evangelism as parable
howard mellor

the ‘strength’ of the church is never anything other than the strength of the presence of the Risen Jesus
rowan williams

mission and spirituality
brother damian ssf

chips with everything
jonathan clark

see page 29
image by rachel matthews
It will be all change on the Fresh Expression front next year. In October 2008, the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Methodist Church announced that the Fresh Expressions initiative is to continue for a further period of five years.

The Bishop of Maidstone, Rt. Reverend Graham Cray, is to be the next Archbishops’ Missioner and leader of the Fresh Expressions team. He will succeed Dr Steven Croft who has led the project thus far and is now to become Bishop of Sheffield. The Methodist Connexional Missioner for Fresh Expressions is to be the Revd. Stephen Lindridge, currently Evangelism Enabler in the Newcastle District. He will succeed Peter Pillinger who is to become Chair of the Plymouth and Exeter District.

Bishop Graham said: ‘I have been delighted with the national and ecumenical response to Mission-Shaped Church and hugely impressed with the work done by the Fresh Expressions Team. It is an honour and a thrill to be asked lead the second phase of the work. I am very grateful for the Archbishops’ invitation, and look forward to taking up my new responsibilities.’

Stephen Lindridge has helped to pioneer a fresh expression of church in Gateshead and has been instrumental in setting up training and resources to support fresh expressions of church in the North East. He said: ‘I am delighted to be joining the fresh expression team, as the fruit of phase one is evident for us all to see and I am very much looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that phase two (of fresh expressions) will bring.’

The initiative has been strongly and generously supported by the Lambeth Partners since it was launched by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who has regularly thanked them for their support during phase one.

Dr. Martyn Atkinson, General Secretary of the Methodist Church, added: ‘The Methodist Church is delighted to continue the fruitful partnership with the Church of England in the second phase of Fresh Expressions.’

Church Army are to continue as active partners in Fresh Expressions in its second phase. Mark Russell, Chief Executive of Church Army also welcomed the news of phase two.

Dr. Steven Croft told Mixed Economy: ‘Graham will bring a lifelong commitment to mission and fresh expressions of church and the practical experience of building a mixed economy church within the Diocese of Canterbury. He is exactly the right person to lead Fresh Expressions into the next phase of its life. Stephen Lindridge is an experienced pioneer and a tested advocate for fresh expressions of church and will bring rich gifts to the team.’

Meanwhile, this edition of Mixed Economy pays tribute to the remarkable job which Steven Croft has done in establishing Fresh Expressions as an essential part of the Christian landscape in the United Kingdom.

Sir Christopher Wates, Chairman of the Board of Fresh Expressions said: ‘Steve has been an outstanding initiator of ideas and projects and it is absolutely no surprise to me that he should be appointed to such a senior post. Steve will bring to the task of being a bishop a rare combination of evangelist and pastor as well as huge wisdom and maturity.’

As Fresh Expressions enters the next period of its life, this first edition of Mixed Economy draws together stories of creative mission and reflection from across a range of traditions in the Church of England and the Methodist Church. The journal is evidence of the immense vitality and creativity within the church in these lands both in more traditional congregations and fresh expressions of church.

www.freshexpressions.org.uk

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Sunderland has only had its own Minster for a few years. It was created from Bishopwearmouth Parish Church in 1998. Since then its leaders have been asking important questions like: What is its relationship to other churches in the city, and how it can best be a Christian presence and influence in civic life?

Sunderland Minster does not easily fit the description ‘parish church’ or ‘cathedral’. Its leaders aim to live out a mixed-economy paradigm. They lead worship catering both for those seeking traditional services as well as exploring avenues for creative and innovative witness.

The story starts in the mid-90s when Sunderland changed from being a town to a city, and the city fathers asked the Bishop of Durham for a cathedral. Since a Diocese can only have one cathedral, a Minster was the next best step!

A Minster was historically associated with monastic life, sending people out into the surrounding area. Canon Stephen Taylor, who has been overseeing the work at Sunderland Minster since 2000, describes that sort of monastery as ‘a hub community’.

Much of the last eight years has been spent dealing with issues of governance. The Minster is the first parish to become an Extra-Parochial Place. Geographically, parts of the parish were given to three neighbouring churches. Being able to shed its traditional parish responsibilities meant that it could pursue a particular ministry in city life. The settling of most of these issues now allows the Minster more space to look to the future.

Stephen Taylor moved to Sunderland from Hartlepool, where he had experience of connecting the town centre church with civic institutions. His aim is to help Sunderland Minster become a civic church rather than just a city centre church.

‘Sunderland is the biggest city between Leeds and Edinburgh,’ he says. ‘The Minster team wants to answer the question, What is church in a large urban community? As a non-parish church, it can have an influence beyond parish boundaries. It plays a role in policy making for the city and in working on the image of the city and its regeneration plans.’

Accordingly, Stephen now chairs the city’s Local Strategic Partnership, which works on Sunderland’s economic master plan, and regeneration initiatives.

At the heart of the ministry is the Minster Council, which includes ecumenical representatives, deanery representatives, the archdeacon, clergy and members of the congregational committee; the equivalent of a PCC.

From the hub of the Minster come many spokes reaching into different parts of the city. For a start, the team includes three whole-time chaplains; one for the university, one for retail and industry and, most recently, a spirituality chaplain.

The latter is currently establishing her role - making links with prayer networks, developing models for understanding worship as pilgrimage and journeying. Other part-time chaplaincies - to the theatre, the lifeboat institute, the football club, the police and the theatre - are taken on by other clergy in the team.

Sunderland Minster is embracing a mixed-economy way of life, and faces outward with confidence to bring the presence of God into the city. It is a work in progress, but is already discovering a positive and creative role in civic life.

Stephen Taylor says: ‘Mixed economy is particularly applicable to large-sized urban areas. There are churches in other towns and cities showing interest in what we are doing here, including Doncaster, Stoke and Bath.’
Here are some of the current issues arising out of this project:

**Patron saint**

Helping the new city choose a patron saint. Consultation via newspapers and amongst officials led to the choice eventually of Benedict Biscop, an extraordinary seventh-century spiritual leader, with an impressive list of achievements - including bringing stained glass to Britain. He founded monasteries in Wearmouth and Jarrow.

**Codex Amiatinus**

To celebrate the new patron saint, the Minster and city worked together to buy and put on show in different places around Sunderland a copy of the Codex Amiatinus, the oldest surviving one-volume Latin Bible in the world.

**City moments**

In 2004, the civic authorities asked Sunderland Minster to put together a memorial service for Bob Stokoe, the famous former manager of Sunderland Football Club. As a demonstration of the city’s loss and gratitude, it was, says Stephen, ‘a moving audiovisual and multimedia event’.

**Faithful cooperation**

In 2005, the London bombings in July led to a joint statement by faith leaders at the Minster, reaffirming their commitment to community cohesion.

**Ecumenical cooperation**

July this year saw the Sunderland International Airshow. The Minster initiated collaborative working to enable a stall and marquee in local church grounds to give Christians of many different churches a chance to engage with people at this important event.

**Fairtrade initiative**

Last year, the city was awarded Fairtrade City status - a huge achievement for so large a city. The Minster was able to use its influence to move the agenda forward.

**Resourcing local churches**

This is a growing area of work for Sunderland Minster. At the moment, it helps out in times of interregnum or clergy sabbaticals, as well as representing the churches in the city.

**Working together**

The industrial chaplain hosts a number of annual services, including a city harvest, which brings into the Minster symbols of the industrial fruits of the city.

Much has been achieved in the last ten years, but there is huge potential for the future. Canon Peter Sinclair, who works in management consultancy, is now a consultant for the Minster, working with various stakeholders to define its vision for the next stage. They have come up with six areas for action:

- enabling interfaith dialogue;
- creating a sacred space at the heart of the city;
- being a venue for civic events;
- promoting the regeneration and image of the city;
- becoming a critical friend to city institutions;
- playing an integral part in church life in the city.

Stephen’s hope for the Minster is that it becomes, ‘not a club, with the exclusiveness that implies, nor a place of competition with other churches in Sunderland, but a place that develops a complementary ministry to add value to the work of other churches and bring a Christian presence to areas that would not otherwise have one’.

Pam Macnaughton is a freelance writer and editor, and an Associate Missioner with Fresh Expressions
substantial space for local application

Pete Atkins

Background: The mission shaped ministry course is designed to equip pioneers to do the work of establishing fresh expressions of Church; it is primarily developed by practitioners for practitioners who are called to birth new Christian communities. The course was ecumenically developed in Lincolnshire as part of a planting strategy in the county, has been adapted further by Fresh Expressions and is being made available across the UK. See www.freshexpressions.org.uk for more details and course centres.

Emphasis: This course is for practitioners.
It is aimed at:

- those who are already active and for whom time is at a premium;
- at teams who are starting a fresh expression project together;
- those who are serious about establishing church for those who are not in church;
- those who take mission seriously and are prepared to be further shaped in their thinking and practice.

Who’s involved? msm is designed for lay people or clergy of any age, tradition, or experience. It is suitable for anyone who has the recognised capacity to be able to lead a small group, be part of a pioneer team or exercise leadership in other spheres of church life. We recommend that members of pioneer teams attend the course together for maximum benefit: much of the material is designed to be applied in teams with considerable emphasis on the extraction and application of principles from case study.

The mission shaped ministry course ( msm) is rolling out nationwide

What’s involved? The course sessions are spread out through a year and typically involve six evenings, three Saturdays and a weekend away. There need not be any requirement for further work outside course sessions other than applying the learning gained from them. Teams that are establishing new work are encouraged to further enhance their learning by being coached/mentored. The learning process can continue beyond the initial year through participation in a learning network, continued coaching/mentoring and the use of Share (www.sharetheguide.org).

The content, shape and delivery of the course are focused on the practical issues of starting and sustaining a fresh expression of church with substantial space in course sessions for local application.

If you are starting, or thinking of starting, a fresh expression of church then take your team through msm - it will build great foundations, highlight effective practice and equip and inspire you to be as effective as possible.

Pete Atkins is mission shaped ministry coordinator in the Fresh Expressions team and also coordinates leadership of the Ground Level Network, one of the national partners in the course.

Messy Church is a fresh expression of church for families, based around sacred values of chilling, creating, celebrating and chomping. It began at a local church and has been talked about around the country, to the point where the team goes to lead a training session at a church and is told all about, ‘this wonderful project we’ve just started. It’s called Messy Church, have you heard of it?’

The journey we are on seems to be into uncharted territory. This is surprising, given that the elements of Messy Church have nothing really new about them: youth groups have always seen the need to veg out together; children’s leaders have always done craft activities with their groups; Alpha courses have made eating together mainstream and Christians have always managed to gather together to praise God and celebrate his story. The elements are not rocket science.

messy church is not a club

Lucy Moore

The difference is, perhaps, first, that this is a church, not a club: this gives Messy Church a dignity and aspiration that a club doesn’t have. Second, from the start, Messy Church has advocated an approach that welcomes the whole family: we never insist that children are separated from their mum, dad or grandparent in worship. The whole experience is for the
whole family. That this should be so revolutionary to so many churches is frightening.

It has challenged us to think about the use of traditional Sunday children’s groups: how do people worship and learn best? By being split up or by modelling the faith to each other? By leaving their family or by sharing an experience with their family that can be talked about later at home?

the experience is for the whole family

Our Messy Church journey is not a one-way experience of traditional church feeding and supporting the fresh expression; it is a two-way process with the newer congregation challenging the traditional preconceptions of what church has to be.

Perhaps, without realising it, the traditional church has taken away the authority of the family to bring up the children in the Christian faith: the church has said, ‘Come to church, send your children to Junior Church and we will teach them what they need to know. We, the church, are the experts and you, the parents, are not capable.’

Messy Church seeks to reverse this process and empower parents and grandparents to walk the discipleship journey alongside their children. After all, God placed Jesus into a family.

I find myself often pondering why there are no discipleship courses from the UK designed for the whole family to do together?

It is the once-a-month ceiling on many Messy Churches that has made us think about home discipleship. We can’t manage to hold it more than once a month, but how can we be growing disciples if two hours is all we give them once a month?

The answer has to be not to add on more meetings, for which people have no time, but to equip people to meet God, talk about God, pray to him and celebrate him in their own homes: again, revolutionary stuff! (But... isn’t it obvious? How frightening that we should have strayed so far away from these habits and now have to rediscover what it means to ‘do faith at home’.)

Another area with which we’re grappling is that of planning worship that helps these particular people encounter God and does not hinder them from meeting him. The starkest example of this was when we held our first Messy Church Eucharist. We realised that, if we are a church, we need to celebrate the sacraments.

But the Anglican Common Worship eucharistic liturgies, though much loved by traditional churchgoers, are patently unfit for purpose for people who aren’t ‘churchy’. The whole sacrament needed to be taken back to grass roots and to be rewritten with these people in mind.

Why would we suddenly call Jesus ‘Christ’? We always call him Jesus. Why would we use subjunctives? We always use everyday English. Why would we suddenly burst into acclamations from a totally different part of the story? We always try to make things clear and straightforward. Why should the mystery of the simple bread and wine meal be lost in a stream of words? To us, actions and visuals speak as loudly as words. With prayer, trepidation and frustration we developed a Eucharist that turned out to be the most moving celebration we have ever had at Messy Church, and the one that provoked most response.

Messy Church is a tool God is using to give new life and hope to many. We wonder if it is going to be a platform for a new way of being disciples where the home is as much a temple of the Holy Spirit as the gathered church. And you can see what Messy Church looks like by buying expressions: the dvd - 1: stories of church for a changing culture ISBN 978-071514095-6 £12.99 from our online shop www.freshexpressions.org.uk/shop

www.messychurch.org.uk

Lucy has published Messy Church (Barnabas, 2006)

Messy Church 2 will be published by Barnabas late 2008

Lucy Moore works with the Bible Reading Fellowship and is an Associate Missioner with Fresh Expressions.
stepping into other people’s shoes

Rob Marshall greets Rob Gillion at intermission

Alan Bennett draws comical parallels between the role played by an actor and the task of a priest. In his ever so slightly depressing short story, 'The Laying on of Hands', Father Joliffe has to impress a diocesan selection board by the way he leads a service: 'A service is a performance. Devout, sincere and given wholeheartedly for God, but a performance nevertheless.'

I’d just read the story when I sat down for coffee with Rob Gillion, Vicar of St Saviour’s and home of fresh expression intermission - just a stone's throw away from Harrods in west London. 'There is so much going on here, it’s hard to explain it all but one thing is for sure - we have been blessed by God in what we have done so far and the link between theatre and acting and the church is real and alive here.’

Rob, a regular Pause for Thought presenter on BBC Radio 2 and senior chaplain to the Actors’ Church Union, is a trained actor with an impressive CV. He starred in National Youth Theatre productions and commercial theatre before recognising the inevitable vocation to full-time ministry.

'I had ten years as an actor and I suppose once you are actor there is always something of that in you. It’s not a question of dressing up, by the way! I think it is more a question of seeking to step into other people’s shoes: to look at the story which is there before you and to develop that story through the characters involved.’

intermission is clearly Rob’s dream come true. He is supported by his wife Janine, as Missioner to the Arts, who is equally enthusiastic. And he believes it is God’s dream too. 'Everyone is important at intermission. I would like to think that above everything else we are about hope. And this business of listening to people, hearing their story and then, through pastoral care, teaching and preaching developing your outreach - we have got to know our audience!’

St Saviour’s had been redundant for many years due to disrepair, despite the fact that it is located on one of the most expensive streets in the country. Rob was asked to reopen the church in 2002 with a specific remit to be creative, and intermission emerged.

Donations came in and the project ('we didn’t really know we were a fresh expression at the time, we only realised that later') began to take off. There are many Christian theatre companies but as far as they know intermission is the only theatre church in existence.

So there is regular worship at St Saviour’s, weekday times of reflection and meditation and Bible study. But there are also regular full-scale theatrical productions with professional actors being paid (unusual for fringe theatre) equity rates. Recent plays have included Cracking the Whip and Prison Wings (written by Artistic Director Darren Raymond) and The Bishop’s Candlesticks (written by Associate Vicar Ed Olsworth-Peter) but Rob becomes more animated and excited at the mention of his own one-man show The Visit, which packed St Saviour’s towards the end of last year.

In the play - from a story by Adrian Plass which Rob adapted
Mixed economy is very much a part of *intermission* - existing parochially as part of a very different congregation that has shown support for intermission. Rob is also Vicar of St Simon Zelotes (a Book of Common Prayer congregation with a good musical tradition) and is about to become Rector of Holy Trinity, Sloane Street, as the diocese recognises the tremendous energy and vision which he is putting into this part of London.

*intermission* is now much more widely known and is facing perhaps its most challenging time as novelty turns to reality and the need to maintain impetus and funding becomes ever more demanding. This is the task of Revd Ed Olsworth-Peter, who is to take over leadership of St Saviour’s and is to be appointed Creative Director of *intermission*.

In George Lings’ booklet *Encounters on the Edge: A Short Intermision* (b) this fresh expression was described as a wild bird sanctuary. ‘He observed that we at the church are the sanctuary keepers and the wild birds are our artists. We are not an aviary, for we don’t hold artists, but encourage them to fly. The joy of wild birds is that they migrate and often return to the sanctuary as a place of safety, where their welcome is assured. We are excited about the future. *intermission* is about journeys of creation, amongst stories of faith and is a community of Christian performers, writers and artists committed to deepening an understanding of God through the arts.’

They have recently extended that to work with young people at risk of offending - showing them the joy of performing and stepping into a quite different pair of shoes. Darren Raymond (Artistic Director of *Intermission* Actors), along with other members of the Company, lead drama workshops and next year will present with the youngsters Jules Caesar!

‘I love to see performers from the world of theatre, music, media, dance and the visual arts coming to worship and being inspired by the emphasis on spiritual nurture and pastoral care - as a church with a clear vision. We are stepping into other people’s shoes.’

Indeed, when Rob was a prison chaplain in Hong Kong, something happened to him that, inadvertently at the time, was to change the course of his working life and ministry.

‘I was working in a top security prison in Hong Kong and one day, doing my rounds, this young man, with no hope of ever really being released, slipped a piece of paper through the bars to me. He had drawn a picture of a pair of shoes overshadowed by prison bars with a caption - Why don’t you step into my shoes and find out how much it hurts?’

‘From that moment, I took his challenge on board and *intermission* really is about understanding how other people live - through living with and alongside them in community - and by using the great art of theatre to inspire and challenge others.’

(a) Alan Bennett, *Three Stories*, Profile Books, 2001, p.18
(b) George Lings, *Encounters on the Edge: A Short Intermision*, Church Army

You can find out lots more about *intermission* at the website below: *intermission*, St Saviour's Church, Walton Place, London SW3 1SA 0207 823 8979, info@intermission.org.uk

www.intermission.org.uk

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Rob Marshall is Media Adviser to Fresh Expressions
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“Every pioneer minister comes from a local church. So every PCC and Deanery meeting should watch this DVD, so that they can identify and encourage the pioneers God has given them” Paul Bayes - Church of England National Mission and Evangelism Adviser
Engaging in the Winchester Passion, Easter 2008, has prompted me to reflect again on appropriate forms of evangelism. The Winchester Passion was a church-inspired community event involving voluntary groups such as choirs, theatre groups and statutory institutions such as Winchester University and the British Army.

The idea was born while watching the Manchester Passion. Two years later, eight people, the producers, meeting weekly for just over 15 months, joined monthly by 40 directors each responsible for a slice of the action, mobilised over 800 people to deliver the Winchester Passion. On Good Friday evening 2008, 10,12,000 people engaged with the event.

There is testimony from email, letter and conversations in church and in the street that many people were deeply moved by the event and some came to a living faith. The main Easter Sunday services in many churches across the city saw an increase of 25% in attendance over the immediately preceding years.

It seems to have affected the mood in the city, the way Christians are viewed, to have cemented church relations and engendered a real enthusiasm for people to work together.

The various methods of evangelism can be cast differently but I offer here three main types: pastoral, proclamation and evangelism as parable. Since the costly and largely failed projects of 1994, conceived in the enthusiasm of the Decade of Evangelism, the English Church has almost entirely focused on evangelism in a pastoral mode giving attention to relational evangelism.

In his parables, used to express the heart of his message, Jesus lets the story speak for itself, inviting the hearers to participate in it and to take a stand. The topics, drawn as they were from life as people lived it, did not require extensive elaboration. In a little-known work, Neal Fisher expresses the dilemma well, ‘In the parables, it is not so much that we are instructed by Jesus but that we stand with him and view life through his eyes... We are not told what we must see there, rather, the scene is set in sparse terms and we are invited to view what is before us.’

It is as if Jesus uses parable to create a window and invite his hearers not merely to look upon it, but to look through and see the significance for themselves. It is of the essence of a parable that there is an engagement by the listener with the story.

One of the sub-themes of my argument is the contention that we need to recover our intellectual and spiritual nerve to find an appropriate form of proclamation of the truth and efficacy of the gospel in our contemporary plural society.

Christian theology and the evangel are, in my view, public truth - a notion that rather cuts against the contemporary distaste for a metanarrative. Our timidity and nervousness about proclamation is, I judge, violating the right of a whole generation to enter into the Christian story. Note I say appropriate proclamation, for I do think such evangelism could benefit from learning from the third type - evangelism as parable.

In his parables, used to express the heart of his message, Jesus lets the story speak for itself, inviting the hearers to participate in it and to take a stand. The topics, drawn as they were from life as people lived it, did not require extensive elaboration. In a little-known work, Neal Fisher expresses the dilemma well, ‘In the parables, it is not so much that we are instructed by Jesus but that we stand with him and view life through his eyes... We are not told what we must see there, rather, the scene is set in sparse terms and we are invited to view what is before us.’

It is as if Jesus uses parable to create a window and invite his hearers not merely to look upon it, but to look through and see the significance for themselves. It is of the essence of a parable that there is an engagement by the listener with the story.

Other scholars have more recently built on this thought. Sally McFague writes, ‘The parable does not teach a spectator a lesson; rather it invites and surprises a participant into an experience.’ In an intriguing book publishing his doctoral research, Andrew Parker comments, ‘The object of parables is to force the hearers, whether they like it or not, to open their eyes to reality rather than offer a rational explanation of it.’ These comments focus on parable as an experience, rather than a set of formulae that have to be learned.

A parable then is not just the telling of a story, but an event that attempts to draw listeners in so that they see the issues clearly. ‘The stories seem in many ways designated to lure the hearers to become participants.’

They are invited to play the parts - in some sense to become the characters and to see and hear and feel what is happening from their perspective.’ Evangelism as parable then must have the capacity for so setting out the narrative that people can ‘see’ it and enter into the story because they see themselves in it. In that sense a dramatic presentation well done facilitates the experience of parable.

Parable is almost always in the public arena. In contrast, teaching about the implications of kingdom, discipleship, mission and community are reserved to a more restricted audience. At Caesarea Philippi and in the Last Supper Discourse it is the disciples and the inner circle of followers who receive the teaching. Parables, on the other hand, are intended for public discourse and dialogue within the public arena.
To draw on Methodist heritage, John Wesley often used to say of his evangelistic sermons, ‘there I offered Christ’. This tells us about the heart of the message, but also indicates the approach adopted. In his teaching of the early Methodist people, and especially the preachers, he is highly directive, giving clear instruction.

However, in his preaching in the open air, Wesley speaks in, relatively, short bursts, using contemporary imagery and often inviting those who wanted to explore the faith more to meet him the following morning at about 5.00am! In both the parable and the offer there is risk and opportunity.

Engaging in the public arena means that outcomes cannot be controlled, and more obviously, in a parable, the listener has the liberty to walk away from the message. The experience and intention of the Winchester Passion was to take the risk of letting the story of Jesus loose on the streets of the city.

That mutuality of conversation is vital to the parable and in my view has implications for all who would engage in proclamation of any kind. In all approaches to evangelism, and I have reduced them here to three (pastoral, proclamation, and parable), the listener needs to be engaged in a dialogue with the storyteller.

‘It is of the essence of a parable that there is achieved in it a dialegesthai, a conversation, a dialogue between the narrator and the listener.’ It is this that is at the heart of parable and which I covet for all forms of evangelism. In my judgement it gives proper dignity to the listener, significant importance to the narrative shared and real substance to the notion of a dialogue between the person sharing and those listening.

The listener has the liberty to walk away from the message

Such an approach to evangelism is one characterised by risk and development or, if you like, faith and transformation.

It will not seek to control the hearers nor their decisions. It involves freedom of participation, giving the listeners the capacity to think and decide and act for themselves. Those engaged in such evangelistic ministry, of any kind, will ensure that they are with mere words, painting pictures to which the listener can relate. In such a dialogue the listener becomes active in this process, hearing, interpreting, thinking about the words proclaimed, and so engaging in an inner dialogue.

The inner dialogue not only interprets and assimilates the proclaimed word, but also challenges or allows it to challenge present thinking and assumptions. An approach to sharing the good news that embraces these values will be as vulnerable, as creative and dynamic in the hearer and proclaim as were the parables of Jesus.

The evangel will be shared boldly and with conviction and yet without imposing belief. The need of the hearer to decide is not violated, and the need of the evangelist to communicate in not compromised. The risk undertaken by the evangelist is no greater than that undertaken by Jesus in his parables, namely, that the hearers may think, discuss, decide and act for themselves.

A postscript

Evangelism as parable is a way of engaging in evangelism that is entirely consonant with our present culture. A culture that loves story, welcomes dialogue, honours risk and enterprise, is captivated by colour, dance and movement, the thoughtful use of language, the courageous declaration of truths, and the opportunity to be an engaged spectator. Not one standing aloof, but willing to be drawn in to the circle of the dialogue and to engage with the heart of the message. Now the challenge for us and others is how to build on this so that evangelism as parable is not simply confined to an event one evening in Winchester.

Moreover, the missiological task is to apply the learning points from this approach to evangelism to other forms of faith sharing. That becomes the next big challenge.

Howard Mellor is Superintendent Minister in Winchester and a former Principal of Cliff College.
When you hear the term ‘fresh expressions’ being used as a bit of a joke, at least you know it’s arrived! You can hear people talking about proposals for new arrangements in a PCC or Synod as fresh expressions of church admin; or music groups as a fresh expression of organs...

What is obvious is that the language is here to stay. The last few years have established that the Church in the UK has recognised an inescapable truth. Renewal for the Christian community is never simply a matter of doing the same things better, though that is an essential part of it; it’s also about finding what new shapes for our life together are created under the pressure of mission. New wines and new wineskins, you might say; the idea is firmly rooted in the Gospel itself.

The Fresh Expressions initiative has managed to hold together a resolute commitment to new forms and styles with an equally resolute refusal to write off the best of what we have inherited. One of the things I have found most encouraging and positive in all this is the spirit of generosity it has nurtured. It’s always easy to claim that there is one and only one answer to the question of how to make room for new life in the Church.

But this has not been the agenda of Fresh Expressions. It has instead made us ask, 'What is the kind of vitality, imaginative life, integrity and quality of worship that is appropriate in this specific circumstance, with these specific people?' The traditional parish pattern, worked out with flair and commitment, may be completely the right priority to work on in some situations; in others, the actual needs of the people around will suggest new possibilities. And this is probably most often the case when we’re talking about those who live in less traditionally focused communities, those who have never had any experience at all of Church life - and many, perhaps most, of the under-25s.

So Fresh Expressions has encouraged two attitudes that I believe to be vital for a healthy Church. It has helped us to be positive about the variety of ways in which the call of Jesus Christ can be heard and prayed through and thought about; and it has helped us pay real and costly attention to the real questions and the real agenda of those with whom we want to share the Good News.

Certainly this has also meant an encouragement to take some risks. A fair number of new initiatives have flared up briefly and then faltered or dissolved, and this is bound to be painful. But the New Testament and early Christian history already show us plenty of instances where the new life of the gospel community comes to life in unexpected ways, some of them lasting, some transient.

The early Jerusalem community in the Acts of the Apostles...
is marked by an intense commitment to sharing all its material goods and by loyalty to the Temple. But it is not slavishly reproduced in other churches - and, so far as we can tell, it does not survive the scattering of the apostles and the later death of James the Lord’s brother.

Paul in Acts 19 encounters an established Christian group apparently working with a defective understanding of baptism, and he sets out to change its practice and theology. The letters to the churches in Revelation suggest a picture of local churches some of which are expanding or deepening their lives, and some drying up. There is no need to panic at the thought of risk and even at the thought that what we come up with is liable to change drastically or even disappear in the form we know it.

But, to live with risk like this, we need to have a clear and robust understanding of what the Church really is. It is not, in the New Testament, a carefully constructed human society, organising itself in local branches, with members signing up to a constitution. Instead, it is what happens when the news and the presence of Jesus, raised from the dead, impact upon the human scene, drawing people together in a relationship that changes everyone involved, a relationship which means that each person involved with Jesus is now involved with all others who have answered his invitation, in ways that can be painful and demanding but are also life-giving and transforming beyond imagination.

The ‘strength’ of the Church is never anything other than the strength of the presence of the Risen Jesus. And one thing this means is that, once we are convinced that God in Jesus Christ is indeed committed to us and present with us, there is a certain freedom to risk everything except those things that hold us to the truth of his presence - Word and sacrament and the journey into holiness. These will survive, whatever happens to this or that style of worship, this or that bit of local Christian culture, because the presence of Jesus in the community will survive.

Fresh Expressions, I’ve suggested, has helped us see something of this liberating vision. It’s true, from one point of view, that this takes us beyond a concern with denominational identity; and for some this is worrying. Is it really Anglican, or Methodist, or Baptist? What I hope is that, in the next phase of the work of Fresh Expressions, as it continues to enter more fully into the bloodstream of the churches, we start asking instead - of Fresh Expressions, but also of some of our inherited patterns - ‘Is it really Church?’

Is this a place and a community where people are expecting the Risen Jesus to be tangibly at work and the Holy Spirit making a difference? Is this a place and a community where people can begin to see that what makes the Church what it is and holds it together is the sheer strength of God’s promise and invitation through the living Jesus?

You can ask that question without rubbing it or ignoring the precious heritage of witness that our denominations have accumulated. There are deeply traditional churches where the presence of the living Jesus is obvious and there are fashionable new ones where it isn’t. What matters is what I mentioned a little while ago: whether we are really trying to make the connection between what we say about Jesus and what the genuine questions and needs are of the people we are seeking to serve. Generosity and attention, remember: and all of it in the name of the One whose word of judgement and mercy and hope has the power to penetrate into the depth of every human heart and every human culture.

So, as this first phase of Fresh Expressions’ work moves into a new rhythm and style, I thank God that he has helped us turn our eyes back to the heart - and Head - of the Church, so that we see all that we do and say as the believing community hanging on his Word. Generosity and attention - and, undergirding them, gratitude and wonder. I’ll be praying that, in the next round of work and planning, it’ll be this gratitude and wonder that will move and more inform what we do - and that such gratitude will set us all free to rediscover some of what the essence of the Church’s life is, and deliver us from that profoundly tempting and sometimes all-pervading anxiety which so chokes the Good News of Jesus and his resurrection.

Rowan Williams is Archbishop of Canterbury

mixed economy

mixed economy is the annual Journal of Fresh Expressions.

Fresh Expressions is an initiative of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and of the Methodist Church. Our aim is to encourage sustainable fresh expressions of church in every place alongside traditional congregations within a mixed economy of church life.

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One of the most interesting and significant developments in mission in the last five years - since Mike Booker and I wrote *Evangelism - which way now?* - has been the spread of mission action planning. Like most fresh moves of the Spirit, this has not been the result of any national initiative or launch, but appears to be spreading organically from one local church to another, and from one diocese or district to another as mission-minded church leaders meet together to talk, to pray and to share good practice. At the latest count over 2,000 churches and 16 dioceses have now introduced mission action planning and the number grows month by month.

The concept is a simple one, and one that is similar to the improvement strategies increasingly being used by successful schools, hospitals and companies. The difference of course is that, in a church, prayer is central to every stage of the process, seeking both the guidance and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, who is the true Agent of mission.

A good mission action plan (MAP) involves the minister and church council in a four-stage cycle: REVIEW, CHOOSE, PLAN and ACT. This cycle needs to be revisited regularly, so that the MAP is a working document constantly revised, not a blueprint in a file gathering dust.

Having recently moved from being diocesan missioner to being a parish priest again, I am discovering that - even for those familiar with the process - getting a whole church to agree and own a clear vision is a surprisingly difficult task. Churches need clear leadership, but if the vision is to be inclusive and owned by the whole congregation, each church member who is prayerfully listening to God needs a way of being able to input to the process - without having to give up their only free Saturday to attend a parish away day!

This is where the MAP process is proving really helpful. As part of our mission action plan I am currently working on a draft vision statement, outlining the kind of church God might be calling us to become over the next five years. Lots of churches have mission statements, but a vision statement is different and, I believe, more important. A vision statement expresses vision rather than purpose, inspiring people with a vision of where (under God) we might be in a few years’ time. A good vision statement can act as both magnet and compass, drawing people together and pointing in a clear direction.

The origins of mission action planning can be traced back to the arrival of David Hope in London diocese in the early nineties. Faced with a huge and very divided diocese, Bishop David devised Agenda for Action, to establish four agreed mission priorities for the diocese. The staffing and finances of the diocese were then extensively refocused (with the loss of some diocesan boards and councils) to resource these mission priorities at local level. Each deanery and parish was then invited to follow a similar process, and to choose a few realistic targets that they wanted to set themselves in the light of the overall diocesan vision.

When interviewed recently, Hope said he believed that mission action planning contributed significantly to reversing the downward attendance spiral in the diocese - 'It wouldn’t have happened without MAP!’ Hope’s approach is interesting in that he encouraged a two-way dialogue, writing personally to those who had completed MAPs, and producing a report after the first year, feeding back to the parishes what they had said. Acknowledging that some parishes wanted nothing to do with MAP he commented, ‘We didn’t force it - I thought if it was good, it would spread by word of mouth.’

This underlines the value and importance of providing consultants and advisors to help churches to go through the process properly and to keep on doing it. If a church’s MAP is just a vaguely worded wish-list, without any ‘SMART’ objectives, or a collection of competing agendas without any ordering of priorities, or a paper exercise that’s allowed to gather dust, then, sadly, it’s a waste of time.

To look at good examples of parish and diocesan MAPs, visit the website www.church-maps.co.uk, where Mike Chew and Peter Hill have assembled a huge range of MAPs from both local churches and dioceses so that practitioners can learn from one another. To help those wanting to implement mission action planning at local church, district or diocesan level, Mike Chew and I are writing a book, to be published by SPCK in 2009.

Mark Ireland is vicar of All Saints Wellington with Eyton in the diocese of Lichfield, and co-author of ‘Evangelism - Which Way Now?’ (CHP, 2nd edition 2005), and ‘Evangelism in a Spiritual Age’ (CHP, 2005)
The development and understanding of what we mean by mixed economy of church is seen perfectly in Coventry cathedral and how it has been dealing with its duty of care and mission in the 21st century.

It does, of course have a pastoral duty to a wide variety of audiences. We could call them those who tend toward inherited expressions. But there will still be many semi-regular visitors to whom a fresh expression is their best route into the Christian paradigm. Two groups, two labels, have found a place in the flock at Coventry through fresh expressions: Goths and Hoodies. The results have defied the preconceptions attached to the demographic labels.

When it became apparent that groups of Goths (young people who listen to heavy metal music and wear dark clothing) were congregating in the city centre for want of anywhere, the Cathedral moved and found a fertile soil for evangelism.

At first, the cathedral was providing a place for Goths to hang out in safety; but it was soon observed that many of those taking refuge were also beginning to take an interest in church services and the church building, without really connecting. And so now, Wednesday nights, 7.45pm, they come and gather for the ancient Office of Compline, introduced in this form for their use - candles, prayer, silence, the Peace.

Utterly orthodox in its liturgy and theology, but utterly tailored in its specificity and missional context, The Goth Compline is a nuanced mixed internal economy within an expression of church.

Of more recent advent is work with ‘Urban’ youth, aka ‘Hoodies’. Both are horribly misleading labels in themselves: to identify the young people of inner cities as characteristically angry, violent and antisocial is to misrepresent and disenfranchise them; and to associate those qualities with an item of clothing is even more bizarre and tragicomic. (As the owner of several hooded sweatshirts, perhaps I have an interest here!)

But all labels have a root: in this case, one can specially identify those from deprived inner-city areas, affected by family break-up, poorly financed education, and a fractured, crime-plagued community.

So, it seems to me, there can be nothing more in the spirit of the 2,000-year-old, adaptable Body of Christ than for it to find a place for ‘Hoodies’, armed with permanent markers, sketching scenes from the Gospel and writing ‘Jesus Wept!’ on the wall of their place at the Cathedral, before returning to a game of pool or sitting down and talking with their companions in this new community - as, perhaps, the great cathedral bells ring out as they have done in one form or another in this place for nearly a thousand years.

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Owen Edwards is studying theology at Chester

goths in the cathedral

Owen Edwards

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www.freshexpressions.org.uk/mixedeconomy
The Church of England and the Methodist Church have been on a journey towards becoming a mixed economy church over two decades. These are some of the milestones on that journey.

1990

Both churches begin a Decade of Evangelism. The key fruits of the decade are not in the big events and evangelistic campaigns but in the renewal of process evangelism through smaller groups.

1992

Archbishop George Carey establishes Springboard as an initiative to enable evangelism. Over the next 12 years the team lead missions and equip the churches to reach out to those on the edge of faith. The Methodist Conference calls on circuits to consider planting new congregations.

1994

The Church of England publishes the report Breaking New Ground - the first ever General Synod study of church planting. Major church-planting conferences convened by Anglican Church Planting Initiatives continue to resource this agenda.

1996

Church Army establishes The Sheffield Centre, researching evangelism and new ways of being church in response to a growing movement of experiments in new forms of church life for a changing context.

1997

Methodist Church publishes Stopping the Rot: planting new congregations, telling the story of early ventures and giving guidance.

1998

Church Army evangelists are increasingly deployed to these pioneering situations. The Encounters on the Edge series of booklets begins.

2000

Methodist Conference publishes Our Calling and focuses church life and activity around Worship; Learning and Caring; Service and Evangelism.

2002

The Church of England establishes a new working party chaired by Bishop Graham Cray to look at the growing number of new forms of church in development.

2003

Rowan Williams becomes Archbishop of Canterbury and brings to the role a strong commitment to mission and to encouraging these new forms of church as part of a mixed economy of church life and mission.

2004

The Mission-shaped Church report is commended for study by the General Synod - 25,000 copies have now been sold. The term 'fresh expressions of church' enters the vocabulary of the churches. Fresh Expressions is established as a joint Anglican-Methodist initiative to encourage this new movement of mission. Methodist Conference sets a high priority on developing fresh ways of being church.

2005

A growing movement to encourage fresh expressions of church among dioceses and districts. Fresh Expressions website launched with online directory. A growing sense of creative initiative at local level. Recommendations of Mission-shaped Church begin to be implemented.

2006

Guidelines on ordained pioneer ministry agreed by the House of Bishops. mission shaped ministry course launched by Fresh Expressions and other partners. The course is now running in over 20 centres with over 600 students. Second Fresh Expressions DVD published. Fresh Ways working group established by Methodist Conference. Hard Questions tour engages 14 theologians to look at the difficult theological questions raised by fresh expressions of church (now published as Mission-shaped Questions). Share website launched by Church Army and Fresh Expressions as a way of collecting and resourcing good practice.

2008

Bishop’s Mission Orders come onto the statute book for the Church of England as a way of giving legal recognition to fresh expressions of church alongside the parish system. Growing international interest in what the Church of England and the Methodist Church are doing. A growing number of pioneer posts are created in deaneries and circuits to enable fresh expressions of church.

Steven Croft is Archbishops’ Missioner and Leader of the Fresh Expressions team and Bishop-designate of Sheffield.
‘The vision of re:generation’ says Ruth Poch, ‘is to provide a safe environment where people can really explore Christianity, and not feel they are going to be judged or looked down upon for where they are at, or for where they are coming from.’

re:generation is an innovative fresh expression in the Romford Methodist circuit in Essex. The church started in 2004, led by new deacons Ruth and Jamie Poch in their first posts after training at The Queen’s Foundation, Birmingham.

The posting came about because this local Methodist circuit knew that it was struggling to meet the needs of teenagers. The initial plan was for Ruth and Jamie progressively to set up youth work in individual churches across the circuit. But it soon became clear that something else was needed - long-term hands-on work focused on building community in one location.

re:generation seeks to ‘relate to the needs of the emerging generation of Christians and non-Christians today.’ It now involves between 50 and 60 people, mostly in the 13-21 age group - and their involvement is very real. The website (www.regenerationchurch.co.uk) is run by young people in re:generation, and is full of their ideas:

ESC is ‘a group of Christians using graffiti to share the gospel.’ Parkour for Jesus (www.parkourforjesus.co.uk) sees parallels between the skills of le Parkour - moving fast and efficiently through the urban environment - and finding ways to negotiate the obstacles of life. And R-Mail is the church’s news in comic book design.

The focus from the start has been on prayer, discipleship, meeting the needs of the young people, and above all enabling community. ‘The buzz of community’ is key says Ruth.

Interestingly, re:generation is beginning to attract some older adults, usually parents of teenagers involved. There’s now a weekly Bible study for this group called (in the house style) re:juvenate.

Involvement in fresh expressions can be demanding. re:generation has received some strong support within the circuit for this ground-breaking work, but perhaps inevitably has also faced questioning. ‘There was real fear when we began,’ says Ruth, ‘that we would draw young people out of churches, but in reality most of the young people that are in re:generation were already de-churched or unchurched.’

And what about the future? re:generation shares a church building with one of the churches in the circuit, where they have a room that is specifically theirs. ‘We’d love to have a place that is open all week, a place with a very open feel, where people can come and be themselves.’
Briefing:

**Emerging Churches** by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger (SPCK, 2006) is perhaps the best overview of the worldwide emerging church conversation. ‘If the church does not embody its message and life within postmodern culture,’ say Gibbs and Bolger ‘it will become increasingly marginalized.’

**CMS (www.cms-uk.org)** is ‘an evangelistic mission working to see a world transformed by the love of Jesus.’ CMS brings a stimulating and vital global perspective to local mission. CMS has recently moved to Oxford and its excellent resources include a variety of meeting spaces and a comprehensive library of world mission.

**Small Fire (www.smallfire.org)** is an inspiring online record by Steve Collins in pictures of ‘alternative worship’ in action. ‘Environments of startling beauty come and go in a matter of hours,’ says Steve. These pictures suggest the potential and possibility of creative worship.

**Blah (blahonline.wetpaint.com)** is a rolling series of conversations on mission, worship, church and Christianity in today’s rapidly changing culture. Facilitated by CMS, Blah is a stimulating mix of local events, learning days and opportunities to engage with practitioners and authors from around the UK and beyond.

The Fresh Expressions website is updated regularly and could be amongst your browsing favourites: keep in touch with us via www.freshexpressions.org.uk. Podcasts are a regular feature.

**Colossians Remixed: subverting the empire** by Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat (IVP, 2004, published in the UK, 2008) looks again at this New Testament letter and discovers a powerful biblical resource for our time. ‘Colossians is,’ suggest Walsh and Keesmaat ‘a subversive tract for subversive living.’

**Morning bell** is a daily call to prayer sent and received by SMS text or email. The aim is to enable people to begin to practise a monastic-inspired rhythm of prayer wherever they are. Exploring themes from Scripture, wisdom of the saints and lived experience, morning bell rings out early each morning and is available from the pace bene project (www.ianadams.info).

**Reimagining Spiritual Formation: A week in the life of an experimental church** (emergent YS, 2003) by Doug Pagitt and the Solomon’s Porch community is the story of an innovative urban church community in Minneapolis, USA. Told candidly in their own words, it pictures a church whose life and worship spring from the experience and hopes of its people.

The Anglican Franciscan brothers enjoyed something of a boom time in the sixties and seventies, and I was happily caught in the tide. In their new Friary at Alnemouth in Northumberland, novices were encouraged to focus on sharing the established common life.

The traditions were to be learnt and passed on. So when some of the novices asked if they might also meet separately for shared prayer, fear was expressed that this would somehow undermine and break up that coveted life in common.

I learnt that care needed to be taken to maintain the unity. Yet the more we worked simply for unity the more the diversities appeared - and threatened! The trials and errors of the years to date have provided time for us to acknowledge and enjoy the range of expressions within our shared Franciscan vocation, which encourages diversity while cherishing the underlying unity. Inevitably, there have been high points and low points, and a good deal of learning about people and grace and generosity.

One of the blessings of belonging to a religious order is the variety of opportunities and experiences it brings.

To serve on Lindisfarne is one such amazing gift, and especially to connect with the pioneer religious life of those seventh-century saints who built up the Church so effectively. Their legacy to this island remains tangible, yet moulded further by a turbulent history, strong doses of weather, and the development of a strategy of survival by its later inhabitants.

Today, Holy Island opens its causeway to holidaymakers, schools, birdwatchers, walkers, tourists - and pilgrims! Pilgrims also come in many shapes and sizes: in parish groups, as

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**mission and spirituality**

Brother Damian SSF

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Today, Holy Island opens its causeway to holidaymakers, schools, birdwatchers, walkers, tourists - and pilgrims! Pilgrims also come in many shapes and sizes: in parish groups, as
retreatants, completing St Cuthbert’s Way or commencing St Oswald’s Way.

The sight of a procession of coaches crossing the causeway in convoy is at times alarming. And, warns Ian Bradley, the writer and broadcaster, we are likely to become even more popular as the years go by.

What an opportunity, but it is daunting. Our numbers are small, just over a hundred actually live on the island. The community supports three hotels, three church centres, two modest stores with a sub-post-office and some B&Bs. Our school has eight children under nine years of age.

The ancient Church of St Mary must be there for its parishioners. Yet how do the locals make real their belonging while visitors constantly outnumber them? The tendency for them has been to look back and claim their memories rather than look forward with expectation. Meanwhile, pilgrims or groups of visitors arrive with high hopes of refreshment and renewal, of identifying with the early saints, seeking for a place to deposit their personal stresses and tensions, and to offer praise and intercession.

The key factor from my perspective is partnership - that is, to allow the creative flow of the whole community to offer its distinct contributions within one basic purpose, spelt out for me when I was inducted as Vicar: ‘let the Island speak to them.’ In other words, to facilitate and provide the hospitality for ‘God to speak to them.’

So that may include a reflective walk round the harbour, a chance to sit in the Gospel Garden and write a postcard, a nice cream tea in a café, a chance to see the Priory ruins and hopefully find some solace, challenge or prayerful engagement in one of the churches.

People in the end do need encouragement to become still, even when the incentives are high. So people can find welcome and prayer cards, candles, and intercession slips to pin on the prayer board, all of which will hopefully assist the spirit to engage and cause a spark of response. Quite often it is the lady arranging flowers who finds herself the most effective pastor to a visitor.

I often find myself claiming that life on Lindisfarne is unique with the ebb and flow of its tides. As such, nature offers, free of charge, the provision of busy and slack times in each day, giving its rhythm for activity and then contemplation.

Yet it throws in an obvious challenge to all identifiable communities, religious and secular: to seek the riches of diversity within the unity of the whole; to recognise the partnership opportunities that exist to create the unity; and to embrace these brothers and sisters for Christ’s sake; to be open to others who come with their own hopes and fears; and to underpin the whole through the regular offering of the prayer of the church in continuity with the Saints who have gone before us.

This is a story in two parts. It’s not an account of a real situation but a story that highlights some common mistakes in establishing a fresh expression of church, and some healthy principles. See how many mistakes you can spot in the first half and how many good principles you would want to underline in the second.

**case study**

Mandy and Mike belong to a healthy congregation in a traditional church in a large village. The regular Sunday morning service attracts over 40 people, who are mainly over 50. There is little connection between the congregation and young families in the village.

Mandy and Mike recently moved into the area. They were previously members of a large charismatic church in a large city. They are very attracted to the idea of starting a fresh expression of church. For many years, Mandy has wanted to be a worship leader.

There is no opportunity for a music group in the Sunday morning service so this could be the way forward.

The vicar is not unsympathetic. He has read a little about fresh expressions of church and likes what he sees on the DVD and the Fresh Expressions website. A small group from the parish attend a Fresh Expressions vision day but no other training is yet available.

The couple begins to meet regularly with three other people who volunteer to help and become part of the core team.

The group’s starting point is that it may be a good way forward to begin a new Sunday evening service on a regular basis and in a charismatic style in Mike and Mandy’s house. They decide to test this idea out on various groups. The vicar is pleased that something new is happening but is extremely preoccupied at present with a dispute over buildings in one of his other churches, so leaves the new venture well alone.

The PCC grumbles a bit but can find no basic objection if this is what fresh expressions are all about. However, one person does ask whether the group has carried out a proper research and a mission audit. Who are the people the group is intending to connect with? The group agrees to do this but the pressure is building to start to
gather for worship and prayer and so the fresh expression begins initially as a prayer meeting for those who want to come and support the project on Sunday evenings at Mike and Mandy’s home.

Three months later a group of around 12 is meeting in Mike and Mandy’s house. They enjoy their worship and fellowship together and once a fortnight gather for a meal. Without exception they are all existing members of the Anglican or Methodist churches in the village. They find a lot of the group’s time is taken up with supporting the pastoral needs of two or three members of the group. Mike reports to the next PCC meeting that all is going well - they have seen many answers to prayer - but they haven’t yet had time to do the mission audit work.

Six months later and the numbers in the group have grown to 15. The house is now quite crowded on Sunday evenings. There is a sense of great excitement around the new group. The food is good and a real community is forming. Christians from other churches are wanting to find out more about what is happening so most weeks there are some visitors to the small group. Mike and Mandy are now finding their workload is growing, pastoring the new group and liaising with the visitors. Somehow the mission audit work has been postponed again.

Because their home is getting quite full, Mike and Mandy decide, without consultation with the original team, that it would be good to move the event into the nearby school. This would create lots of space for growth. After some initial hesitation and one resignation the group owns the idea and begins to work towards it. Publicity is printed and put up around the village. A speaker is invited from 30 miles away. At the next PCC meeting there is real conflict bubbling up. Why wasn’t there more consultation?

Mike replies that this is the way you have to do things in fresh expressions of church. Someone comments back that there seems to be a bit of an ‘us and them’ situation developing. Would it be good to have some sort of social event or conversation to draw the different communities together? Nothing happens.

The new public service opens for business on a fine Sunday evening in October: Brave Adventure Church. Thirty people come along. They are made up of the original group; the visitors who have been coming to learn; one or two members of the PCC and a couple of people from the village who have heard about it from the posters. There is a real sense of occasion. The visiting speaker is excellent. The doubters in the PCC adopt the Gamaliel position and wait to see what happens.

At this point in the process, Mike and Mandy come under real pressure. Mandy’s mother, who lives 60 miles away, contracts a serious illness. Mike passes through an extremely demanding time at work. At exactly the same time, the work of sustain-

Numbers at this event drop as the evenings close in and the weather gets colder. The PCC has been to look and now stays away. The visitors no longer come. Numbers dwindle to the original group of a dozen or so who are so busy putting out chairs and setting up the hall that they no longer have time to talk and pray. There is an attempt to organise a community carol service but it seems the people in the village prefer the Christingle at the church.

In January, Mike and Mandy take the decision that the group may as well move back into their house. They are beginning to feel unsupported by the PCC and also that some of the members of the original group are not taking on responsibility for what should be happening. They are also very tired. Things limp along for a while longer. However, by Easter, the couple have decided that the group needs a break. The experiment has come to an end.

Over the summer months, the diocesan missiioner hears what has happened to the Brave Adventure and comes to visit. She spends time with Mandy and Mike, with the original group, with the vicar and the PCC. During the discussions there is a lot of affirmation for the courage and faith of the original group but also some honest owning up to key mistakes. It is also very clear that the original question has not gone away: how will the existing churches in the village connect with a new generation?

The missioner returns for a second meeting three weeks later and discovers that there is an appetite to begin again and a new openness and willingness to learn lessons together. The vicar and PCC agree to establish a project team to work together to explore a fresh expression of church. Mike and Mandy are appointed as team leaders. One of the PCC is appointed to the group specifically to look after communication with the wider church. Every six weeks the vicar meets Mike and Mandy to review progress. Sue, the missioner, agrees to act as mentor to the new team. The whole group begins to engage with Share (a guide to fresh expressions of church, www.sharetheguide.org) and one joins the Share community and takes particular responsibility for checking the group’s progress against the experience of others recorded there.
One of the conditions set by the PCC for something new beginning is that nothing should happen publicly for about six months and until there has been a great deal of prayer and research by the new team. Their second condition is that the team enrols in the mission shaped ministry course that begins in the diocese next September. Mike and Mandy are particularly careful about selecting the new team: they can no longer accept volunteers but are clear that only people with the time to give, the calling and the right gifts can work with them at this stage.

The new team meets together once a fortnight to pray and to plan. This seems about right in the first few months. In the initial few months they get to know one another and share a growing vision for connecting with the young families. They get hold of the booklet, listening for mission, and begin to work through a five-stage process of mission audit. The first part of every meeting is worship and prayer together. The second is very practical as maps are drawn and people report back on their different bits of research. A key meeting takes place with the local Methodist minister and, after all appropriate meetings and consultations, the possibility for the fresh expression is jointly owned by both the circuit and the deanery. Two Methodist church members join the team. There is regular reporting back to the two church councils.

This process of building foundations continues through the first months of the mission shaped ministry course. The group gradually comes to realise that the primary school is the most likely focus for mission. Mike and Mandy’s children attend the school and they become aware that there are a number of families who would welcome a chance for their children to engage with Christian teaching. However, there is no provision at the church and Sunday mornings are not a good time for families to attend. The head teacher is keen to build church-community links and welcomes the team’s practical involvement in a number of fund raising events including a highly successful barn dance and fashion show held in the school hall. Plans are forming to begin a mixed-gender village cub pack (there are very few local amenities for children) and two members of the team have agreed to lead this. An end of term school carol service is held in the parish church.

In February, Mark and Mandy present a report to the Church Councils on their work so far and also the outlines of a plan for an all-age fresh expression of church meeting initially once a fortnight on school premises in the early evening and supported by both churches. The Church Councils are engaged, ask questions and are fully supportive. They both contribute to the start-up budget, which will cover a hire fee for the premises and some equipment. The team also receives a grant from the diocesan mission fund. The fresh expression will be based around craft activities followed by a meal together and an act of worship with teaching in smaller groups. It will run initially for the summer term and will then be reviewed.

Through the set-up period the team has continued to learn from the MSM course. As that draws to a close they become part of an ongoing learning and support network with Sue, the missioner, as convenor. Mandy has felt affirmed in her own growth and ministry through this period and is exploring the possibility of Reader ministry linked to the fresh expression of church.

Shortly after Easter as the schools return for the summer term, the new venture is launched in a low-key way. There is excellent publicity to the school community but the two congregations are specifically told not to attend over the first few sessions and there is no publicity outside the village. There are lots of mistakes in the first three or four meetings and much to learn. It is essential that the team gathers after every event and reviews what is happening. Input from Sue as mentor and support from the vicar are both key. Over the course of the first few weeks numbers attending average 30 people - half of them children.

The summer holidays provide a much needed break to reflect on progress to date and learn lessons. The Church Councils affirm the fresh expression as a way forward and agree to resource it for a further year. The team is strengthened with people with the gifts needed for this stage. Plans are laid for an Emmaus nurture course for parents in the late autumn running fortnightly and alternating with the fresh expression. A good foundation has been laid for the future.

Steven Croft is Archbishops’ Missioner and Team Leader of Fresh Expressions and Bishop-designate of Sheffield.
The Net in Huddersfield has changed both leader and demographic since its launch in 1999. The challenge facing this pioneering network church today is how to sustain a core community whilst continuing to look outwards.

Current incumbent, Nick Haigh, arrived as leader of The Net in 2006, replacing Dave Male, whose original vision helped bring the church into being. Nick had worked with Dave whilst in training and was familiar with the vision and the model. The task ahead of him was to continue to reach unchurched 20 and 30 somethings. This included establishing a town centre venue. The Net now meets on Sunday mornings at the National Children’s Centre and this fixture has seen a welcome increase in attendance by students.

Growth in numbers, however, does not mean growth overall. The Net’s initial core was made up largely of professionals who were able to support the church financially. As a new venture, The Net’s share (annual contribution) to the Wakefield Diocese was low. Consequently, resources were available for a ministry that employed a youth worker and children’s worker.

Only a few of the original team are still around. ‘The nature of a network church is that it gathers the network-minded, those who are not geographically based for a length of time,’ explains Nick. ‘It’s a very scattered, diverse community and there’s a critique perhaps needed there. The Church has responded to a network-based society but there are inbuilt flaws to that.’

Current members of The Net are drawn from the student population and lower-earning workers. Meanwhile, its diocesan share has increased. ‘A healthy church is self-sustaining and needs a sense of sacrificial giving,’ Nick believes. An early principle of the church was no collection plate. Now a gift box is present at every meeting.

This change in practice is no distraction from a continued focus on discipleship. On arrival, Nick spent several months talking one to one with members and discovered a steadfast commitment to the church that did not necessarily take on board the need for a shared life of faith.

The geographical spread of members who might work in Bradford, live in Holmfirth and worship in Huddersfield could be seen as prohibitive to this, but a larger question arising from the nature of networks might also be responsible. If network churches make room for the competition with work and leisure, are they suggesting that sharing with a community of faith is only as important as any other activity?

The Net’s response is to increase its output. Hence the addition of a second venue, an art gallery space on a Sunday afternoon that includes a shared meal every week to which members are inviting their friends. The vision is to have not one large gathering but many smaller groups that meet for a large celebration once a month.

‘The challenge is to deepen church life and the life of the church community, to keep the misssional aspect and to enable the community to keep reaching out,’ explains Nick. ‘My reflection on the Acts church is that the deep koinonia gave witness to those around them.’ The Net’s contemporary vision of forming new relationships is both true to its original heart as well as its persistent key challenge.

exciting developments
in Huddersfield

‘Network churches have perhaps a lower size threshold,’ suggests member of The Net’s advisory group, George Lings. ‘Nick has perceived that though The Net’s congregations are tiny, different tiny congregations are the way forward.’ Archdeacon to The Net, Robert Freeman, agrees.

‘Nick has made a good transition,’ he says. ‘We have someone who is also a pioneer at heart and who has enabled The Net to look again at why it exists.’ The tendency would be to settle and drift back to being a gathered church instead of a networked missional community.

‘These communities exist to evangelise and multiply. I think that’s what’s been healthy, that multiplication has arisen.’ Yet he agrees that financial implications do affect The Net’s mission ‘at a time when all dioceses are facing very tough decisions about sustainability and finance’. It can no longer ‘be ringfenced and protected’ but must make its case along with every other church in the diocese.
‘The mixed economy means that different expressions of church are going to have to put their own case for the limited resources available,’ Robert suggests.

George Lings believes, however, that there is still a firm case for supporting The Net.

‘Though we don’t know how all networks work, some are too ephemeral to know, in a town like Huddersfield, a diocese needs to follow through on the idea of a mixed economy, and that has financial implications,’ he says. ‘To support one Net and see how it works is not an undue risk. A one in 200 risk doesn’t seem irresponsible in the slightest.’

The Net’s challenges centre around sustainability. Its answers seem to lie in holding to its purpose as it seeks to be a church for the unchurched within the Anglican family.

Emma Garrow is a freelance writer

Nailsea has no cinema but it does have people who enjoy films. A group of eight of us from the Anglican and Methodist churches in the area got together to plan and then launch Film Club Extra in October 2007.

The first film shown was the gritty and realistic prison drama, The Shawshank Redemption, which like all the subsequent films has the criterion of being a quality mainstream entertaining film but with themes that we felt overlapped with the good news of Jesus. By choosing popular secular films as the basis of the club rather than those that have a more overt Christian message, we were trying to overcome the sacred/secular divide that has bedevilled so much of church life.

In other words it’s an incarnational approach to mission that looks for the presence and activity of God within every part of his creative world.

Advertising was done through articles in the local press and posters in the town centre. There were also leaflets for local churches, community centres, and a neighbouring film club. Normal attendance so far has been between 30 and 50 people.

Seats are arranged in groups of five to encourage some mixing with others and to prepare the way for the discussions that immediately follow the film after a short comfort break. A series of open-ended questions encouraged everyone to first share their reactions to the film, and then to consider the overall ‘message’ of the film in terms of what we have seen as the ‘spiritual’ issues.

The groups have not needed any other leadership or direction. After 20-25 minutes the discussions are drawn to a close and the leader for the night shares their final thoughts, in which with examples drawn from the film, they ask deeper questions about the purpose and meaning of daily life and then link this in with a Christian approach. These final thoughts can be read in full in the archive section of our website (www.nailseafreshexpressions.blogspot.com).

There is no doubt that Film Club Extra is beginning where people are and enabling the good news of Jesus to be presented in new ways and to a new group of people. Over the coming months and years the challenge will be to find ways to add to this ‘learning’ starting point the other key aspects of the Methodist ‘Our Calling’ vision of what it means to be church, and to grow leadership from within the club to carry the work forward.

David Bagwell is a Methodist minister in the Gordano Valley Circuit of the Bristol District shortly to move to Camborne in Cornwall.

www.freshexpressions.org.uk/mixedeconomy
international perspectives and developments

Ian Adams

‘An eco-tone,’ explains writer, speaker and pioneering emerging church leader Brian McLaren (www.brianmclaren.net) ‘is the meeting place, the overlapping point, the boundary, between different cultures.’ And Fresh Expressions, he says, is playing a vital role as an eco-tone. ‘It faces inward to the institution and outward to the emerging culture.’

Brian describes himself as, ‘an evangelist for Fresh Expressions in the USA, where currently it has almost no exposure at the upper echelons of the church’.

At local level in the USA there are various examples of groups, projects and communities that have found some of their inspiration through contact with fresh expressions of church in the UK.

Scott Bader-Saye from Peace-meal in Pennsylvania (www.peacemealcommunity.org) says that Fresh Expressions has been a great help in encouraging him and his colleagues to start something new within traditional church. Through exploring Fresh Expressions online he discovered a close connection to what was happening in the UK. ‘Our goal was to create a new embodiment of church within the traditional structures and liturgical sensibility of the Episcopal Church. I have continued to visit the Fresh Expressions site to get ideas about what other communities are doing.’

Jason Bishop from a group called The Journey, in Texas, (www.journeylubbock.org) says that the Share website (www.sharetheguide.org) has been a valuable source of inspiration. ‘Much of what is shared there keeps me hoping and inspired for the American Church. Some of the events that we’ve implemented here at The Journey share core principles with the things we’ve read on the sites.’

There’s further exciting evidence in Canada of the way in which Fresh Expressions has been able to encourage thinking and action beyond the UK. The Anglican Church there has recently announced the setting up of Fresh Expressions Canada, to be led by Anglican priest and leader of Emerge in Montreal (www.emergemontreal.com), Nick Brotherwood.

John Bowen of Wycliffe College, Toronto is a key figure in the process of setting up Fresh Expressions Canada. He suggests some potential priorities for this new venture:

He identifies the research done by Fresh Expressions into what is going on religiously and spiritually in Britain as providing a vital foundation for the start of new fresh expressions. ‘What are the Canadian realities?’ he asks. ‘If Fresh Expressions is a response to a changing culture, we have to know how Canadian culture is changing.’

Fresh Expressions has been able to encourage thinking and action beyond the UK

John also sees a need for Fresh Expressions Canada to network people who are either already engaged in fresh expressions of church, or would like to become involved. vision days (using Fresh Expressions materials) have already begun and the plan is to offer this resource more widely. ‘This is an exciting development, and many people have a sense that, in the midst of all the troubles in the Anglican Church, the Holy Spirit is still at work.’

Ian Adams is a leader of mayBe (a fresh expression in the Diocese of Oxford,) a mentor, guide and writer on themes of emerging church and simple, creative and prayerful living: www.ianadams.info

There is also significant and growing interest in developing fresh expressions of church in Australia, and much of northern Europe.

Brian McLaren
‘letting go’ and ‘trying on’
Andrew Roberts and Rachel Matthews

Across the country, in pubs, schools, churches and cathedrals over 4,000 Christians have participated in a vision day. The highly interactive days introduce people to the vision and values of fresh expressions through a rich mix of worship and prayer, storytelling and interviews, presentations, discussions and reflection.

The key Fresh Expressions values of hospitality and community are modelled with participants seated café style and sharing food at regular intervals.

Fresh expressions are all about incarnational mission; about ‘the Word becoming flesh and blood and moving into the neighbourhood’.

‘today I learnt that “fresh expressions of church” is not just the latest buzz word.
I see its impact.’

vision days begin with participants letting go of something precious to them and trying on something precious that belongs to someone else. Creative ‘character’ cards are used to help people imagine different forms of church for different cultures. Minds and hearts are opened to the needs of others. Participants engage in four key sections:

- a celebration of what is happening and why it is important;
- the core values of fresh expressions and how they form;
- optional seminars on a range of topics;
- reflection on God’s call and guidance on help and resources.

vision day feedback has been extremely positive, with participants going on to engage seriously with mission-shaped thinking, courses or projects. After a day in a primary school on a large council estate in Kings Norton, Bill Anderson, the Chair of the Birmingham Methodist District said:

‘In a church where our mission intention is much more clearly on the agenda than it has been, days like this scratch where we are itching and give us the encouragement to have a go.’

Alan Smith, the Bishop of Shrewsbury, was similarly enthusiastic after a day in Oswestry:

‘Our rural Fresh Expressions day was so encouraging both because of the great interest from rural churchgoers but also because we heard of so many exciting and innovative things already going on. We should have more of these vision days.’

The Bishop’s wish has come true and details of forthcoming vision days can be found at www.freshexpressions.org.uk/vision. If you would like to organise a day in your area Fresh Expressions will be delighted to provide presenters and work with you in organising a day. We recommend that you:

- contact Rachel Matthews for a full information pack rachel.matthews@freshexpressions.org.uk;
- get a small ecumenical organising group together (minimum level Circuit/Deanery) and choose a date;
- allow six months to plan and prepare.

Speaking after the Westminster vision day, the then Methodist President, Martyn Atkins, said: ‘Vision is incredibly important’.

Rachel Matthews is Fresh Expressions Events Administrator
Andrew Roberts is Director of Training of Fresh Expressions.

www.freshexpressions.org.uk/mixedeconomy
The importance of philanthropy in establishing new ventures has long been understood across the wider charitable sector, yet the crucial role finance has to play in enabling mission is often overlooked. This article seeks to explore how funding streams can enable, rather than inhibit, the future sustainability of mission initiatives.

There is a danger that innovative, cutting edge mission projects maintain a very traditional approach to handling issues of money and finance; only considering them when funds are running out, and the funding need is pressing. However, the application of some simple principles can provide a platform for sustainable growth and health.

1. Focus on revenue three years before you need it

Many projects start with a capital injection sufficient for a number of years’ running costs, but don’t start creating sustainable revenue streams until it’s too late. It takes time to develop and nurture revenue streams whether you’re in business, managing a charity or running a mission initiative.

Unless your ongoing revenue requirements are minimal, you will need two or three years to nurture sufficient regular income. This is illustrated in Fig 1. The two charts show the same amount of capital investment, but the one on the right is spread stepwise over five years, giving time to grow the necessary revenue for ongoing running costs. Note that in doing so, there is some surplus capital that can be spread into years 4 and 5, to cushion the revenue need.

![Fig. 1](image-url)

2. Share the vision with those who might fund it

It is well known by fundraisers that whilst donors are prepared to fund projects generously, they will fund only those that excite them and in which they can see a value. There is no shortage of competing calls upon a philanthropist’s purse. Potential donors are both those who will be actively involved in your project and those who will not, and it is advisable to think widely when developing a list of potential donors.

Most external supporters will provide capital funding, either as a one-off gift, or regular gifts over a limited period. They may renew their gift for a further period, but many won’t. Keep communication open, and update them on progress.

Conversely, supporters who are actively involved with your project are much more likely to offer an open-ended commitment to give regularly. Their giving becomes part of the revenue funding needed for ongoing sustainability. This underscores the importance of encouraging those who are involved not only to give their time and skills, but to commit financially as well.

3. If regular giving is required to sustain your fresh expression, teach it as part of discipleship

There’s a natural tendency to shy away from talking about money in the life of any church; and even more so in a mission environment. Yet it is vital that we talk about money early, and as a routine part of church life.

The important thing is not to focus on money for the project first, but rather to teach broader money topics as an essential part of discipleship. Issues such as handling consumerism, managing debt, ethical spending, are practical worldly issues, and a distinctive Christian view can underscore the relevance that the Christian faith has to issues of life and lifestyle. Woven into a broader diet, giving to support mission can be introduced naturally.

4. Plan on a rolling three-year basis. (At least!)

When focusing on mission there can be a tendency to think and plan short term - the next few months offer quite enough challenges, and energy and focus can be drawn to navigating these successfully. Planning finances needs to be much longer term, and a three-year planning horizon minimises the risk of being caught by surprise when it’s too late to correct the issue easily. The budget for the current year should be fairly detailed, ensuring that money is spent where you want it to be. The longer-term planning horizon will be less definitive, but if potential developments can be anticipated, strategies to manage the financial impact of these can start to be developed.
5. Make wise decisions on buildings and people

Decisions on buildings and people are the two key areas to think and pray through. These are undoubtedly the areas of major cost in a project, but also the areas that can have a significant impact on success or failure in mission terms. Alternative resourcing strategies carry huge financial implications; stipended/salaried, part-time, tent-making or purely using volunteers, will make very different financial demands on the project. Decisions on property - purchasing, leasing, renting or hiring - will also have major financial implications.

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released for something new

Norman Ivison

The term ‘pioneer minister’ can raise the hackles of those who like things precise and organised, especially if they perceived ‘mavericks’ are going to operate in a mixed economy church and therefore be inescapable. But over the last few months, as I have travelled the country filming the latest Fresh Expressions’ DVD, meeting ordained pioneer ministers in training and ordained pioneer ministers in context, I have been constantly surprised and impressed.

These cowboys and cowgirls, as Mike Pilavachi calls them, really are working on the margins, with people not normally on the radar of our churches. They are working with wisdom, skill and sensitivity. At the same time, they are affirming the need for traditional congregations and clergy but are glad to be released for something new.

Senior selection secretary Stephen Ferns is also a convert. He says that, like many others, he had some hesitations about this new emphasis of ministry, until he met the candidates. He found them ‘dynamic, engaging and exciting’ and he realised that often men and women like this were not being attracted by the church. Archbishop John Sentamu sees pioneers as exemplars of Jesus. Like him they stand where human need and God’s love intersect, always loitering with intent.

Some particular filming days stand out. I remember the chilly evening spent on wasteland near Horningsea, and the interview with pioneer Ben Norton. His XY church is aiming to form Christian community around activities for men, such as survival camping. The later discussion on natural disasters, in a Bridlington pub, was a more enticing photo opportunity!

Then there were Annie Kirke and Pete Hughes at St Mary’s Bryanston Square, just south of Marylebone. They are training in situ, and plan to church plant in the Diocese of London. Unlike most of us who remember what it was like to be a green curate, they will hit the ground running. Already Pete is in discussion about where his new church will be and who will form the team to help lead it.

Summary

Lots of thought, research, prayer and hard work goes into new mission initiatives, yet the sustainability of such new expressions of mission and church will be at least partially governed by establishing sustainable revenue streams. This needs similar thought, research and prayer throughout the life of the project.

John Preston is National Stewardship and Resources Officer for the Church of England.

The question in my mind is, though, will ordained pioneer ministers deliver in ways that perhaps worker priests and ordained local ministers and ministers in secular employment didn’t quite? Will they really make a difference to the way we do mission and ministry in the Church of England? Like Stephen Fern, I am a convert. I am sure they will.

Amy Orr-Ewing, a Christian apologist working for the Zacharias Trust, puts it well. For her, ordained pioneer ministry is not yet another top-down initiative but is coming from the grass roots, coming from the cutting edge of mission in Britain today. And that means that our old stereotypes of what a vicar is do not have to be what ministry is like any more. Buy the DVD and accompanying booklet and decide if you agree.

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www.freshexpressions.org.uk/mixedeconomy
The Share website, from Fresh Expressions and Church Army (www.sharetheguide.org), is a means by which we can learn together about fresh expressions. It contains a guide to good practice, and answers to questions that people are asking. So far, there are over 40 questions to browse (www.sharetheguide.org/questions). Here are some examples.

What is a fresh expression?

The definition of a fresh expression of church 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’.

Currently we think this is the most helpful definition:

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

- It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples.

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

No. Alongside fresh expressions is ‘inherited church’. Inherited churches are what exist already. Fresh expressions are new or different forms of church that connect with people who are not reached by inherited churches.

There is still plenty of life in inherited forms of church. Traditional does not necessarily equal stale. Many inherited churches are full of vitality and growing. Our aim is not to grow fresh expressions instead of inherited churches but alongside them: a mixed economy. (See ‘fresh expressions and a mixed economy church’ - www.sharetheguide.org/section1/1/mixedeconomy)

Are fresh expressions really church?

Fresh expressions can grow into mature church and some do that more quickly than others.

What happens when people gather round Jesus has been described in Mission-shaped Church in terms of four dimensions:

- UP (in worship to God);
- IN (in fellowship with one another);
- OUT (in mission to the world); and
- OF (belonging to the whole church throughout the world and through time).

These correspond to the four historic marks of the Church in the Nicene Creed: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. (See ‘Are fresh expressions proper church?’ - www.sharetheguide.org/section1/4)

How might we start a fresh expression?

It is really important to start by listening to the community or network you want to reach. You might literally walk the streets and listen to what people have to say, invite a group to a pub for a meal and ask them what church might look like for them, or get on the internet and do statistical research. (See ‘How might we start a fresh expression?’ - www.sharetheguide.org/section2)

A fresh expressions journey might start as Christians serve their area or network, a community then begins to form, evangelism leads to disciple-making and eventually a culturally relevant form of church emerges. (See ‘How do fresh expressions develop?’ - www.sharetheguide.org/section1/5)
What part do the sacraments play in fresh expressions?

As in inherited church, fresh expressions see baptism and Holy Communion as central to being part of the universal Church.

The many forms of fresh expressions have a variety of approaches to the celebration of Holy Communion. For some in the catholic tradition this sacrament will be central to their worship. For others, the leaders may have discerned that communion is not yet appropri- piate, or conversely, just right for the people they seek to reach. The issue of administration affects the approach of many lay-led fresh expressions, and creative ways of addressing this are a part of many leaders’ work. (See ‘The UP dimension of church’ - www.sharetheguide.org/section1/4/up)

It is important to be faithful to the tradition of the denomination or stream to which the fresh expression is affiliated, while seeking ways to express that tradition in the culture the fresh expression is called to serve.

Mike Moynagh and Andrew Wooding edit the Share website and encourage learning networks among fresh expressions practitioners.

little fishes
Rachel Matthews

As a mum with a little toddler, it’s difficult at times to find your spiritual food. We are so busy being a Martha, doing our very best for Jesus, that we often neglect the importance of spending time with him... I find church can be a challenge (my little boy James often wants to talk about fire engines during the Lord’s Prayer). And if you are blessed enough to have a house group, being able to go is dependent on your child’s sleeping patterns... and I’m writing this, as somebody with faith. How much harder is it to be fed spiritually, if you don’t have a faith to begin with?

At Cartway Church (URC & Methodist) they are tackling this problem and offering something for both mums and their tots once a month called ‘Little Fishes’. Cartway Church is tucked away in Bridgnorth and through its toddler group the church has indirect contact with over 60 families in the area.

In 2007 a number of people who were anxious to extend children’s work within the church squashed together in a lounge to watch expressions: the dvd - 1: stories of church for a changing culture and began to talk about what they might do. After some weeks of dreaming, reflecting and praying, Little Fishes was born.

‘Let the children come to me. Don’t stop them! The kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children.’
Mark 10.14, NLT

Little Fishes is open to parents/caregivers and their toddlers and meets on the second Friday of every month from 11am till 1pm. Tickets are offered to families attending toddler group and at the moment there are about ten families who attend regularly.

I took my toddler James to one of the sessions and was welcomed warmly and lovingly into the group. As the session started with a story and a song, it was clear that this was a Christian environment and that God’s love for the children was to be acknowledged and understood. There was a variety of activities, which had all been prayerfully planned and related to the day’s theme.

engaging toddlers and mums in Bridgnorth

We gathered later in the church, to listen to a Bible story, sing and join together in prayer.

I was astonished during my time with the group, having been fed so well spiritually, to return to the downstairs room and be offered food (quite literally) for both myself and James. The fresh expressions values of hospitality and table fellowship were powerfully present.

The surfaces were cleared, the painting and mess was tidied away and in front of us was a beautifully cooked meal for the children and sandwiches for the mums. This provided another opportunity to build relationships and for everyone to reflect openly on the theme of the day. James and I had a wonderful morning. It was heartening to receive God’s word and love through the leaders there, without the need to do anything in return. This was truly grace in action.

The challenge for Ruth Cole and her team is a continuing one - as the children grow up and go on to nursery, the team is keen to maintain the contact it has established. It’s a difficult challenge and life is so incredibly busy, but with such an open heart and open door, I believe that the links that have been so lovingly made won’t break easily.

I know I’m hoping to return soon!

Rachel Matthews is part-time Fresh Expressions Events Administrator and full-time mum.
Gareth played a key role in the founding of fresh expression Tubestation (www.tubestation.org) in an old chapel near the surfers’ beach of Polzeath in north Cornwall. He is now beginning a new fresh expression on the south side of Cornwall. The aim is to re-ignite church life in a rural area where many churches have closed.

The Roseland Peninsula is Cornwall in miniature: long and narrow, with vast wealth and considerable poverty, and an economy based on agriculture and tourism. Traditional established religion is still around, but the Methodist Church has sold all its buildings on the peninsula. This was not a strategic decision but the result of a slow decline in membership over many decades.

‘The church,’ says Gareth, ‘has a rich local heritage, and much public goodwill, but is at a crossroads.’ In recognition of this the Truro Methodist Circuit decided to create the new position to which Gareth has been appointed. The aim is ambitious: ‘to do something new, not to repeat what has gone before, but to create a fresh expression rooted in the area and its people’.

Gareth has a threefold strategy for the first phase of this new project:

- **New places**: ‘I want to discover the potential places we can use. Probably people’s homes to begin with but this may eventually become public places: pubs, clubs, community halls. I need to become a user of some of these new places, to become a consumer, to become known.’

- **New people**: ‘Fresh expressions are developed out of relationships and need plenty of contact to make them successful. I want to get to know people, and I’m a great believer in getting to know people over coffee.’

- **New skills**: ‘There are ways of holding this project together that need me to develop some skills I do not yet have. An effective and dynamic website could be crucial, so I am planning to take a web design course.’

Looking to the future, Gareth can imagine a network of small groups, ‘where people are beginning to have the confidence to talk with their neighbours about Christ because these are the people who we have coffee with. When they ask us to pray with them it will be as natural as borrowing sugar.’

Gareth sees the potential of small groups. ‘I think this is the real hope for the project. It’s my conviction that people discover Jesus in the intimacy of a small group. That encounter gives people new confidence. Conversely if we don’t learn how to be comfortable in a small group we will never be able to engage fully in mission.’

‘Fresh expressions are developed out of relationships,’ says pioneering Methodist minister Gareth Hill, ‘and need plenty of contact to make them successful.’

At the moment the shorthand name for these projected small groups is cell - but Gareth says that, ‘we may need to discover a new name for cell to suit our location.’ It’s not yet clear whether these might be cross-generational groups, or whether each small group will have a particular focus, but Gareth is happy to let the details emerge in God’s care.

‘It is,’ he says, ‘a step into the unknown, but a very exciting one.’
There is a somewhat scurrilous website that suggests that the only appropriate Catholic response to any pastoral, spiritual or social problem is to celebrate a Mass. Or, as I’ve heard it described - have whatever you like, but it’s chips with everything. All in all, it doesn’t sound like the sort of menu that is likely suddenly to include the exotic and experimental dishes on the menu of fresh expressions.

And let’s be honest, many of the new dishes have been put on the table by individuals and groups coming from the evangelical and charismatic end of the Church. Maybe exactly for that reason, those within the Catholic tradition have often regarded fresh expressions with a certain amount of suspicion. But that is beginning to change.

Fresh expressions of church are important as part of the mission of the whole Church, of all traditions and equally, all parts of the Church have something distinctive to bring to the task of expressing the gospel afresh. The problems the Church is facing in a rapidly changing culture are common to all.

Where I am in ministry, there is a clear need for the ‘mixed economy’ that has been commended as the context for fresh expressions. We are deeply traditional: our main service is a Sung Eucharist, and we sing BCP Mattins and Evensong every Sunday. They are perhaps surprisingly effective.

One evening, a young couple turned up for Evensong. On talking to them afterwards, it transpired that one of them at least had been attending a large charismatic fellowship in central London. Oh, how I wished that our worship had been something that she could have connected with! And that was that, I thought. Then they turned up next week, and it transpired that they had been looking for something very different - and Evensong was just the thing.

Whether on the simple level of St Mary’s Noisy Mass, or in a whole community such as Moot, those of us in the Catholic tradition have perhaps to do more work in creating fresh expressions than those coming from other traditions. If the church’s tradition itself is one of the places in which we encounter the Holy Spirit, developing and changing it has to be approached with care. But that doesn’t mean things shouldn’t change. It is as much a betrayal of the tradition to put it asp, as it is to ignore it. The Fresh Expressions movement is the sort of challenge - and also the opportunity - that we all need.

But we also have, for instance, a large number of parents and carers of very young children, who find our Sunday style of worship theoretically perfect - but in practice almost impossible, as they are continually worrying about what everyone else is thinking of their baby. So we have set up the Noisy Mass, a monthly (at present) eucharistic service that is specifically aimed at parents and carers of young children, a lightweight and informal act of worship in which they can feel at ease with the noise of their children, because everyone else has one too. We think of that as our own little fresh expression, because it is becoming for some ‘their church’ - and a Bible study group has now grown out of it.

There are other, much bolder, fresh expressions of church that have grown out of the Catholic tradition in the Church, and have re-interpreted it for groups far more marginalised from the traditional forms of church than our young parents. How about Moot, for instance? Moot, which meets in Westminster but whose members are from all over London, is, as its website says: ‘a developing community of spiritual travellers who are seeking to find a means of living a life that is honest to god and honest to now... moot seeks to make connections and find inspirations in the meeting of faith, life and culture... moot looks to the christian call for justice, equity and balance as a means of living politically and ethically. we recognise the inspiration of saints, mystics, philosophers and artists throughout the centuries... moot seeks to live a christian spiritual rhythm of life through practising presence, acceptance, creativity, balance, accountability and hospitality.’ (www.moot.uk.net, 6.7.08)

www.freshexpressions.org.uk/mixedeconomy