel threatened and rejected. They cannot love their younger brother through the arrogance of adolescence to the wisdom of maturity. Clearly Joseph himself. He uses his own particular gifts from God to exalt himself over the rest of the family and provoke them to jealousy. And clearly Jacob. He shows particular favour to one of his sons at the expense of the others.

Fresh expressions of church need space and respect and room to grow. But they should not be singled out as an ideal form of church or somehow better than traditional congregations. Every form of church falls short of the ideal. They should beware the arrogance of Joseph. Those whose calling is to traditional congregations need to beware the jealousy that afflicted his brothers. They need to be generous and sometimes patient. And those whose calling is to lead and guide this mixed economy will need a wisdom greater than Jacob’s to nourish each part of this complex family and guide its life in mission.

In many places we have made a good beginning. We need now humility, sanity and wisdom to see that good things mature to fulfil its full potential.

Steven Croft

...every form of church falls short of the ideal...

...the online guide...

Coming soon is The Online Guide to Fresh Ex-pressions. It will provide practical help for people of all kinds involved with developing and supporting fresh expres-sions of church.

It will contain how to advice, stories that illustrate good practice, and space for users to tell their own stories and share their experiences. The Guide will be continuously modified in response to users’ comments, so that it increasingly becomes a users’ guide to good practice. It will be visually attractive with photos and video clips.

The Guide will include portals – for instance, on evangelism and discipleship – that will describe published material, contain links to it and illustrate how it has been used by fresh expressions. Toolkits will encourage fresh expressions to develop their own material and share it with others.

The Guide will start with five sections:

- foundations
- preparing for a fresh expression
- developing fresh expressions
- sustaining fresh expressions
- supporting fresh expressions

It is hoped that users will work together to create further sections on topics such as rural fresh expressions and children’s fresh expressions.

Learning networks will be central to how the Guide develops. We pray that the Guide will become a honey-pot around which practitioners will gather online (and sometimes face-2-face) to ask questions and share what they have learnt.

The Foundations section of the Guide should be ready by around Easter, and Preparing for a fresh expression by the summer. Work has already begun on further sections.

Mike Moynagh

Team develops

The Fresh Expressions team has grown in recent months, reflecting the expanding task.

Pete and Kath Atkin are experienced church planters and were involved in the creation of the training programme that has evolved into the Mission Shaped Leadership course.

They have joined the team part-time to help roll out this Fresh Expressions course across the country.

Andrew Wooding is the newest recruit. With a background in writing and editing for both web and print, he is coordinating the online guide – which is being launched this year. Andrew is a Church Army Officer.

Ben Clymo is the Team Administrator. In his spare time he is part of the leadership team for a fresh expression of church for young people in his home village. He says, “Having been involved first-hand in the struggles, challenges and exhilaration of catching hold of God’s vision locally, it’s good to be helping to enable others to do the same across the country.”

Rachel Matthews is Administrator for the Vision Days. She also works as a Youth Worker. She says of her new role, “I am excited and challenged by what God is asking us to do and am encouraged by the way people are responding. We would love to see as many Vision Days as possible being run around the country.”

Bob Franklin is seconded to the Fresh Expressions team one day a week from the Congregational Federation. Originally from New Zealand, Bob is in the UK to coordinate the Federation’s exploration of new forms of church.

George Lings
Gradual, inexorable shift

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams spoke about Fresh Expressions being a central part of the Anglican Church ‘to provide a place where Christ is set free in our midst’, when he introduced a presentation on Fresh Expressions at General Synod.

The full text of the Archbishop’s introduction follows:

You’ll recall that at the inauguration of this new Synod I suggested that Synod should remind itself annually about what is happening, by some sort of report, or better some sort of celebratory event. Well, I hope it’s a sufficiently celebratory event that we’ve moved on from the last business to this one, but you are certainly going to have a report on where Fresh Expressions is.

To be called back during our Synodical procedures to some recollection as to why we’re here in the first place is, I think, essential; it happens in our worship, it happens in a lot of our conversations, and of course it weaves itself in and out of a great deal of our business, one way or another.

But it is important to set aside time just to hear, to learn, and to give to give thanks for what is happening.

Essentially the Fresh Expressions programme is not simply about a kind of scattered set of experiments: it’s about that gradual, but I think inexorable shift, in the whole culture of our church that has been going on in the last few years, and which will undoubtedly continue to grow and develop.

And that shift in culture is about the way in which discovering new expressions of the Church’s life has now, rather paradoxically, become part of the blood stream of the traditional, mainstream churches’ life.

To be, so to speak, an ordinary average Anglican, to be an ordinary average Anglican diocese, to be an ordinary average Anglican bishop, now involves you in thinking about, pouring out, and involving yourself in, some quite extraordinary and, on the face of it, sometimes rather un Anglican bits of new life.

We’re rediscovering something about what the Church is, as well as what the Church of England is; rediscovering, to use a favourite metaphor of mine, that the Church is something that happens before it’s something that is institutionally organised. It happens when the Good News summons, assembles, people around Jesus Christ.

Remember that that is what we’re thinking of, not a series of scattered experiments, not a series of enterprises in religious entertainment, not, God forbid, a kind of dumbing down of the historic faith and its requirements so that more people may get vaguely interested.

The point of Fresh Expressions is the point of the Church itself, that is to provide a place where Christ is set free in our midst, if one can use such an expression - and I hesitate to - to gather those who want to be in his company. That freedom is always there for our Lord, we can simply try and, as has often been said, join in and not get in the way.

One in two parishes supports a fresh expression of church

Half of all Church of England parishes are engaged, or are planning to engage, in a fresh expression of church. This is the encouraging news emerging from parishes and churches as they completed their annual parochial returns early in 2006. A fresh expression of church was here defined in 2006. A fresh expression of church.

The returns showed that 39% parishes and churches had, since 2000, begun a fresh expression of church involving a new and regular activity. Meanwhile, 33% support activities that involve people who do not currently attend church or who do so only occasionally. In eleven dioceses, mostly urban but across both the north and south of the country, a half or more of parishes have begun such a fresh expression of church.

More and more churches are catching the vision of new forms of church in their neighbourhood. The results provide reliable information. Consequently more analysis is planned over the coming weeks – so watch out for further information.

Revd Lynda Barley
Head of Research & Statistics, Archbishops’ Council

Stop Press

There are now over 630 fresh expressions of church registered on the website directory. If you know of any that have not been registered, please encourage them to do so, to help us collect information and inspire others to try something new.

Pam Macnaughton - website editor

More and more churches are catching the vision of new forms of church in their neighbourhood.
Key elements

“it's very clear to me now that there is a rising momentum around the development of fresh expressions of church within a mixed economy.”

Guidelines for encouraging lay pioneer ministry at every level were agreed by the House of Bishops in January this year and can be downloaded from our website (www.freshexpressions.org.uk/training/gpm).

The Dioceses, Mission and Pastoral Measure comes to Synod in February. A major part of that measure is about the creation of a new way of giving legal recognition to fresh expressions of church through a device called a Bishops’ Mission Order.

Those are all Church of England developments. Can you say a little about what’s happening in Methodism?

The cause of fresh expressions of church within a mixed economy has been a major part of the focus of the last two Presidents of Conference and is likely to be central to Martyn Atkins’ leadership of the Connexion. The Methodist Church never formally owned Mission-shaped Church – although Graham Horsley was a key member of the working party that produced it.

That has meant it simply hasn’t had a series of recommendations to put into practice. I sense that in Methodism significant change is happening but it’s largely coming from what is happening in circuits. In the Church of England we are seeing change that is both bottom up and top down.

And what difference is Fresh Expressions making?

We’re trying to work locally, nationally and in dioceses and districts. At the moment my concern is that we develop fresh expressions more widely. That’s why we are involved in producing a new DVD and developing vision days. We also need to develop skills – hence the new six week course for local churches and the one year mission shaped ministry programme. But we also need to push our thinking more deeply about more difficult issues: that’s why we are arranging the Hard Questions Tour: a series of days for key leaders across the country.

1. Theology and spirituality appropriate to the task.
2. Leadership and ministry for this vision.
3. Building a mixed economy vision everywhere.
5. Some funded posts so the whole church can learn.
6. A mission fund to develop new initiatives.
7. Developing training for ordained and lay teams.

So what, in summary, is your half way report to the churches?

I think I want to shout Hallelujah for all that’s happening, especially at local level. There are just so many inspiring stories of faith and growth and new ventures. I think I also want to say to all the churches at every level: don’t stop now! There is so much more that can be done if we follow through properly and are able to build in every place sustainable fresh expressions of church for those who are beyond our congregations.
Avoid the temptations of nostalgia

by Graham Carter
President of the Methodist Conference

What an indictment this is on the quality of our church communities, but what an opportunity it seems to signal in terms of sharing faith beyond the traditional boundaries of church life.

How do you express the way of Christ in the workplace or in your local community? How do you live with the compromises necessary to living in the messy complex world we have? How do you maintain your commitment to Christ? As we develop fresh expressions of church, supporting discipleship ought to be a key element of the process.

The covenant becomes the agenda for each meeting as the members are accountable to each other for their commitment to Christ. An advantage of this process is that the members themselves decide together what particular commitments are appropriate for them in their discipleship.

This allows both a flexibility and a relevance, which are more likely to make the practice of their discipleship effective.

I believe that this kind of activity is needed among the fresh expressions of church to help ensure accountability and commitment in a way that is often not present in traditional church.

The attendance

The Methodist Church

have been told on at least three separate occasions during my journeying around Britain as President of the Methodist Conference that people find it easier to talk about God and faith to people outside the Church than to those inside.

What an indictment this is on the quality of our church communities, but what an opportunity it seems to signal in terms of sharing faith beyond the traditional boundaries of church life.

Part of my aim this year has been to highlight the need for churches to be more supportive of people in their discipleship. We need to develop ways of giving people support for working out their discipleship in their daily life.

How do you express the way of Christ in the workplace or in your local community? How do you live with the compromises necessary to living in the messy complex world we have? How do you maintain your commitment to Christ? As we develop fresh expressions of church, supporting discipleship ought to be a key element of the process.

For most of the time every evening one is together. Worship can include, for example, playing a game together or learning a dance.

“When we discuss the Bible, the children do their separate work but then we come together for prayers,” says Kate.

“Two of our children have learning difficulties and they are fully engaged in all we do – something that is more difficult in the more formal service.

Although the afternoons follow a similar pattern, there is a lot of room for flexibility. In the summer we have picnics together and we will have a party for Christmas.

“We have the support of our clergy but there is no real hierarchy within the group. We need to keep listening to God, all together, to learn what we might do next.”

Further details on page 13

Vision Days

Vision Days for fresh expressions are proving hugely popular. One planned for Wolverhampton on January 20 was sold out by the start of December. Details of new ones go up on the website as soon as they are confirmed. Look out for one near you – or contact us to plan one in your area.

Further details on page 13

Life in the East End

St Paul’s Church, East Ham, in London’s East End, has long been considered a church that was welcoming to all. But two members of the congregation, Fred and Kate Apps, thought more could be done so they began a home group that was to meet on Sunday afternoons.

They wanted the home group to provide for families all together. The initial interest was so great, they realised the group would be too big for a home so they took the church for a couple of hours instead. It has become a recognised opportunity for experimental and creative worship at St Paul’s.

Although the group was geared for families, soon others began to join too. Kate says, “The attendance for some is rather ad-hoc, but the nature of the group is such that people feel they can come and go as they please. We aim for a relaxed atmosphere. People are encouraged to take responsibility for some part of the afternoon but there is no pressure.”

For most of the time everyone is together. Worship can include, for example, playing a game together or learning a dance.

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Further details on page 13
Lynda Barley reports on page five the results of the parish returns on fresh expressions. Here, Steven Croft considers the implications of the statistics.

Interpreting the signs

On the surface at least this is really good news for mission across the Church of England and these are very high figures.

What kind of definition were the answers based on? The notes that accompanied the parish return research gave these brief guidelines.

♦ A fresh expression of church is a new and/or different way of being church in and for our changing culture.

♦ A fresh expression of church is not normally seen just as an additional activity or simply a stepping stone for people to Sunday services, but as something with the potential to be or become church for those who take part.

It's important to measure these results against this brief description of a fresh expression (the best we had at the time), rather than the more detailed and robust definition that Fresh Expressions published in May, 2006 following extensive discussions with our partner mission agencies and those working across the field (see page nine).

There are two other ways that these results need to be qualified. Many fresh expressions of church are collaborations between several churches. The figures therefore relate to the proportion of parishes sharing in supporting a fresh expression rather than the number of actual fresh expressions of church.

The second is the point we have reached in the journey of the term fresh expressions of church. It was a new phrase just three years ago. On the first part of its journey, no-one was quite sure what it meant and how to use it. Since then the term has become very widely used to cover a range of mission activities. In some instances those completing the parish returns may not have been exactly sure what it meant and may have given a still broader interpretation.

The use of the term will, no doubt, continue to evolve. Some people argue that we should restrict it to the very major projects such as a new network church in a city centre or a church plant in a new housing area.

I am in favour of a clear, centred definition of what we mean by a fresh expression of church. But I am also very much in favour of using the term to describe the many small initiatives growing at parish level as well as the larger ones across a deanery or diocese. We are talking about the same kind of venture: the attempt to go to where people are, listen carefully to the context and through service form new communities of faith that have the potential to grow into church in their own right.

Paul Bayes speaks helpfully of flags and flowers: every diocese will need its flagship projects in this area that signal its commitment to fresh expressions of church and where it deploys some of its best pioneers. But we also need thousands of flowers to bloom everywhere as the whole church catches a vision for this kind of mission and explores what it means.

So we should interpret the new statistics with care, as always. There is still a long way to go. Training and reflection and hard thinking are needed. But we should also, I think, give thanks that the language of mission and fresh expressions of church is being owned across a wide spectrum and proportion of parishes, that so many good new initiatives have begun and that so many parishes are doing so many good things to make the love of Christ known to those beyond our current congregations.
So many fresh expressions do you have? has become both a fashionable and feared question when bishops meet each other.

Bishops, like most people, want to do well, and most feel a pressure to keep up with what seems to be the latest ‘thing’. There can be little doubt that Fresh Expressions are very much one of those things!

Bishops, more than most people, in the Church also know the fragility and the failures of our institutional life.

So aside from all the difficult questions about funding new initiatives, how do we ensure that this new and welcome movement really digs deep and effects a change, so that in ten years’ time not only the Church feels ‘fresh’ but our society does too?

Here are a few tentative suggestions.

the life of Christ

Let’s turn first to the Scriptures, and in particular the passages that describe the life of the Lord with his disciples from what we call Maundy Thursday until Ascension Day.

These give us all we really need to revitalise the Church, and deliver us from the rather thin idea that a tea party or coffee bar with a few leaflets, occasional Bible reading and a chorus is really a ‘fresh expression of church’. It can certainly be an excellent strategy to introduce people to Christ-anity, but it is not, by scriptural standards, the Church.

In the Scriptures I have mentioned we find Jesus gently but purposefully introducing the disciples into the Spirit-infused ways in which they will continue to experience him after he leaves them ‘until he comes again’. He gives them an experience, as it were, of the tangible ways he will be with them ‘always until the end of time’. I urge you to study these texts, because in them we can discover ‘fresh expressions of Christ’.

To my mind a fresh expression of Christ is inevitably going to be more interesting and effective than a fresh expression of church. To my mind a fresh expression of Christ is inevitably going to be more interesting and effective than a fresh expression of church. The latter has the danger of suggesting institutional renewal rather than personal renewal (which of course is, or should always be, corporate).

I am not a historian but I do know that the great times of revival in church history have come about when a group of people, sometimes starting with one, rediscover Christ and what it really means to live with him. This revival often happened despite the institution rather than through it, though interestingly these holy revivalists always continued to love and revere the distracted Church that was often slow to catch up.

So what do the passages suggest are the ‘fresh expressions’ of Jesus that we must take with us as we go, open-hearted, to the world?

foot washing

First is foot washing.

As we wash each other’s feet and the feet of our local communities in acts of service, we discover Christ. We need to serve in order to experience Christ.

Sometimes I ask PCCs, ‘What are you doing in this local community for which you get nothing in return?’ Sometimes they scratch around for an answer. They do not have the joy of seeing Christ in the faces of the poor, the prisoner, the lonely, or the hungry.

Christ in Scripture

Second, surely the Emmaus story, though in danger of being over talked about, still has so much yet to be discovered in it. Jesus shows the two that he can be found in Scripture, that he is, as it were, alive in Scripture and its unfolding.

breaking bread

Then there is the breaking of bread. Never have I had more moments of Anglican depression than when I hear good people say that the ‘Eucharist puts people off’. The way we do it might put people off, but how can ‘that which proclaims the Lord until he comes’ exclude? How can we hold back from people that feeding in which they ‘knew him’?

If I had time I’d take you to that mountainside in John 6. The food that Jesus gives is unlike any other. Cakes and sandwiches turn into you, but when you feed on the Eucharist with faith, you become like him.

To my mind the effectiveness of this ‘Fresh Expressions’ movement will in a large measure rest on whether we can recover our trust in the Eucharist and loosen up in the ways we present it. Eating is always a bit messy!

And the wonderful thing about the Eucharist is that everybody gets the same thing. There is nothing better on offer than bread and wine.

baptism

And of course Jesus wanted us to baptise, not to join the institution, but to provide a means by which people could die and rise with him. One of the first steps in fresh expressions of church is the installation of immersion fonts!

wounds

Then there are the wounds. Thomas had a fresh experience of Jesus as he touched his wounds. I am personally intrigued as I reflect about what this might say to us about how we are to live our life as a Church. Dare we put ourselves into the glorious wounds of Christ? We may find our names written there.

loving

And of course there is the loving of one another that is a means by which we experience him. The love of the brethren is the essence of life in the Church, it is the eucharist, it is the aroma that the world needs. But it is the aroma of sacrifice and does not come without cost and humility.

Study these texts. These are the fresh expressions that can change us, and if even then the world does not respond, we will have been found faithful and go to heaven to discover the One we have experienced already.

How do you define a fresh expression of church?

The precise definition has evolved over time. The term was coined by the Mission-shaped Church Report. It was taken from the promise made by Anglican clergy every time they take up a new post: ‘to proclaim the gospel afresh in each generation’.

So, our current definition is a fresh expression 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 listing, 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, and for its cultural context.

The fresh expressions registered on the directory range from those well on the way to becoming mature expressions of church to those just starting out. It’s risky to try something new, and not all experiments succeed, but many of the new ventures are putting down roots and becoming established.
Chillin’ out in the Friday Fridge
by Neil Pugmire

The two teenage girls on their way home after a night out only want to borrow 50 pence to ring home. They walk into the church at 11.30pm to discover a café serving bacon sandwiches and coffee, a quiet room to chill out, multi-sensory installations to help them pray — and people willing to chat. “Wow!”, says one of the girls. “It’s so cool.” Three hours later, they’re still there.

This is the Friday Fridge at St Jude’s in Southsea. It’s a chance for people to pop into church and make friends, engage their spirituality or spend some time in quiet on their way home from nearby pubs and clubs. It’s open from 10.30pm each Friday night.

The café-style chairs and sofas, flat-screen TV, atmospheric lighting and constant stream of coffee make the café zone an inviting place. Visitors are amazed to discover they don’t have to pay. Many are grateful the church is open at a time convenient for them. Move into the quiet zone, and there is ambient music playing, comfy cushions to sit on and the chance to write down things they’d like the congregation to pray for. Some light a candle in memory of a friend who is ill or who has died.

And in the encounter zone, this week’s theme is “feast”. DVDs are projected onto the walls, there’s a picnic hamper overflowing with crusty bread and sweets are dangling from the walls. Guests are encouraged to dip strawberries and marshmallows into a chocolate fountain, rearrange magnetic words to form prayers and draw pictures expressing how they feel.

The idea is to draw on the rich tradition of Christian spirituality to provide hands-on prayer stations where visitors can experience God.

The original vision came from a group interested in establishing a fresh expression of church within St Jude’s. Inspired by the Night-shift project in Hereford and Sanctus 1 in Manchester, they wanted to combine outreach with forms of worship that would engage contemporary spirituality.

They wanted to reach people of all ages interested in spiritual things, but who were unlikely to come to Sunday services or who’d never really experienced church before.

The curate, Revd Mark Rodel, said: “The point about the Friday Fridge is that for many people, it will be church.

Some light a candle in memory of a friend who is ill or who has died.

The point about the Friday Fridge is that for many people, it will be church.

It’s excellent, practical, easy to read and encouraging. Messy Church itself is featured on the first Expressions DVD. Steven Croft says in his foreword: “I hope it leads to lots of mess and many different forms of church”.

For those needing a short, lively and practical introduction to different aspects of being mission shaped:

The mission-shaped series from Church House Publishing.

A superb collection of resources written by people who really know their stuff. Sally Gaze has produced one of the best books on rural ministry in mission-shaped and rural growing churches in the countryside. Sue Hope writes at depth on mission-shaped spirituality; the transforming power of mission. Paul Bayes, Tim Stedge, John Holbrook, Mark Rylands and Martin Steely have all contributed to mission-shaped parish: traditional church in a changing world. Margaret Withers writes with passion and with loads of practical ideas in mission-shaped children: moving towards a child-centred church.

To win a copy of each of these books, see our competition on page 3.
Reaching rural parts

It’s many years since every country estate had its own church. Now, Malshanger House, just West of Basingstoke, has opened the doors of its clubhouse for the Warham Trust, an Anglican fresh expression of church in rural England.

“The idea has been that we should be a fully-fledged church in our own right, at the same time as many of our people belonging to their local churches,” explains Peter Irwin-Clark, the vicar of the Warham Trust. “For the vast majority of our 100 or so core members we are their first church, and about one-third of those don’t belong to any church at all.

Beyond that inner circle we have contact with another 200 or so who are infrequent attendees at our worship-services but may come to one of our small groups or a midweek teaching meeting.”

Earlier in the autumn some of the members were confirmed by the Bishop of Basingstoke, reinforcing the clear connection with the established church.

On Sundays, Warham holds Liquid Church – everyone worships together for much of the service, but, in the middle, dispense across the estate to different sessions offering a variety of topics and styles (including a non-verbal Creative Workshop).

On Wednesday evenings, a daughter congregation meets in Padworth, where 40 to 50 people come together for worship and small groups. The more-than-one-centre element is part of what makes Warham different.

This approach to Sunday worship seems to be attractive to all ages. The clubhouse is set out in café-style and provides easy access for people in wheelchairs. This (with the excellent bacon-butties!) encourages a relaxed atmosphere, and it is less disruptive if, for example, a young child wants to walk around.

It is natural for people to stay after the service because the church is set out so informally – and in such a beautiful setting no one is in a hurry to leave anyway.

Where the people are

Being a Church of England school, believes youth officer Susie Mapledorum, “has to mean more than just having a chapel and saying grace at the end of the day”.

Susie is youth officer to St Michael’s High School, Chorley, one of four appointed to Church of England high schools in Blackburn Diocese.

Susie’s day begins with breakfast and chat with pupils. Worship and assemblies happen daily, worship providing an opportunity to reflect at the start of the day without the notices and discipline of an assembly. Breaks and sometimes are used to meet with pupils and staff. Informal clubs and activities take place throughout the week.

“I think the work here at St Michael’s is distinctive church,” says Susie, who draws a comparison with the description of the Church in Acts. “They were meeting together, worshipping together, caring for each other. All those things can happen in a church building, why can’t they happen in a school?”

An important aspect of Susie’s work is getting pupils involved in running worship and activities.

“In my experience, if the young people are running it, it works better because they know what their peers want,” she says. “The hallmarks of church in this school are utterly rooted in relationship. Being part of a community is vital for anybody but key for young people. We haven’t by any stretch of the imagination got it in the bag, but we are church because we meet those criteria, I believe.”

Susie’s appointment is part of a five-year experiment on the part of the diocese, which aims to see each of the diocese’s ten high schools gain its own youth officer. This development, explains Diocesan Director of Education, Peter Ballard, is driven by a view of “school as church community.”

“Schools are ideally placed to be worshipping communities.”

Peter Ballard hopes that at the end of the five-year term the schools will consider youth officers to be so essential that, together with their local churches, they will find ways to fund these appointments independently of the diocese.

“We constantly have to re-examine what we do and what we are about in new ways of being church,” he says. “This is about young people being helped along on their Christian journey.”

Expressions the DVD:
changing church in every place

Expressions the DVD sold 3000 copies and has already made an impact in churches up and down the country.

This second DVD also has five discussion starters featuring some national church leaders (such as the Methodist President, the Archbishops’ Missioner, George Lings, the Bishop of Reading, Sara Savage, Anne Maclaurnin, and Jonny Baker) and downloadable notes will be available from the Fresh Expressions website.

Read stories here of two of the fresh expressions featured on the DVD, then go to www.freshexpressions.org.uk/dvd to find out the latest news, watch a clip, and order the DVD from Church House Backshop.
Focus on Bristol

Major life changes
by Paul Roberts

Bristol was a pioneering alt. worship city in the 90s, but by 2002 its Third Sunday Service /Resonance project had shrunk to a low-key weekly Compline service.

However, in 2004, interest was stirred again by a one-off large East service organised by a handful of Resonance veterans plus newcomers. Over many months, the glowing embers of the old weekly meeting flickered into flame. By 2005, a loose and nameless core group of around 20 was meeting regularly, debating what to do with its own momentum.

Since then, the group has established a name: Foundation. The large services continue to draw in new people every three months, while the Sunday night meetings are the group’s heartbeat.

Around 30 people attend any permutation of cocoa, Compline and pub. The content of Compline is chosen by the week’s leader: either based on the group’s Night Service liturgy inherited from Resonance, or ‘off pist’ improvisation.

There are also monthly meals, study groups, theological talks and trips away. The main age group is 20s/30s, but Foundation also includes students and pensioners. There is a website and a busy community email list.

As numbers on the latter push towards 60, the establishment of some structures has become a priority. Foundation has recently registered as a charity.

Sadly, a good many fall by the wayside.

“We find we’re picking up people who have either left active church membership some years ago, or who were about to do so. This brings its own challenges. Addressing the many new questions and revisiting key Christian themes is important, yet we don’t want to become an exclusive therapeutic community.”

“We don’t want to become an exclusive therapeutic community.”

And while Foundation offers much spiritual and intellectual substance, it peddles no single party line. Those of evangelical and liberal impulses coexist harmoniously. The glue is friendship, a most attractive thing to those looking in; and the common wish to worship creatively and do things a little differently.

foundatiobristol.org

The number of people visiting the Fresh Expressions’ website continues to rise. The site is increasingly becoming the first port of call for people wanting to find out more about the initiative. But why bother?

Find out the latest details of many of the developments reported in this newspaper, such as the Vision Days, Mission Shaped ministry course and the Hard Questions tour.

Sign up for our monthly ebulletin. It will keep you right up to date with developments and the new material on the site.

Be inspired, too, by new stories every month of the risks people are taking in response to God’s call to try new things. Keep up with frequent breaking news about the whole project.

Finally, once you have registered on the site, if you lead a fresh expression, please add the details to our directory. Help us to gather reliable information.
Dreams & Visions
Vision Days explored by Andrew Roberts

When the Spirit moves, God’s people are renewed in vision and purpose. In these days, when God is reshaping his Church, the Fresh Expressions team is working with Christians across the country to help birth and earth new dreams and visions through a series of Vision Days. These events are proving to be very fruitful.

Vision Days are fresh expressions, experiences in themselves. Venues are laid out in café style, prayer and worship are integral and varied, and there is a high level of participation and interaction.

By the end of the day, those attending are equipped to take further their visions for what God can do through fresh expressions of church. Learning is facilitated by the Fresh Expressions team and enhanced by the sharing of local stories and reflections.

In Bolton over 200 Christians from six denominations met to learn about new ways of being church.

Speaking at the day, Methodist District Chair, David King, said he wanted to see local Christians beginning to find new ways of reaching out, as they constantly relied on the Holy Spirit.

Anglican Bishop David Gillett said he looked forward to the day when ecumenical teams of Christians were forming fresh expressions throughout the area – and especially in the clubbing centre of Bolton.

One curate had a personal vision confirmed. She had been wondering about starting a fresh expression for women working on weight loss, and its attendant issues of self-worth. She happened to sit next to a Christian GP in the parish to which she is shortly moving. “That idea and you are an answer to our prayers,” she was told.

Meanwhile in Winchester 50 people from various churches gathered in the recently refurbished St John’s Church. This ancient centre of worship and mission was alive with prayer, conversation and reflection as local Christians dreamed their dreams and explored their visions.

Fresh expressions being considered included an after school club, a church in a pub and the development of ideas for a large council estate next door. A small group of young adults have moved into a ‘discipleship house’ on the estate. The Vision Day helped them to move their thinking forward.

At the end of the day Christine Smith, the local organiser, said, “I hope this will be a pivotal moment for our churches and communities.”

For the latest news of the Vision Day programme go to www.freshexpressions.org.uk/training/vision

If you would like a Vision Day in your town please contact training@freshexpressions.org.uk and Rachel Matthews will be pleased to send you a full information pack.

Church on Monday

Church on Monday happens at Elm Ridge Methodist Church. First comes Tiddlywinks – about 15 parents and their children meeting for creative play activities, Bible stories and praise.

This is followed by an after-school group of around 12 primary school children and five adults who have games, prayer, crafts and Bible stories.

Later in the evening there is a discussion and games group for teens – SOAP – Sort Of A Party.

We are a medium-sized C of E church in West Cumbria and are trying to provide a genuine act of worship for all members of the family, be they 2, 20 or 200.

The adults meet midweek to encourage each other, share together and enjoy each other’s company. Once a fortnight everyone meets, adults and children, to spend time together. Then we may eat, sing, play, learn and share together with everyone able to make a contribution.

Andrew Paikas

At Eastbourne Methodist Church, Darlington, we are starting a Sunday teatime service – tea and praise. It is a follow-up to an Alpha course and also builds on contacts through a midweek children’s club. The church is located in a deprived inner urban area and meets real social need.

Don’t forget to establish a link between your website and the fresh expressions site: www.freshexpressions.org.uk

3six5 in Chessington

3six5 members are committed to being involved in their communities. They have reduced meetings to a minimum and freed themselves to spend time with family, friends and colleagues.

Making friends and building friendships is all-important, praying that through those friendships others will come to know Jesus.

The adults meet midweek to encourage each other, share together and enjoy each other’s company. Once a fortnight everyone meets, adults and children, to spend time together. Then we may eat, sing, play, learn and share together with everyone able to make a contribution.

Andrew Paikas

Tea and praise
All over Britain, Christians are starting fresh expressions of church. However, so far, there have been few opportunities for emerging leaders to learn from the experience of others or to think through the basics as they start a new ministry.

‘mission shaped ministry’ aims to plug these gaps. It is a one-year, part-time course for Christians who want their churches to be more effective in mission. It is also for experienced pioneers and emerging leaders for new forms of church.

Usually the course is taught over eight weeknight evenings, a couple of Saturdays and a weekend away. It is run by local partnerships, based on material used in Lincolnshire for a number of years and developed by Anglican Church Planting Initiatives and the Ground Level Network.

Now the course is going national and a large number of individuals and groups are involved in the development of the completely revised learning materials.

‘mission shaped ministry’ is designed for busy Christians who are active in ministry.

◆ It includes teaching by local and national teachers.
◆ The group of local churches running the course sets the fees and arranges the weekend away.
◆ The course is rooted in prayer and worship and offers practical support through mentoring and an online learning network.
◆ The sessions are fun, interactive and always encourage students to go back to the place where they want to do mission in order to reflect on what they have learnt.

Some vital areas are covered in the course including the qualities and characteristics of Christian ministry, the nature and shape of the church, growing new Christians and making disciples and, of course, how to begin a fresh expression of church.

The course is rolling out during the next three years and we want it to be available in every region of the country. Log on to the website and download a course brochure. This is a course that is going to make a real difference!

For further details see www.freshexpressions.org.uk/missionshapedministry

“I wholeheartedly recommend this course to all churches in the UK... It is designed to equip all God’s people for the task of establishing authentic and effective Church for this and future generations.”

Stuart Bell, Leader, Ground Level Network

“Here is an opportunity to take your discipleship further by engaging in this training for mission-shaped ministry and moving beyond being locked into a ‘maintenance’ mode.”

Rev'd Graham Carter, President of the Methodist Conference 2006-2007

“The next big step in taking fresh expressions of church forward is making the right kind of training available in every part of the country. The mission shaped ministry course looks set to make a major contribution here and I’m delighted to commend it.”

Archbishop Rowan Williams

Hope 08: holistic mission

Founded by Roy Crowne, Andy Haw-thorne and Mike Pi-lavachi, HOPE 08 will build on the vision of initiatives such as Soul in the City and Merseyfest to generate a national momentum for mission in word and action throughout 2008.

This ‘holistic mission’ is at the heart of many fresh expressions of church across all the different denominations, streams and movements.

This is the HOPE08 dream:

In more than 500 villages, towns and cities across England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland churches will work together like never before.

In over a dozen urban centres the church will engage in town and city mission initiatives that will impact the whole community. In 100s more neighbourhoods there will be localised events and activities that will bring words of truth and acts of service to many 1000s of people across the UK.

By working in partnership with the police, local authorities and primary care trusts as well as other local churches, your Christian community could help provide services to address issues such as debt dependency, hunger, homelessness and drug and alcohol addictions. There will be many schools and university missions, fun days, bbqs, kids clubs, estate clean-ups and much, much more...

Isn’t that a dream worth sharing? If you agree, then get involved on the ground floor! Check out the website at www.hope08.com
Doing things differently

Matt discovered this passion when, on arrival in the circuit, he took over Feltwell’s fortnightly Bible study group. A course on the subject of evangelism provoked “lots of mumblings about church not being right,” Matt says.

Matt took a large piece of lining paper to a Bible study and dreamed with the chapel members how they would like church to look in the future. He typed up the results, and presented the chapel members with a clear picture of their ‘desire to be connected’.

“They were there every Sunday but never connected,” he says. “They wanted to know who sat in front of them at church.” At that time a building project was under discussion. Now it was reduced to essential changes such as disabled access, in favour of instituting a new way of being together on Sunday mornings. Importance was now placed on the people not the building.

Such was the enthusiasm that this new model of church began the very next Sunday with members offering to take responsibility for different parts of it.

“They weren’t happy with what happened on a Sunday morning but they still wanted to worship on a Sunday,” Matt explains.

Chapel members now sit café-style at tables throughout the service, which often involves an interactive sermon and shared prayer time. The next step is to make the morning papers available for the congregation to read and discuss together over coffee before the service each week.

This new format means that chapel members have greater freedom to question and explore. Because Matt is responsible for several other chapels in the circuit, he cannot be at Feltwell every Sunday, but key people maintain a commitment, while members care for one another throughout the week.

“They said, ‘It’s our responsibility to care for each other, not the minister’s’,” Matt explains. “They were saying that they always had baptism and communion but not community. Now they are sharing each other’s lives. They pray together and they are in a pastoral group in which they care for one another.”

Since these changes in the worship and community life of Feltwell, several non-churchgoers have been attracted to the chapel, and one family is even considering a café-style wedding.

“Feltwell’s worship is culturally specific, but the underlying principle is of something that connects and helps members to love one another,” suggests Matt. “There is a sense of earnestly seeking God which wants us to be for our community.”

“They are very much doing church for the right reasons.”

Emma Garraw

Colin Brown

Good relationships

You can’t give what you haven’t got! This is a phrase that certainly makes sense, especially when it comes to ‘changing church for a changing world’. How do leaders and members of fresh expressions maintain a healthy spirituality, both for personal well-being, and a fruitful ministry? Well, in one sense, there’s nothing new under the sun. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote in the 1100s:

“We should seek to become reservoirs rather than canals. For a canal just allows the water to flow through it, but a reservoir waits until it is filled before overflowing, then it can communicate without loss to itself. In the church today, we have many canals but few reservoirs.”

Jesus makes this clear in his image of the vine in John 15: ‘without me you can do nothing’.

Spending time with Jesus is vital. Yet God’s call to be mission-shaped also involves going out to where people are and finding ways of sharing God’s good news with them there.

Nick Coke of hope:asha in east London says, “...we do something each Sunday called Good Neighbours. It’s being church out in the community to help people in need in practical ways, such as gardening for the elderly and so on.”

Hope:asha and other fresh expressions are finding that this social gospel builds good relationships and people’s opinion of the church is changed. Love is shown, not just talked about.

But giving out can be draining, physically as well as spiritually. That’s why giving time to go to the ‘water of life’ is vital. In the Australian outback they don’t build fences to keep the cattle from roaming. Rather, they dig wells…

Time to stop, to pray, to listen to God and to be refreshed by him is so important. Another fresh expressions leader says: “I go away on retreat twice a year. I also make sure that I take time away when I need it. I’m developing my pattern of prayer with a monastic approach, whereby I stop to pray three or four times each day, for about 15 minutes each time.”

So, whatever stage you’re at in exploring or developing a fresh expression, ensure you are receiving as well as giving.

There are retreat houses all over the country that offer a ‘well’:

For information go to: www.retreats.org.uk

Develop a pattern of stopping: to pray…to be…to listen.

Be filled…become a reservoir of freshness.

Emma Garraw

Colin Brown

Feltwell Methodist Chapel in a Norfolk Methodist circuit is made up of 17 largely elderly members “with a passion to do things differently,” says local minister, Matt Finch.

Matt took a large piece of lining paper to a Bible study and dreamed with the chapel members how they would like church to look in the future. He typed up the results, and presented the chapel members with a clear picture of their ‘desire to be connected’.

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Colin Brown
hard questions
mission and church in the 21st century

Fresh Expressions is holding a series of one-day conferences about hard questions of mission and ecclesiology. Our aim is to draw out debate and resource thinking and reflection in these key areas of faith and life.

The Church of England and the Methodist Church have made a commitment to develop fresh expressions of church alongside traditional congregations. There are now hundreds of new communities and mission initiatives in every part of the country.

These fresh expressions of church are signs of life and hope. They also stimulate debate and discussion. If we are to grow and mature as a mixed economy church there are hard questions to be asked and answered.

The conferences are aimed at senior office holders, including circuit superintendents and area/rural deans, mission practitioners, pioneer ministers, vicars of mixed economy parishes, synod members, lay leaders, theological educators and others from a range of backgrounds and positions. Everyone is welcome.

Each day conference will look at two significant questions with the aid of distinguished guest lecturers. There will be space for questions and debate. Attendance at each event is limited to 60 people. Lunch is included in the day.

Conference Programme

**19 April**
Weston College: Bristol
What is the essence of the church?
The Revd Dr Martyn Albrecht, Principal of Cliff College
Mission-shaped training for a mission-shaped church
Rt Revd Canon George Knox, Principal of Trinity College, Bristol

**23 April**
Lambeth Palace: London
Sacramental ministry in fresh expressions of church
Rt Revd Lindsay Groom, Bishop of Welshpool
Developing ecclesiology in global perspective
Canon Martin Warner, St Paul's Cathedral

**25 April**
Durham Cathedral
Fresh expressions of church in the New Testament?
Professor James G. D. Dunn
Developing churches which can transform the culture
Rt Revd Dr Graham Tomlin, Principal of the St Paul's Cathedral Centre

**3 May**
Manchester Cathedral
Catholic ecclesiology and contemporary mission
Rt Revd Dr Angela Tilby, Westcott House, Cambridge
Looking for maturity in the emerging church
Rt Revd Professor John White, School of Theology, Fuller Seminary, California

**10 May**
University of Birmingham
The challenge of evangelism and apologetics for new communities
Rt Revd Professor Loveday Alexander, University of Sheffield
Patterns of church and mission in the Acts of the Apostles
Rt Revd Dr Tim Dakin, General Secretary, CMS

**17 May**
Cathedral Hall: Leeds
The gift of the Spirit and the shape of the church
Rt Revd Dr Alison Morgan, ReSource
Can fresh expressions of church make a difference?
Rt Revd Lynda Barley, Head of Research, The Archbishops' Council

**24 May**
Canterbury Cathedral
Prayer and spirituality in a mixed economy church
Canon Martin Warner, St Paul's Cathedral

God of love and life
grant us grace to follow your mission in the world. Help us to listen deeply and discern your way.

Son of compassion and life
giving yourself for all, help us by your risen presence as we follow your call to make disciples.

Spirit of power and life
through whom all things are possible, lead and sustain your people in fresh expressions of church and the building of God’s kingdom.

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Contacts

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Pete Pillinger – mission accompaniment
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Andrew Wooding – online guide
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Pete and Kath Atkins – msm course
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Vision Days – training@freshexpressions.org.uk
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Further copies of Expressions – expressions@freshexpressions.org.uk

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

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