engaging with culture

grasping the challenges for mission

Bishop Graham Cray has urged Christians to recognise that understanding, accepting and working with the novel culture of today, and dealing with the challenges it raises, is key to helping people become disciples.

In an exclusive interview with expressions, Archbishop of Canterbury and leader of the Fresh Expressions team, Graham Cray said: 'I am convinced that the ultimate test of what we do is about what sort of disciples we make. How we actually encourage people with hardly any knowledge of the Christian story to follow Jesus is a great challenge.'

a learning curve

Expressing his delight at the 'huge imagination' shown by so many involved in the growth of fresh expressions, Graham insisted that the church has never faced a cultural backdrop quite like today's as it seeks to make disciples. 'It really is a novel culture at the moment,' he said. 'We cannot pretend that we already know how to grow disciples in this culture. We are on a learning curve and are engaging people with the gospel who have never, or hardly ever, been involved before. Only with them can we answer the call to transform communities and networks, as we all become more and more like Christ.'

Graham Cray has vast experience over several decades of growing disciples, both in local churches and in networks such as Soul Survivor. 'A positive view of discipleship, emphasising what Christians are for rather than simply what they are against, needs to be established right at the beginning. The really important thing about discipleship is that it is a positive thing – a Christ-like thing.'

relevance of discipleship

Pushed as to whether today's cultural challenge is really any different from any other, he insisted that there is a uniqueness about the current situation, but that the Spirit is the same: 'The Church has always been called to cross-cultural mission. We need to learn from the Holy Spirit. In terms of the particular culture that we have now – globalised, networked, individualised – we have to engage with something that is new'.

He added: 'Fresh expressions take culture and context seriously. People who belong to new forms of church need a relevant discipleship that works where they are. It is not about learning a new pattern of behaviour from something which is alien to them.'

Graham Cray is currently meeting with a wide range of people involved in fresh expressions of church, widening ecumenical contacts and engaging with international churches keen to learn more about discipleship and mission here in the UK.

Rob Marshall
more on discipleship at: sharetheguide.org/discipleship

strong sense of call

Six of us from the ministry team at St George's, Swallowbeck, Lincoln attended the mission shaped ministry course in 2006 and listened eagerly to the different themes, each one like another jigsaw piece.

In between lectures, over coffee, we'd sit with a blank piece of paper and doodle ideas. It proved to be a special time of reflecting, away from the local situation. We were already all quite busy, and hadn't seen ourselves particularly as a fresh expression of church planting team. However, by the end of the course an idea for a Sunday afternoon service for beginners was taking shape.

We took a strong sense of call back to St George's. One person we told designed the main tool for our new, monthly, T-Time Church – a large fabric die that could be thrown up in the air or rolled along the floor. The six sides indicated different activities, which of course appeared in an unpredictable order in the service – Story time, Song, Prayer, What's in the News?, Getting to know you, and a time for testimony – What's in the T-Bag?

Two years later we have an established small congregation, made up mainly of people from unchurched backgrounds, who wouldn't otherwise be receiving regular Christian teaching in any other way, or experiencing what it could mean to belong to Christ's Church.

A young child has been baptised, a mother confirmed, and preparation for a wedding has also connected with T-Time Church.

We are now thinking about how we would do Communion. Five from around our mmn table, plus three others, form a solid leadership team. We know we have a long way to go but we're certainly not turning back.

friendly invitation

None of my family goes to church and, ironically, it was partly through an atheist friend that I came to Christ. I saw the banner advertising regeneration on my MySpace page. I'd had many bad experiences in life that had led me down the wrong path and one day a friend of mine invited me to go to regeneration, and I agreed.

I was amazed at the amount of young people there, and the liveliness of the music. It was a very laid back atmosphere and the people were so friendly and welcoming that I kept coming back on more and more.

Four months later I gave my life to Christ and that summer was baptism. After coming here for so long, and not having such a great home life, I feel as though I've found myself a new family.

Dean Richardson (student)
The new approaches

Methodist Church is breaking new ground with a scheme called Venture FX. Over the next five years, it will be looking for 20 Methodist pioneers with the calling and gifting to create fresh expressions of church among people in their 20s and 30s, in 20 new places.

Tell us how you came to be where you are.

My background is in business administration. I started training as an evangelist with Church Army in 2001. Church Army was looking at new ways of training and I studied part-time and worked part-time in ministry for about five years. Being able to learn and try out things at the same time proved both positive and productive.

I was also building up local community links and relationships. I was admitted to the office of evangelist in the Church of England in 2006 and became full-time lay worker in Hunmanby and Muston parish, North Yorkshire. What are the things that are going really well at the moment?

• Café Church is run monthly in our church hall. We attract family groups in all their various forms, with around 40 regulars. It’s very informal and we structure the children’s activities at the same time as a themed DVD runs for the adults.

• Messy Church is an informal church service that begins with refreshments. There is a choice for people of all ages to work with the theme in crafts, in silence in the quiet room (we use pebbles, music and Christian meditation or reflections to connect) or in a discussion group. We come back together to celebrate our faith and share what we have learned or produced.

• Other good initiatives have been creative prayer days – offering a taste of prayer through letter-writing, art and clay and so on – and Faith through film has also gone well, looking at Christian themes through films.

What are your hopes for the next year or so?

• I’m hoping Café Church will develop the younger leaders on the team.

• I’m also hoping to be more involved with the general public this summer on the beach and around the town of Scarborough.

• I’m exploring joining a team providing sacred spaces for people to explore the Christian faith in contemporary society. For example, I’ll be using the Jesus Deck, which is a pack of cards depicting the four Gospels that looks a little like tarot cards. They are designed to attract people who are interested in spiritual guidance but may not have previously considered prayer and Christianity. Another aspect would be to offer prayer for healing on the beach, and producing twenty-first-century, edgy versions of medieval mystery plays.

What advice would you give to someone starting out as a pioneer minister?

Be yourself. You have been given gifts and talents that are unique and your whole life up to now is how God has shaped you to become humble before him. He loves you for who you are.

Be invitational in your language, both your spoken words and your body language. Take creative risks in what you do, find out what brings life to you and share that in ministry to others.

‘The glory of God is seen in a human being fully alive.’

(St Ireneaus)

What are your hopes for the next 5 years?

I am excited that the Methodist Church has the vision to establish new models of church with the appropriate gifts to attract people who are hardest to reach in our contemporary culture. I am encouraged that the Methodist Church has the vision and determination to pursue such a ground-breaking and risky project.

The aim is to complement the already growing development of fresh expressions around the country, reaching out with the good news of Jesus Christ to those who don’t naturally connect with traditional church.

Ian Bell is the coordinator of the scheme and will be working part-time until the end of August 2009, becoming full-time from 1 September. Ian says: ‘I believe that the connexional Pioneering Ministries Scheme has the potential to release people with the appropriate gifts to establish new models of church and to offer an alternative pattern for creating Christian communities among some of the people who are hardest to reach in our contemporary culture. I am excited that the Methodist Church has the vision and determination to pursue such a ground-breaking and risky project.’

For further information, go to: methodist.org.uk/venturefx

new approaches

The national Fresh Expressions diocesan and district synod tour set off in September 2009. Since taking up the post, Jude Stone, the tour coordinator, has seen 19 Anglican and Methodist synods visited, addressing some 2,500 people, with a further 16 already planned for the next 12 months.

members of the Fresh Expressions Core Team and Associate Missioners have been pulling out the stops to deliver engaging, lively multimedia presentations. Backed up by supporting literature such as encouraging fresh expressions of church and this newspaper, half of all the diocesan and district synods have been brought up to date with national developments and local fresh expressions. Deliberates have also been encouraged to engage further, with information about training, support and resources.

Feedback has been more than positive. One delegate said, ‘This is the most exciting thing I’ve heard at Synod for years!’

key moment

The Revd Roberta Rominger, URC general secretary, said: ‘We want to attract those who don’t come to church, by offering something new and different alongside more traditional forms of worship. The Fresh Expressions initiative is a real opportunity for Christians of all persuasions to join together in mission and to share the Christian good news at a key moment in the life of our nation.’

United Reformed Church members are already actively engaged in mission shaped ministry, the nationwide course equipping leaders of fresh expressions, which has well over 1200 students.

lively multimedia

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Taking creative risks

Shena Woolridge talked to expressions about her work as a full-time lay pioneer.
Married to Elaine, who is also a Methodist minister, and with their two children, Ruth and Samuel, Stephen Lindridge loves any form of good competitive fun, films, wildlife watching and the great outdoors. The family is delighted to be remain-

affectionately call ‘Daddy’s Angel’ because it’s so big.

Stephen brings a lot of practical experience of fresh expressions, a passion for the kingdom of God being made visible in local communities and a keen strategic mind to his new role.

His Manchester MA in Mission and Evangelism through Cliff College gave the opportunity to reflect and act on good practice in the fresh expression, Mind the Gap, he helped initiate in 2001.

Stephen said, ‘I sincerely relish the opportunity to serve Fresh Expressions for the next phase and welcome every chance to hear and encourage what God is doing across Great Britain as I live out my new role.

Much of the great growth we have seen in the first phase has been a fantastic encouragement. This vision of what is possible under God should be nurtured into the wider bloodstream of the church, that more of God’s kingdom may come.’

more to do

It’s a great privilege to be appointed leader of the Fresh Expressions team. As the chair of the Mission-shaped Church working party it is also a bit like being given my baby back. Not that I have been a distant parent. I have been actively involved in promoting fresh expressions of church and lay and ordained pioneer ministry since the report was published in January 2004.

This will be my sixth post since ordination in 1971. I have been a curate in Gillingham (St Marks), an advisor on parish ministry to youth and children for CPAS, a vicar in York (St. Michael le Belfrey), a theological college principal (Ridley Hall), a suffragan bishop (Maidstone) and now Archbishops’ Missioner; a role that needs all that I have learned in my previous ministry and much more.

I am married to Jackie, who is a parish priest in Maidstone, and we have two adult daughters, Catherine and Sarah. I love rock music because nobody ever convinced me that I should grow out of it. I watch sport, study culture, and read theology. Youth ministry has been a permanent thread in my ministry. I helped set up the Centre for Youth Ministry and I chair the Soul Survivor youth event.

The first five years of Fresh Expressions have seen wonderful progress, but there is much more to do. So watch this space!

ministry among Tamils

London is home to communities of Tamil Indians, from both Sri Lanka and South India. In the last few years Tamil Fellowships have been set up around Anglican churches in Wembley, Tooting Broadway and East Ham.

‘People from ethnic minorities have to be taken care of, so a ministry to Tamils living in the area is part of caring for them,’ believes the Revd John Princely Croos, Tamil Chaplain in East Ham, London.

Princely’s is one of three chaplaincies to Tamils across London. As Associate Minister at St Paul’s church, his pioneer ministry comes out of his life as both worker and worshipper there. His work is funded by London City Mission with housing provided by Chelmsford Diocese. South Asia Concern lends spiritual support.

‘There is a large Tamil/Indian community in East Ham,’ he explains. ‘Stepping out of the house I can always see people, chat with them, get to know them. There are always new people at St Paul’s and the church is situated within a predominantly Indian area so I see people around. It’s a friendship ministry.’

running groups

Princely runs an international fellowship fortightly. A Tamil fresh expression of church has been meeting on Wednesday evenings since 2007, and is growing. An all-age group of 7-10 members gathers for worship in its native language. As Tamil residency in East Ham is highly transitory, faces and numbers change over time.

Meetings include prayer and praise as well as discussion around the Bible. ‘We want to encourage people to think – we are building them up rather than giving them lessons,’ says Princely.

watching and praying

A particular focus of prayer is the current political conflict in Sri Lanka.

‘We are watching and praying,’ says Princely, who lobby international agencies on behalf of Tamils. ‘One of my ministries now is supporting the community in its suffering. At present Tamils feel defeated, abandoned. It is very hard to speak of God, so we sometimes have to pray quietly with the believers. They ask, “What is God doing?” Such deflation does not prevent members of the fellowship from regularly bringing along their unchurched friends, so that Princely is having to consider whether the way forward is to develop into a more mature expression of church. Currently they are becoming a Eucharistic community, with Holy Communion celebrated on occasion. He would like to develop a team so that the ministry among Tamils can grow.

‘I am trying to pray for a helper, a team,’ he says. ‘This kind of ministry is very focused on evangelism.’

In the meantime, he continues to be a presence among the non-English-speaking Tamil community and a support to members of both the growing fresh expression of church, and the Tamil community at large.'
LEADER

see what Jesus is doing and join in

As I look back on the last five years, and on the great interest there is in fresh expressions of church, can’t help asking myself why? There are lots of reasons, of course, but the one that strikes me most is that we all know that we don’t know what we are doing!

Or rather, we all know that many of our cherished ways of passing the faith on to others no longer seem effective and we didn’t know what to do.

We have a population that knows less and less about Jesus, and that either seems to be happy about religion if someone else does it for them, or that simply doesn’t expect to find God in church.

When we are strong we don’t tend to trust God for strength. When we think we know what we are doing, we don’t tend to seek God for wisdom. We just ask him to bless what we would do anyway. But when the ways of church we love no longer touch the people we love – children and grandchil-
dren for instance – then we start asking God if we have fresh lessons to learn.

The flow of fresh expressions in the last few years has been born out of a willingness to acknowledge that we do not know what to do and an accompanying willingness to see what Jesus is doing and to join in.

The danger, now that we have stories, DVDs, training courses and a new language to describe what we do, is that we might start to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there to feed our imaginations. The training is there to get overconfident again. The stories are there...
sharing and blogging

So what’s the weekly blog on the Share website (sharetheguide.org) like? Here is one example, from Jenny Baker.

Breathe

Thirty teenagers jostle into the room, shedding bags and coats, grumbling at being asked to take off their shoes, mocking each other’s socks.

Some make up their minds that this is boring and a waste of time; some are intrigued and ready to engage; others have ‘impress me’ written clearly across their faces.

Fifteen minutes later a stillness has settled on the room and they sit en-grossed, touching a plasma ball as they think about how they might connect with God, writing the names of significant people in their lives on leaves and adding them to a tree, playing with Mr Potato Head as they think about how grossed, touching a plasma room and they sit en-stillness has settled on the faces.

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Ancient Habits

Penny Worth reflects on the sense of being called by God to step out into new ways

‘Lord, I cannot go on any longer, these garments you gave us to wear are so heavy and wearying. They weigh me down, they restrict my movements.’

‘Then take them off, my child, they are not for you. I gave them, in my love, to others, long ago who needed different things.’

‘But Lord, we cannot travel naked the world will look and mock. It will not listen to a naked traveller.’

‘My child, do you think they are impressed by your ancient habits? Take the risk, let them see your vulnerable flesh, that they may know you have a heart like theirs.’

‘But Lord, the world is cold...’

‘My child, you can have fine new clothes fit for your journey. But first you must let go of these – you cannot wear the new on top, a liberating lightening is what you need.’

‘But Lord,...’

‘Do you trust me enough to shiver in your nakedness, while together we weave some new clothes, from the joys and longings of all my children?’

Officer, we kept Breathe open late so a couple of staff members who worked in the venue and were intrigued by what they had seen could create more opportunities like these for those outside the church to participate in.

Each month in Grace we invest time and energy in having a go. One wrote: ‘Really very inspirational. Didn’t ever really take time to think about things and this relaxing environment really gives you the chance to.’

How can we create more opportunities for creative spirituality outside the church?

Resources like Breathe create a space – for questioning, reflection, wondering – and a sense of place – that this is what you do here. (Words coined by Bob Mayo in his work on the spirituality of young people.)

It makes the most of the curriculum requirement to learn about and from religion, the potential for a thin place in the otherwise noisy school day; if young people have to do that, why not give them the best of what we have discovered that feeds our souls? The challenge for those of us who maybe take for granted the riches of creative spirituality is how we can create more opportunities like these for those outside the church to participate in.

Creating a space for people to encounter God. We’ve often asked ourselves how we can also do that in other contexts for people who will never come into our building.

I’m not sure we’ve come up with many answers, but we’ve been in-spired by groups like Beyond in Brighton and their beach hut Advent calendar. Again, they have used the thin place that Christmas provides and invited people to consider what it’s all about.

These stories remind us that God has set eternity in the hearts of people and perhaps all they need is a little nudge and a bit of space to connect with their creator.

Jenny Baker is a writer and a co-founder of the Sophia Network for women in youth work. She is a member of Grace, an alternative worship community in Ealing. She is the author of Heart, Soul, Strength, Mind (Monarch).
Edited highlights from an interview with Brian McLaren, American author, pastor, and expert in mission. He addressed the 2008 Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church.

let a thousand flowers bloom

Why is it important that Christians take culture seriously?

When we think about church and culture, a good starting point is a wise theology of institutions. Institutions preserve the social and spiritual advances of the past, but they also tend to oppose the next advancement that we need.

So, there’s a dynamic relationship between the wine and the wineskins; between the parts of the gospel that call us forward into creativity, and those that call us to hold firm to the advancements already made.

attitudes to change

There are two theological attitudes towards cultural change. The first assumes that the best days are in the past and the future only gets worse. This results in a combative attitude towards culture – trying to hold it at bay.

The second sees the future as bright with the promises of God. It results in an attitude that is properly cautious and properly hopeful; that whatever we face, God is with us and we will get through.

But we can learn from church history about wise dealing with change – neither too reactive, nor uncritically accepting. We see that many of the things we now accept were bitterly opposed. For example, bicycles – because young men could ride to the next village and cause mischief and get back before anyone knew what they had done! creating an enclave

One of the confusing phrases that we Christians throw around is that we are ‘in the world but not of the world’. It justifies the creation of an enclave within culture – but the enclave is usually 40-100 years out of date. It’s as if culture is okay as long as it’s the culture of our grandparents.

I think that is a terrible misunderstanding of the phrase. When Jesus stands before Pilate at the end of the Gospel of John he says: ‘My kingdom is not of this world, otherwise my disciples would fight.’ What he’s saying is: ‘My kingdom is in the world but it doesn’t use the violent techniques of this world.’

The apostle Paul picks it up: ‘our weapons are not of this world’. We don’t fight flesh and blood. We’re in a different kind of struggle, being contemporary.

We need a deeper kind of approach if we want a proper understanding of the relationship between gospel and culture. The incarnation is the key. Jesus did not show up addressing the issues of his great-grandparents; he addressed the issues of his time. Jesus, in speaking the language of the day, with amazing creativity, with miracles and wonders, was a master communicator.

Thousands of people came to listen to Jesus because he was touching the issues that really mattered to them.

What can we learn here in the UK from the emerging churches in the United States?

One of the best things to come out of the emergent church in the United States is a group of theologians and practitioners who treat each other with mutual respect, realising that they need each other.

It’s also not about developing a model that others then copy. We need to let a thousand flowers bloom. I prefer to call what is happening an emergent conversation. It’s about Christians talking to each other from different parts of the Church about what it means to be followers of Jesus now.

moving forward

We need to have broader understanding of Jesus’ gospel of the kingdom. We need to translate that understanding into a holistic understanding of faith that is not based on church services. We need to ask what it means to be followers of Jesus Christ in all areas of our life. We need to discover the outward focus of the Church.

3. Only then can we look at church services. Could we use those 60 or 90 minutes better to help people develop the skills of being disciples? What impressions do you get of the fresh expressions movement?

I have been so enthusiastic about the fresh expressions movement here in the UK since I first met Graham Cray several years ago. I’ve met people who are doing fresh expressions of church, seen the reports and visited some of these communities.

I’m very impressed. I think the fresh expressions movement shows an institutional body making a decision that very few institutional bodies make: ‘from the centre, let’s create creative space around the margins’. That’s how institutions renew.

It’s a pattern that is being replicated elsewhere, in other countries. People are taking notice. Here is an institution that has found a way, within its parameters, to create open space.

Institutions are good at making policies when bad things happen, to stop them happening again. But they can get so many policies that nothing bad happens, but nothing good happens either.

The fresh expressions movement represents a wise move in a faith community and is a ripple that will spread and inspire creativity in other churches around the world.
Back in the ‘90s I attended an early fresh expression called The Carpenter’s Arms – church for the unchurched. At that time I was exactly that, unchurched. God quickly became relevant in my life and as my commitment deepened so did my involvement with this new understanding of what church could be. Some years later my wife and I now lead a fresh expression in Wiltshire, Food for Thought, bringing God to people where I was all those years ago.

Klynn Alibocus

Coaching For Missional Leadership
Bob Hopkins, Freddy Hedley
ACPI and Fresh Expressions, 2008
Bob Hopkins and Freddy Hedley examine the importance of supporting leaders through coaching and mentoring, so that mission initiatives, church plants and fresh expressions of church have access to accompaniment that both provides best practice in mutual reflection and offers connection to the experience and wisdom of other leaders, as well as to the wider Church. In addition to exploring the principles behind coaching, this book is designed to be a manual for coaches to use as an ongoing resource that can help and inform their coaching and mentoring experience.

stop press
mission shaped congregations
Fresh Expressions, 2009  £10.00
An interactive DVD-ROM to help you plan a mission-shaped Sunday worship service.

latest resources

Ancient Faith Future Mission: fresh expressions in the sacramental tradition
Steven Croft [ed.], Ian Mobsby [ed.]
Canterbury Press Norwich, 2009
Fresh Expressions conjures up children’s clubs, café church and innovative youth work, yet this is not the whole story. Churches from the traditional wings of the church are being equally creative and imaginative, exploring alternative ways of worshipping and being Christian communities. Their focus may be more contemplative than action-packed, but the place of encounter with God needs space and silence. Practitioners from such churches tell their stories and reflect theologically on the initiatives they are exploring, with contributors including Rowan Williams, Brian McLaren, Steven Croft, Stephen Cottrell, Richard Gless, Phyllis Tickle, Karen Ward and Ian Mobsby.

key issues
vision day seminar packs
Ideal for use in small-to medium-sized church meetings, vision day seminar packs explore specific key issues and various genres of fresh expressions. Each pack consists of a downloadable presentation and accompanying presenters’ notes and resources handout:• discipleship in fresh expressions;• enabling finance in fresh expressions;• fresh expressions and children;• fresh expressions and older people;• fresh expressions for city dwellers;• introducing mission shaped intro;• listening for mission;• prayer and spirituality in fresh expressions;• rural fresh expressions.

also available
• on the edge: exploring ordained pioneer ministry in the church of england: a DVD and booklet featuring 14 ordained pioneer ministers, who tell their stories passionately and honestly.
• changing church for a changing world describes some of the exciting fresh ways of being church that are emerging in a Methodist context in Britain.
• expressions: the dvd - 1: stories of church for a changing culture• expressions: the dvd - 2: changing church in every place Engaging and informative stories of emerging forms of church around the country• Mission-shaped Questions: Defining issues for today’s church Addressing big theological and practical issues, the various chapters reflect lectures given by a wide range of academics, professionals, priests and educators, from just about every tradition.

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change church for a changing world
Engaging and informative stories of emerging forms of church around the country

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An assortment of our popular booklet series. Contains one each of:• moving on in a mission-shaped church• starting a fresh expression• listening for mission• Bishops’ Mission Orders: a beginner’s guide• encouraging fresh expressions of church.

food for thought
Back in the ‘90s I attended an early fresh expression called The Carpenter’s Arms – church for the unchurched. At that time I was exactly that, unchurched. God quickly became relevant in my life and as my commitment deepened so did my involvement with this new understanding of what church could be. Some years later my wife and I now lead a fresh expression in Wiltshire, Food for Thought, bringing God to people where I was all those years ago.

Kynan Alibocus

Order these items from our online shop at: freshexpressions.org.uk/shop
fifteen years on from Mission-shaped Church

where next?

Bishop Graham Cray, new Team Leader of the Fresh Expressions initiative, surveys the scene.

The five years since Mission-shaped Church have seen tremendous progress:
- Hundreds of fresh expressions – far more than ever registered on our website.
- The subject has been high on the agenda of both the Church of England and the Methodist Church at a time of financial uncertainty and other difficult issues.
- There seems to be a new atmosphere of permission and imagination about being church.
- Our mission shaped ministry training course is helping practitioners across the country.
- I have inherited an able and energetic team for the next phase.

There needs to be a next phase because there is a great deal still to do.

The proportion of the population that has had no meaningful contact with the Church or the story of Jesus continues to grow and includes the majority of children and young people.

We have only just begun to face the missionary challenge, so in phase two we need many more first-time participants.

The evidence is that a mixed economy of fresh expressions of church and inherited models of church should be the norm for the local church in the UK.

We are not looking for some parishes, churches or circuits to maintain traditional church approaches while others do fresh expressions – we want to see them as partners everywhere.

We need to maintain some clarity. The evidence of the impact of our report is that ‘mission-shaped’ and ‘fresh expression’ are being used all over. But we are committed to fresh expressions of church not of worship alone.

We are seeking to plant churches and congregations that are both Christ-shaped and appropriate to the culture of those whom they serve.

Fresh expressions of church are not about making our worship more attractive in the hope that people will come. They are about planting congregations where people are.

I believe that this is a movement of the Spirit that is for all traditions in our churches, not just some, because all traditions face the same missional challenge and we are all going through social and cultural transitions that marginalise the Church.

As Mission-shaped Church was published only in 2004, most fresh expressions are young. If we want them to develop into mature expressions of church, we will need to help them do so.

Ultimately it does not matter whether a church is a fresh expression or a mission-focused traditional approach.

What matters is the quality of disciples it makes. We have lots of work to do to help new believers live a Christlike life in our consumer culture.

With my lifelong commitment to youth ministry I know we have to make our work fit for the next generation.

This is not because young people matter the most. Fresh expressions for senior citizens are just as important.

But we have been rediscovering something essential about the Church – that it is always called to embody the way of Christ in its culture.

Our language is temporary (how long does ‘fresh’ stay fresh?) but the challenge is permanent and we have to be thinking about equipping the next generation.

Finally, I believe we are in the early stages of a fresh understanding of Christ’s church; an understanding that can be learned only as we follow Christ together in mission.

As we hold together the ancient and the new, the high and the low, the charismatic and the contemplative, Scripture and sacrament, evangelism and social concern in the practice of mission and church planting we will gain a new understanding of the church that cannot be reached through church debates and disagreements.

Embody the church for others and see Jesus as you have never seen him before. I can’t wait!

Grasping the call of Jesus

One woman’s experience of a fresh expression of church in Montreal.

I was a Christian for many years, but I had made choices that withered my faith. A year and a half ago I found myself alone and a parent and I yearned for God again.

I came to emerge because I wanted my baby to be baptised and to grow up knowing Jesus, and in the process I have rediscovered him.

Within the emerge community my faith is being restored and I feel as if I am beginning to grasp the call of Jesus to live a resurrected life.

Our little community of emergers spends a lot of time attempting to respond to that call.

I am so thankful for my beautiful, healthy, happy toddler; since before her birth I had prayed that she would walk with Jesus.

I give thanks for emerge, for encouraging us both in that walk.

Catou Small
Colin Brown ponders the ways God speaks to us as we develop fresh expressions of church.

visions and dreams

I’ve just started my dream job – to develop a fresh expression of church through art and amongst fellow artists. As a Church Army evangelist I have moved to Cornwall to begin this work from scratch. As well as the joys of being in a beautiful place, and doing what I love to do – painting – I find myself with a lot of questions. How do I follow God’s lead in this? Where do I put my energy today? How do I go about meeting people who don’t go to church and help them to become aware of God in their lives … in their art? What might church look like for them, and what part do I play in developing that? A good place to begin is prayer. I’ve been praying with the Acts of the Apostles and found the passage about Paul, Silas and Timothy’s journey to Philippi very helpful.

They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. Acts 16:6–8 (NRSV)

Just what did that look like? How did the Holy Spirit let these men know this? Wouldn’t we love some more detail? But perhaps the mystery encourages us to ask the Spirit to show us the way for our time, our place.

How do you listen to the promptings of God’s Spirit? For me it is often a deep sense of rightness (or the opposite) about some decision – large or small. At the moment it feels as though the Spirit of Jesus is saying, don’t rush… and keep listening for my prompting… keep looking for the people I will bring your way.

When I first arrived in Cornwall I visited church as normal. I’ve always broken. Lucas Teague reflects on the journey that brought him to baptism.

Increasing isolation
The spiritual path began for me 20 years ago, when I discovered Buddhist meditation and pledged myself to the path towards Enlightenment.

For me this became an all-encompassing desire to realise the meaning of myself and the nature of the universe. Full of heroic ideals, I felt like a character from a Hermann Hess novel.

This path, however, became one leading increasingly to a sense of isolation and alienation. Amidst the powerful insights and evolved stages of consciousness, there was something missing, a sense that I didn’t fit, with myself or the world. The more effort I put into meditation, the worse it became and the further I seemed to be from where I wanted to be.

feeling compelled
Some years later, I found myself in St James’ church in the heart of London at a fresh expression of church called Contemplative Fire. I found myself receiving the Eucharist for the first time, and not really understanding how or why.

At the same time, however, I felt compelled by an invisible power, urging me to let go and be led.

One thing was clear though; that receiving the bread and wine that evening represented a watershed in my spiritual life, that having crossed this point I could never be the same again.

I sat down at the back of the church and silently cried and I felt God’s voice in my heart saying: ‘You have always had a broken heart and you have always sought to run away from that brokenness and in so doing you have also run away from me. I am the brokenness’. I realised in that moment, in trying desperately to find the answers through my previous spiritual journeys, that I had turned further away from the one thing I longed for, which was to know love. There was in that moment nothing to do and nowhere to go. All questions had been realised and I opened up to the power of God’s grace.

emptying self
For me my baptism means honouring my own brokenness, from a place of love and continual forgiveness.

My inheritance as a human being is that I have always been and will always be broken.

It’s all about an emptying out of the self, in order for God’s divine love to manifest, and offers a radical alternative to the spiritual ascendency of my days as a Buddhist.

However, honouring my own brokenness isn’t the whole picture. I powerfully feel through the baptismal process that I am being called to bear witness and stand alongside the brokenness of all humanity in deep relationship and communion.

Recently, when we were invited to walk in love with the sufferings of Jesus, I felt at times overwhelmed by the pain of bearing witness to Jesus’ suffering and by the knowledge that there is only one response left available to me now, which is to let go into the core of this and carry the cross.

So, am I willing as Thomas Merton states to become a ‘burnt man of Christ’, to love in the face of suffering. To take up the cross?

The answer is yes.

© Lucas Teague 2009

To see more of Colin’s artwork, go to: colinsart.org.uk
We joined Emmanuel Network Church because it was a church unlike any other we had experienced. Our introduction to it was attending meetings held in a Café Bar once a month. We enjoyed the whole thing so much we began to attend regularly, valuing the lively discussions and the new friendships we formed. In time we both attended Alpha courses and are now core members of the network church community seeking to follow Jesus for ourselves.

On Easter Day 2009 we renewed our marriage vows after 20 years, surrounded by old and new friends and family. As Tim once said, ‘I would never have gone to church if it wasn’t like ENC.’

Tim and Lyn Wallis

Fresh expressions of church are happening around the world – Helen Johnson is at the very beginning of establishing one through a shop in a small town in Tasmania.

One day on the West Coast of Tasmania, Australia, I felt distinctly challenged by God to do something new...

I had lamented to God that most of the people and financial ministry resources go into cities, and no one seems interested in going to the places so needing support. All he said to me was, ‘You could go!’ There was no other answer but to shut up and go.

After 15 years of ordained congregational ministry in the Uniting Church in Australia, many thought it was odd that God would call me to a somewhat isolated area of Tasmania. It is a place of wilderness and wilderness. Its mining and logging industries have shaped its story and people. What they did not know was that God’s calling had been shaping me throughout my life toward this kind of ministry and life context.

Many colleagues feared I had had some kind of breakdown and needed to escape for recovery. I listened to the voices of encouragement and concern, and God affirmed his call with inescapable clarity. Folk commented on all that I was leaving, but God placed before me a vision of what I was going to.

becoming known

In the years of transition, friendships grew and I became part of the small town of Zeehan – population approximately 650. These are my people. I am one of them. This was to be my whole life. There would be no five-year, stipended arrangement from which I would move on when I got bored or burnt out.

I arrived in 2006. The only instructions I had from God were to wait, to listen and to do as I was told. It is with shame I realised how busy, competitive and controlling I was. It has been a huge lesson to accept myself and others and not try to manipulate matters as I see fit.

learning surrender

God has taken a strong-willed, independent, single woman on a pathway of surrender – I needed to surrender my sense of reputation and my need to be understood. Thankfully, the call to be transplanted was stronger than any other voice and I have not doubted that the plan was God’s true purpose.

To connect with and contribute to the Zeehan community, I opened a small shop in the main street in an historic building. God paved the way every step before me. Faith has been stretched until I could trust in nothing other than God. It gives opportunities to meet local people and visitors, to speak of the West Coast and God’s goodness. When I have surrendered my concerns and anxiety about the way forward and the resources, God has provided perfectly.

The most strenuous struggle to surrender has come through marriage. I had not wanted a partner, but God knew better. He appointed a wonderful strong-willed man to persist until I surrendered.

making it work

Currently I do preserving and sell the products in the shop, and engage in some contract work with the Uniting Church, and wait to see where God is leading us next. We are all taking our part in kingdom activity, seeking to be flexible enough to modify our ideas for God’s plans.

My vision is that the West Coast becomes a place where Christ’s light shines ever brighter. As God continues to send Christians to pray, to come for short or long stays to help in resourcing ministry, I believe the spiritual landscape and people’s hearts will change as his kingdom comes among us.

enjoying the experience

We joined Emmanuel Network Church because it was a church unlike any other we had experienced. Our introduction to it was attending meetings held in a Café Bar once a month. We enjoyed the whole thing so much we began to attend regularly, valuing the lively discussions and the new friendships we formed. In time we both attended Alpha courses and are now core members of the network church community seeking to follow Jesus for ourselves.

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Tim and Lyn Wallis

freshexpressions.org.uk
Jenny Sharp reports on a remarkable commitment by one village to provide a fresh expression of church for the children who live there.

**Lively Worship**

**The Vision**
In early 2007, I was given a vision for a fresh expression for five-to-seven-year-olds. I managed to drum up support among local, like-minded, Christian parents and Sparkles was born. Sparkles is for 5-7 year olds, is free, and meets once a month in Copmanthorpe Methodist Church, just south of York.

**Breaking Down Barriers**
In April 2007, Sparkles met for the first time. On that first Sunday afternoon there were nine children who came along. A year later, we have 42 children on the roll.

The great thing about Sparkles though is its ecumenical nature. We have leaders drawn from three different churches and from five different denominational backgrounds, all with one goal – to bring the gospel message and experience of God’s presence to young children.

Sparkles has broken down the denominational barriers in the village, which has enabled us to reach out collectively to non-churched children.

**Sparkles**
Sparkles is a fast-moving, colourful, noisy and welcoming event. Each session begins with the children doing a game and/or craft activity. After this the group comes together for a time of lively worship.

We use a number of resources including Hillsong Kids’ DVDs, and other child-oriented songs with graphics and actions. We follow this with a time of teaching using Scripture Union and Willowcreek teaching programmes.

Over the first year the children have been learning how God wants to flip their lives around. Each session we have a memory verse and a memory phrase with prizes the following week for those who can tell us how they have put the teaching into practice.

Some of our life-changing phrases have included ‘Forever friends with Jesus’, ‘Say no to sin’, and ‘Live his Way’.

We then generally split into groups for a more in-depth look at the lesson with an associated activity – making everything from ice cream to grass heads. At the end we come together again for a final time of praise.

**God and Me**
Every child who has come along has received a copy of the God and Me book to take home, providing daily readings and thoughts. This is a great encourager for the children, both churched and un-churched, to think about living for God every day and not just at Sparkles. One child was so pleased with his book that he took it into school the next day and told the teacher she had to read from it!

**The Future is in God’s Hands**
Sparkles has become an established event in the village – advertised with a permanent banner. We are excited to see how it will develop next.

It has even spawned a new group, Musical Sparks, that meets every Friday in the neighbouring St Giles CoE Church, led by two of the Sparkles leaders who are also professional musicians.

For more about fresh expressions for children, see: sharetheguide.org/examples/children

**Expressions**

Expressions caught up with Nick Green, an ordained pioneer minister in Coulby Newham in Middlesbrough.

**The Man on the ‘BluSofa’**

Tell us how you got to this point.
In 2001 I started as a Church Army pioneer as an itinerant minister in the Archdeaconry of Cleveland. As the job went on, however, I got more involved in Ingleby Barwick, the estate where we lived, and felt a growing longing to grow some sort of relevant faith community there. In 2004 I was excited when the Methodist, Anglican and United Reformed churches put money into establishing fresh expressions community on the estate – and even more excited when I got the job of running it. Several initiatives are still going strong – including getting people together in the local supermarket coffee shop.

However, the ecumenical dimension made the establishment of an independent church complicated.

As I worked on with this project, I discerned a call to take things further – in my own life by seeking ordination, and in church life by being able to grow new initiatives into fully-fledged churches.

So, for the last couple of years we have been living and working in Coulby Newham, another large mixed housing estate, with me as an ordained pioneer minister.

What are you most excited about at the moment?
There are three initiatives that are particularly exciting:

1. Christ’s Church, Coulby Newham. This is a church for people 50 plus who don’t go to church any more. With a relaxed style of worship, and guest speakers, we are seeing people coming to faith and being integrated into the community.

2. Harvest Christian Community. This is a very new all-age, media-intensive worship opportunity meeting in Nature’s World, a local environment awareness centre. It’s gradually attracting some un-churched people and there is much potential for growth.

3. The new bus. We are working on a project to take a converted bus out into residential areas and start making relationships with people. We might, for example, screen an episode of The Jeremy Kyle Show and then discuss it with the people there.

Tell us about the BluSofa.
A shop in a shopping centre with a big blue sofa in it that people are invited to come in and sit on and have a chat about anything or everything with one of our trained listeners.

What advice would you give to someone starting as a pioneer minister?
Dream – big and bright, and reach for the sky, but remember that great ideas can be red herrings.

Pray and listen – listen to people, to the community and God. Establish a prayer group as a first priority. Write down any prophetic words God gives and look for paths opening up.
Over 1200 people from a range of denominations and streams have now participated in the one-year learning experience msm. Having reached 27 centres across from Plymouth to Penrith, msm is now also being offered in Wales and Northern Ireland with serious interest in Scotland too.

Participants commit to six weekday evenings, three Saturdays and one residential weekend.

Ideal for all Christians (lay and ordained), msm takes participants on a learning journey, training those who are looking to start and grow sustainable fresh expressions of church. Subjects covered include:

- the qualities and characteristics of Christian ministry;
- listening to God in culture and community;
- the call to share in God’s mission;
- the nature and shape of church;
- making and growing disciples;
- how to begin a fresh expression;
- how to sustain and grow a fresh expression to maturity.

I nearly didn’t sign up for msm because I thought I would have heard it all before. I’m very glad I have done it as it has given me a lot of fresh thinking. If we are going to have a church in the 21st century it is important that church leaders set a lead by learning themselves. The teaching was excellent and of course you learnt as much from other participants from other churches and other denominations.†

Paul Howard Anglican Vicar

msm places a high value on learning in community. Many individuals come on the course, but msm is particularly suitable for teams from mission-minded churches or fresh expressions. The sessions provide space for participants to reflect on how their learning can be applied in their own contexts. Coaching and mentoring support is offered between sessions. msm also works closely with the online learning guide Share and encourages ongoing growth after the course via learning networks.

On their blog 2churchmice, theologians John and Olive Drane wrote: John got an invitation this week to be part of the board that is being set up to oversee the development of mission shaped ministry. He couldn’t resist saying yes right away … for once (though not for the first time) it was an invitation to something that really matches where the church mice find themselves these days.

"The most helpful training I have had."

Methodist minister Christine Jewitt, about her experience of mission shaped ministry (msm).

For details of msm, including forthcoming courses, go to: freshexpressions.org.uk/missionshapedministry

To explore running the course with ecumenical partners, please contact Fresh Expressions’ Director of Training, Andrew Roberts: andrew.roberts@freshexpressions.org.uk

seeking stability

I believe that this day is the day that has been drawing me all my life and that baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality. For a long time, I had an inarticulate and secret longing for the infinite, an invisible rootless way, overwhelmed by anxiety. Very often, I felt far away from that inward stability that I sought.

I had some opportunities to explore traditions other than Christianity, but somehow nothing took root. On the other hand, I felt drawn to the Person of Christ, with no way of knowing how I could approach him, although I sensed that the way would be an inward one.

About twelve years ago, I found that way, which was a way of contemplation within the Christian tradition and made a commitment to embark on that journey. Later, through my involvement with Contemplative Fire, this exploration took more shape, and deepened.

finding the light of Christ

I sometimes have an image of a spring of water emerging into full light from an unseen source. The source is like God, pouring out his life and love endlessly so that we might be refreshed. The spring is like Christ, pristine, radiant, cool – ever the same, but created new in every moment; the living water; of the same substance as God the Source, and a manifestation of the divine.

In these sparkling and radiant waters, I immerse myself, so that Christ can wash me clean of all the things that prevent the divine from taking root in me.

Through my experiences of contemplation and meditative reading of Scripture, I have observed some of those obstacles to growth, and sometimes found a limitless space within me, an emptiness that can be filled with God. Paradoxically, this inward journey has led me outwards to a new sense of the world and of the light of Christ in other people.

I have a profound sense of thankfulness to God and to all those who have helped me to be here, now, on this threshold. This is a threshold that I must cross, not in the expectation of a static perfection, but in the belief that Christian life is one of never-ending growth, of dying to the old self so that Christ may live in me.

© Linden Bevan-Pritchard 2009

emtiness filled with God

This is what Linden Bevan-Pritchard said when she was baptised at a fresh expression of church called Contemplative Fire.

© Linden Bevan-Pritchard 2009

PERSONAL STORY

freshexpressions.org.uk
I’ve been thinking back to how I felt when I was first involved in a fresh expression of church. We’d been going into schools in Kenilworth doing lessons, lunchtime clubs and pastoral support. Some of the young people were asking questions and so Bless† started: a small gathering of teenagers working out what up with others involved in similar things, through friends of friends, or hearing about other projects. We started to reflect together. Having space to process as things were developing helped us to be more adventurous and creative. Meeting up encouraged us far more than books or seminars. We visited other projects and experienced what they were doing. We communicated so much of what it means to be a fresh expression of church.

One of the areas where sharing experiences proved most helpful was in worship. The members of Bless† had little

Beth Keith on being part of a learning network

journeying together

faith and following Christ meant to them. It was exciting, tiring, and unnerving. We read books and attended seminars in an attempt to find out what we should be doing. That was helpful but we were left feeling that we needed to be talking this through with other youth workers.

learning networks and youth church

We managed to connect shared stories, challenges and were able to build on each other’s experiences.

Becoming friends, meeting face to face and committing to process together created a safe space to be honest, share experiences and challenge each other. Meeting together like this focused our attention on being local to the story. Somehow a local voice telling a local story has an energy behind it that communicated so much of what worship means to them. It was exciting.

But I then interviewed Jonny Baker, from the Church Mission Society in Oxford, who is a member of one of the older alternative worship communities, Grace, which has been going for about 15 years.

How has networking influenced how Grace has developed?

Alt worship is a great example of how network- ing changed the world. Technology has changed, so connecting is a lot easier these days. Because we’re communicating all the time with blogs, Twitter, Facebook… you quickly find out about good bits of practice. For example some people involved in artistic worship have been challenged to do stuff in public space, stations of the cross or the Beach Hut Advent Calendar. People share that learning together and you get inspired and then you do it.

What’s the value of being networked?

Being networked breaks the isolation of feeling no one understands and builds that sense of journeying together.

and finally…

A number of learning networks are developing, some regionally, others with a specific mission focus. If you’re not sure where to start there is more information on networks at sharetheguide.org/networks. Here you’ll find details of existing networks and if you’re part of a network there’s space to upload information so others can join. There is also space to network informally in the Share community area. Why not log on and share your ideas and thoughts?

Beth Keith has recently joined the Fresh Expressions team to support and help develop learning networks. If you would like to be connected up with others involved in similar fresh expressions, contact her at: beth.keith@freshexpressions.org.uk
Pete Atkins talks about the development of a Fresh Expressions Area Strategy Team (FEAST) in Lincolnshire.

One of the new strategic developments for encouraging fresh expressions of church around the country over the last couple of years has been the setting up of Fresh Expressions Area Strategy Teams. Their purpose is expressed succinctly in their names – to have a strategic and creative overview of the development of fresh expressions of church in any one place. However, there is one that has been blazing the trail for the last eight years, starting before the term ‘fresh expressions’ was coined.

It was initiated in Lincolnshire by the Ground Level network of churches as they realised that Christian life and witness was decreasing in the county, with Anglican churches being amalgamated into multi-parish benefices and Methodist Chapels closing. Denominational leaders were invited to discuss the situation, and agreed a way forward – the planting of new communities of faith to transform the area.

The group contacted people from agencies with church experience for their overall aim into a strategic comprised of six tracks:

1. Vision and leadership: clear vision and committed leadership was and is needed for the aim to be adopted across the county.
2. Prayer: a specific group prayed for the development of the strategy, and then subsequent links have been made with denominational prayer websites and newsletters.
3. Research: this was undertaken to see what churchs already existed and what their strengths were.
4. Equipping: a training course was developed to help people think about new faith ventures.
5. Planting: creating ways to support and coach those taking action.
6. Emphasis on young people: because of the acute and continuing loss of young people from churches.

When the Fresh Expressions initiative was set up, things started moving with even greater commitment. The Bishop of Lincoln, John Saxbee, convened and now chairs the local FEAST to continue encouraging the development of fresh expressions of church in the county. This team has started a number of initiatives that are resourced administratively by the newly appointed facilitator for Churches Together in all Lincolnshire: A vision day in the cathedral in 2007 drew 600 people wanting to know more about fresh expressions, and a 2009 event for people now involved in setting up fresh expressions attracted 200 or so. At this event 20+ fresh expressions or mission project teams were commissioned in prayer by Lincolnshire denominational heads. An ecumenical road show involving Anglians, Methodists, URC and New Church members has been taking the vision day experience to people in their own places.

Successful training

Probably the strongest track over the years so far has been the equipping one. The original training programme has evolved over time and eventually became the foundation for the Fresh Expressions mission shaped ministry course. Around 250 people in Lincolnshire have now done the course – and both Anglians and Methodists have received significant funding to enable them to do it.

Crucially, the Lincolnshire FEAST has taken the long view – realising that transformation takes time. From the foundation of building good ecumenical links they have worked steadily towards their goal, having agreed a 25 year timescale.

Starting a FEAST

FEASTs are developing in lots of places around the county, on both small and large scales. Some of the key points that are emerging as important are:

- Work ecumenically. Whatever your area, large or small, working ecumenically is vital.
- Mix the team. Teams that are made up of practitioners, permission givers (such as chairs of district, bishops and so on), and ‘champions’ (people who are passionate about God’s work in a particular place) can be very effective.
- Engage with the structures. As well as building strong ecumenical links, getting to know and work with local and area church representatives on mission, evangelism and training is essential.
- Keep sight of your goal. Aim to build up coaching and learning networks for pioneers so that they can go out and answer the call of God on their lives to start fresh expressions of church.

music leads the way

Pillar of emotional support when times are tough, and a place to be happy in with others when things are good, and I am delighted that music led me in where direct evangelism would never have succeeded.

Brian Helweg-Larson
Emma Garrow reports on Christians growing a fresh expression of church in the nightclub community of Tenerife.

The living room is a home from home for those who work in and around the nightclub areas of Tenerife. For years, local Christians had walked the nightclub areas of the island, building relationships and praying. ‘We saw too many people lose the plot,’ says Lee Mountford, who himself has worked on club doors and now runs the living room. ‘Out of a prayer meeting came the idea that if they had somewhere to go first, maybe they wouldn’t hit rock bottom.’

A building was purchased by mission support charity, Grassroots Trust, and the living room was opened five and a half years ago. It exists for locals, not tourists, whose home is currently on Tenerife. ‘There is no security there,’ explains Lee. ‘There are seven “lads who have consistently stuck with it” – anyone in the nightclub community is met and welcomed. ‘There is no security there,’ says volunteer Beverley Corbett. ‘There’s loads of drugs and alcohol. The people working in this area don’t have homes – they are living in apartments where there are more people than beds. A one-bed apartment will sleep four people so they don’t have space to sleep, chill or eat.’

Living room teams walk three of the nightclub areas three nights a week, praying and building relationships and community through a consistent presence. The living room itself is open late afternoon to Fridays. On Mondays Breakfree Ministries uses the building to offer drug free counselling. ‘It’s a drop-in,’ explains Lee. ‘There are games, the internet, couches, music, a sea view. It’s very unpredictable what’s going to happen each day. People pop up, there’s banter, they feel welcome.’

Caring for deeper needs Christian literature is around the place and ‘sometimes people get interested’. There is also a big information board offering news of jobs and accommodation, a draw for newcomers to the island. Lee and his team also assist visitors with deeper needs, such as drug users. Having found a rehab centre to which they can refer those with addictions, they visit fortnightly to maintain relationships. Sadly they have seen some deaths from drugs, but currently they are in contact with seven ‘lads who have consistently stuck with it’.

After rehab, the men can move to a halfway house provided by the local church, which is also a keen supporter of the living room’s work. Members from local churches are invited to a weekly prayer meeting for updates and to share in prayer for this growing fresh expression. ‘Before every opening we meet and pray, especially for the atmosphere, that it will be amazing,’ says Lee. ‘Just in the last six months we are seeing more fruit than ever. People uninterested in God are reading books, coming along, having conversations. ‘At the living room they are shown hospitality, treated like a king, helped with a job or accommodation. They go away feeling liked and noticed. It gives workers a place to go and a chance for the gospel,’ Beverley agrees. ‘It gives them help, it’s a safe haven, a little bit of normality, bringing something of home.’

Lee would like to see more places like the living room in other holiday destinations.

Future hopes ‘It definitely works in our community. I really want to see something on Mallorca. There are some people doing great stuff on Ibiza. There’s definitely room for more like this in holiday resorts.’

In the meantime, the living room itself is keen for more volunteers, particularly women who can build relationships with the lap dancers. ‘We’ve got people turning away from lap dancing, even though we never say that it’s wrong,’ says Beverley.

She hopes to inspire anyone interested in joining the living room team in Tenerife with a sight she saw recently, an almost photographic image: a lap dancer “wearing next to nothing”, reading the Bible whilst waiting for her next customer.

‘At the living room they are shown hospitality, treated like a king, helped with a job or accommodation. They go away feeling liked and noticed. It gives workers a place to go and a chance for the gospel.’ Beverley agrees. ‘It gives them help, it’s a safe haven, a little bit of normality, bringing something of home.’
The idea started back in September 2007 when I was thinking about what it meant to be an ordained pioneer minister and how that was going to work out in Bridlington. So I made lots of contacts with people in the town but most of them seemed to be with blokes my age. So I began looking into how we could begin to reach them with the gospel.

So I met with two other guys in my church to think about creating some events. The first event we had was a curry night, which was really well attended. The month later at the church, which was really an event we had was a curry night creating some events. The first in my church to think about the gospel. We began to reach them with the gospel. We came up with the idea of meeting weekly in a pub and having a discussion based around the Bible. So I began printing off a flier with some Scripture and some questions. The idea and the structure of the night worked well and we soon got a small group of five or six lads every week. But we began to find that starting the conversation with Scripture put some people off.

So we changed the format to picking an item from the news and basing the discussion around that with some faith-based questions and relevant Scriptures. This has worked really well. And, a few months in, we had a core of about ten lads who came every week, and about 30 who came to our events. Over the last 18 months we have continued to make contact with more lads and things are going well.

"Where next?" is the huge question that we are looking at and praying about. I would love to see us develop into our own church that has a eucharistic focus. But how we get there is another question! However, it is a hugely exciting part of the journey. The most compelling thing about all we are doing is that we are meeting men who are interested in the issues we look at from a faith perspective, and how this changes their world view. A quote from one guy who came recently said: "I don’t do religion but this is really good!"

I believe very strongly that as the church we need to go and meet people exactly where they are at, and allow them to see that we value their thoughts and ideas. We want to live a life that says: "Have you thought about life the way that Jesus did?"

### What is a fresh expression?

A fresh expression of church 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 and for its cultural context.

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**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 Christ our Lord, Amen.

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**expressions is the newspaper of Fresh Expressions**

Fresh Expressions encourages new forms of church for a fast changing world, working with Christians from a variety of denominations and traditions.

It was initiated by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York with the Methodist Council. The initiative has resulted in hundreds of new congregations being formed alongside more traditional churches.

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