

Ministry DNA of The International Fresh Expressions Movement

Fresh Expressions is an international movement¹ cultivating new kinds of church alongside existing congregations to more effectively engage our growing post-Christian society. The movement began in 2004 as an initiative of the Church of England and the British Methodist Church and has brought renewal to scores of established churches by helping give birth to thousands of new communities of faith. We value our relationships within God's new community as agents of the Triune God who make disciples with generous and open hearts while we willingly journey together.

Originating from the ordination vows of the Church of England, the term 'fresh expressions' is a pledge to "proclaim the Gospel afresh in every generation". This is our hope and our prayer as we welcome further conversation and greater partnership among denominations, streams and agencies of the wider Church.

Commitments of partnership

Fresh expressions of church are intentional but organic, contributing to mixed forms of church both as given and as being discovered.² Church can take on many shapes if all are gathered by the power of Christ's resurrected body.³ Our theological and ecclesial partnerships enable a healthy cross-pollination based-upon the following commitments. Each of these commitments is contingent upon the other, creating a dynamic and relational process of discernment.

Listening

God has spoken throughout time and still speaks today. The development of fresh expressions of church begins with noticing and listening for where God might be at work within a particular calling or context. By listening, Barnabas discerned where the grace of God was at work in Antioch. The same is true of the Apostle Paul's engagement with the philosophers and skeptics of his day. A commitment to listening undergirds our spirit of cooperation as we bring our ecclesial and theological heritages together for the mission of God.

¹ At the time of writing, there are Fresh Expressions leadership teams in Australia, Austria, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Canada, Germany, Kenya, Namibia, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States and Zimbabwe.

² The idea of mixed forms of church stems from the terms 'mixed economy' or 'blended ecology' of church that attempt to articulate the essential relationship between inherited and new forms of church. In the mixed-economy, each church, denomination or network of churches has the opportunity to give life to fresh expressions of church that remain connected to the inherited church. See <http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/about/mixedeconomy>

³ Bishop Rowan Williams says that the New Testament church "constitutes itself around the Risen Jesus when the good news is proclaimed is distinguished not only by what it 'confesses', what it states as true and authoritative, but by the character of its relations—'life in the Spirit' marked by mutual patience, generosity and interdependence." (Fresh Expressions of Church and the Kingdom of God, 2012, Canterbury Press, 1)

Loving-Service

Loving-service is loving people and serving alongside others. It is a priority of the disciple community. The ethos of loving-service with others in the name of the crucified and risen Jesus makes partnership in the work of fresh expressions possible. St. John of the Cross said that “mission is putting love where it is not.”⁴ Through our participation in the nuptial or self-giving love of Christ, we become an agency for all who Christ seeks to bring to himself. Loving-service is not based on human effort but upon the humility of the one who gave himself for us so that we can have life to the full.

Building Community

Community is vital for human flourishing. It is also vital for mission. Throughout his ministry, Jesus built community—often in other people’s homes and in the public square. He sent his disciples two-by-two. The Triune God exists in dynamic community, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity strengthens and shows the unity and self-giving love and mission of God. God the Father sends God the Son into the world and the God the Son sends the Church into the world to live by the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Making disciples

Disciple-making is central to the Gospel. Discipleship in a fresh expression of church is both ‘open’ and ‘committed’.⁵ The process often engages a non-formal learning process beginning with questions at the level of a person’s understanding of God. Discipleship engages the whole life and relies on teaching and learning between the emerging and the more mature believer. Discipleship offers an invitation to follow Jesus and a challenge for continued growth in the way of Jesus.

Church Taking Shape

As fresh expressions of church mature, each begins taking on the marks of the church. The Nicene Creed professes belief in the Church that is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. In other words, mature church includes each of the following guiding principles: ‘in’ ‘up’ ‘of’ and ‘out’. It is **one** church; a community gathered around their belief in Jesus the redeemer and king. The church offers space and encounter with the **holy** mystery of God. It is **catholic** in its connection to the universal Church and **apostolic** in its missionary outlook.

⁴ Michael Moynagh argues that this kind of love serves people not by creating dependency, but by enabling human flourishing (Church for Every Context, SCM Press, 2012).

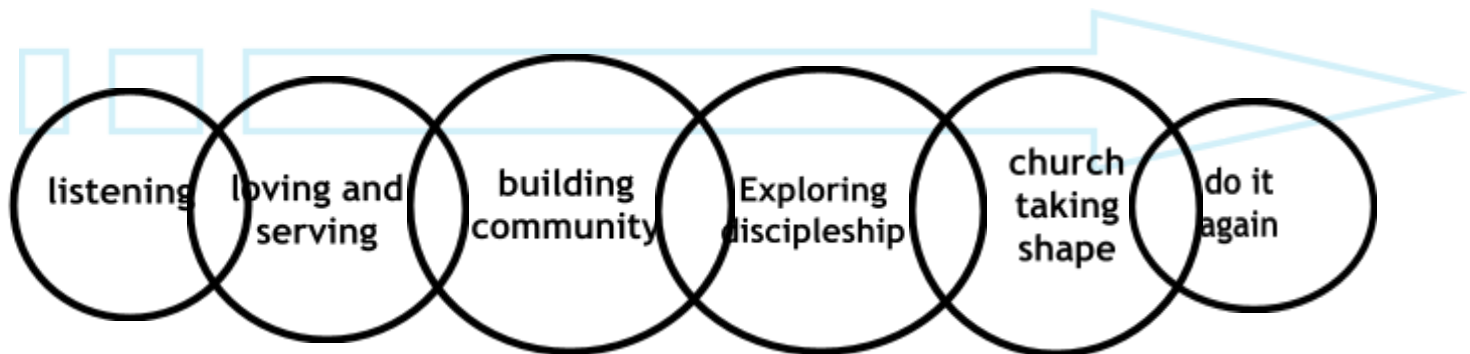
⁵ “The discipleship for which Jesus called was both open and committed. For many people today (including Christians) these two are a contradiction in terms.” (James Dunn, Jesus’ Call to Discipleship, Cambridge 2002).

Doing it again

Multiplication is embedded within the genetic code of the Fresh Expressions movement. The fresh expression that becomes a more mature expression of church will inevitably move toward reaching others that their now maturing expression of church will never reach. The same will be true for our theological and denominational partnerships globally. As our partnerships develop and mature, so will the credibility of the movement. We will reach more together than we will reach separately. Our prayer is that the Lord will add to our number daily those who are being saved.

In Summary

The Fresh Expressions Journey is *alongside* others (Mark 3:14) as Jesus calls us to journey with him, so we journey with others. As we go along, we bless others creating spaces of belonging where those in our midst begin the journey of believing in Jesus and living as Jesus lives as agents of his changing Kingdom. Our international partnerships promote creativity and family-like experiences facilitated by a range of international colleagues whereby missional formation is both taught and caught.



underpinned by prayer, ongoing listening and in relationship with the wider church