

Vision of FX

in The Methodist Church



Two stories: profoundly different outcomes yet incredibly similar beginnings

Both relate to two relatively young brothers, both serving ASBOs after toxic and troubled childhoods.

One story filled the media, shocked the nation and put Edlington (near Doncaster) on the map for all the wrong reasons. The other story may never grace the headlines: a small Methodist church community took brave steps, crossed cultural gaps and began something new. They didn't lock out the undesirables but loved them, patiently, practically, persistently, in a diverse Christian community.

These boys want to be there now. Their transformation is in progress because God lead some Christians called Methodists to close their dysfunctional building, sell it and go to where the need was greatest.

This paper is intended to encourage people at every juncture in the Methodist Church to press on with a renewed vision about who is God calling you to reach. How might that happen? And what might be the vehicle by which you help others to grow as world-transforming disciples of Jesus Christ? This is the whole point of fresh expressions (FX) of church.

Embedding this in the lifeblood of churches and circuits will be creative, diverse and complementary. There will be a mixture of old and new, inherited and fresh, local and regional, young and old, city centre, suburban and rural.

This 'Mixed Economy' (a phrase coined by Archbishop Rowan Williams) is a way of helping us to understand that we can complement the style of church that we have with different forms of church, to meet the spiritual needs of those who are unlikely to come to an established church (however good it may be).

In the six years since the Conference agreed the priority to develop fresh ways of being church, many stories of what God is doing across the Connexion have brought much thanksgiving.

Tearfund's latest research¹ tells us that over the last two decades the number of people not connected to any church has risen from 40% to 58%². Our calling to go to those who need us most holds an urgent priority.

Seeking God's vision of who to go to, how to go, and finding out what will be the best engagement for whole-life discipleship is a challenge for the whole Church to commit

to through regular prayer. Supporting this with clear vision, dedicated resources and stepping out in faith emulates good theological practice and historical experience of pioneering mission.

This resource explores how we can do that in our church or circuit with the support, encouragement and priorities of the Connexion, district and circuit.

¹ Jacinta Ashworth, *Research Matters* & Ian Farthing, *Tearfund Church going in the UK* (April 2007)

² Richer P & Francis LJ, *Gone But Not Forgotten* (London: D-L-T 1998)



The Connexion says

In 2004, the Methodist Conference set the following vision before the Methodist Church:

The Priorities of the Methodist Church

In partnership with others wherever possible, the Methodist Church will concentrate its prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on this priority:

To proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for all the world; and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church.

As ways towards realising this priority, the Methodist Church will give particular attention to the following: Underpinning everything we do with God-centered worship and prayer.

Supporting community development and action for justice, especially among the most deprived and poor - in Britain and worldwide.

Developing confidence in evangelism and in the capacity to speak of God and faith in ways that make sense to all involved.

Encouraging fresh ways of being Church

Nurturing a culture in the Church which is people-centered and flexible.

Quote from Mapping a Way Forward: Regrouping for Mission?

Section 4:

"Vision-meshed-with-reality" must drive change...

Acknowledgement and celebration of our becoming a more flexible Church than we were 50 years ago, ie more willing to do things differently, to change institutional structures, to review procedures (eg in the pursuit of integrity and justice) and to let new things establish themselves alongside the traditional ways of doing things. Hence, "fresh expressions of church".

In 2008, the Conference encouraged every circuit to note the Faith and Order paper on *The Missional Nature of the Circuit*.

John Wesley emphasised that spiritual effectiveness had priority over outward patterns of ecclesiastical organisation. Thus the **shape** of our circuits today should be a response to the **local** and the **contemporary mission** of the Church. The 1990s saw an encouragement to circuits to "**do things differently**" in their own local response, rather than following a connexional blueprint. The nature of the 21st century circuit should depend not primarily on cherished traditions, but on **God's call to engage with a changing world**. As circuits have never had rigid boundaries, so their development is limited only by their ability to respond to God's call to engage in mission and ministry for God's kingdom ... The role of the circuit is expected to be dynamic and changing ... open "to the energy of the Spirit" ... This constant reflection on, and reaction to the mission of God in the world will mean that the role and identity of the circuit will need to be flexible and fluid.

[Paragraphs 3.5.4 and 5.6, emphasis added]

Conference commitment to fresh expressions

Speaking at the 2009 Conference the Methodist President The Revd David Gamble reaffirmed Methodism's commitment to the development of fresh expressions saying,



"Fresh expressions isn't just about what the national team is going to do, but it's the job of every church, every minister, every circuit to be considering where are the places God is calling us to."

How do we support *fresh expressions* of church?

Districts can help by...

- the District Policy Committee (or similar) adopting fresh expressions (FX) as a district priority
- creating a fresh expressions taskforce, which includes training officers, the DDE, the chair, mission enablers (see FEAST information www.freshexpressions.org.uk/feasts)
- coordinating fresh expressions provision and support across different circuits
- ensuring appropriate support groups are in place for each FX in the district
- encouraging circuits to look at fresh expressions as part of Regrouping for Mission: Mapping a Way Forward
- providing space for fresh expressions at Synod (eg stories, displays, good examples)
- clarifying criteria under which fresh expressions can apply for help through district and connexional grants and making the resourcing of fresh expressions a priority
- having the ability to start fresh expressions as the context merits
- working with ecumenical partners (especially Anglican dioceses and URC synods) to resource and support fresh expressions

Standing Order 500 says

“The purposes of the circuit include the effective deployment of the resources of ministry, which include people, property and finance, as they relate to the Methodist churches in the circuit, to churches of other denominations and to participation in the life of the communities served by the circuit...”

Standing Order 600 says that circuits should be focused on mission and exist to support and encourage the work of the local churches, supplying preaching, teaching, leadership and Holy Communion. Equally, local churches never act independently, but always in union with the ministry of the circuit. [S.O.600]

Circuits can help by...

- welcoming fresh expressions as full partners in the life and mission of the circuit and recognising this through dedicated places on the Circuit Meeting (SO 510 ix)
- ensuring that fresh expressions are given appropriate support and encouragement to maximise potential for healthy growth and development, including necessary pastoral, financial, emotional, practical and sacramental support, as well as the right space and permission to do things in new ways! Don't crowd them out but equally don't be a stranger.
- proactively planning in circuit meetings for mission in a mixed economy of fresh expressions and established churches
- cherishing leadership as a partnership between lay and ordained, including appropriate chairing of meetings, enabling people to concentrate on their giftings [Standing Orders 500, 502, and 515(2) and 633]
- releasing resources for fresh ways of working – ‘people’ resources (whether lay or ordained), financial and administrative resources:
 - Delegating one church council's business to another body of the church – releasing the smaller church into mission [Model Trust 16(k)] or different churches sharing buildings [S.O. 605 and 942]
 - Releasing financial reserves kept for a rainy day, which can now be used for any purpose in the local church (eg to pay for a youth or families worker) [S.O. 916(vii)]
 - Working in collaboration with the district grants officer and DDE to work out the best way to fund new projects; checking the criteria for circuit, district and connexional funding; as well as considering ‘tent-making’, full/part-time and/or voluntary ministries. [S.O. 955]
 - Considering whether some activities need to be prioritised over others, to try new things that might be more fruitful forms of mission in the long term
- Seeing *Mapping a Way Forward* as a mission priority, putting mission statements into practice and determining structures in line with the circuit's overall mission

You can encourage *fresh expressions* by...

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- **taking an interest** in fresh expressions, graciously trusting that those engaged are really seeking to do the will of God in often unfamiliar territory
- **supporting** those engaged in fresh expressions already – it can be a tough mission field. How would we support a mission partner in a different country? How can we support people in our own neighbourhood but reach out into a different culture?
- **praying for:**
 - fresh expressions practitioners and the communities they are working with
 - the Fresh Expressions movement across all churches
 - all those trying to do innovative forms of mission and fresh ways of being church

- **encouraging** your local church and circuit to support fresh expressions and make them part and parcel of your policies and procedures – ie get fresh expressions on the church council agenda
- **starting your own *fresh expression*** – but, think it through properly... Who do you want to reach? How might you do that? Who would you do it with? How could you be supported? Would the fresh expression benefit you or the people you are trying to reach? How would your fresh expression establish people as new disciples for Jesus who can transform the world in which they live? Who do you need to talk to about this? What resources and training would help in the first place? Have you talked to your local minister, district development enabler or Fresh Expressions missionary?

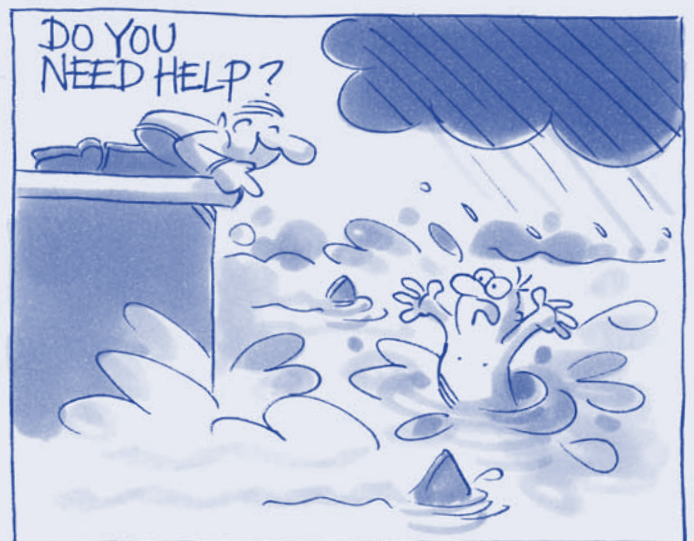
Frequently Asked Questions

You may have questions about fresh expressions but it may be you have found great answers too. The Share website is a great place both to explore your questions but also to offer to others productive solutions to the questions you have already faced.



What is Share?

Share is for all involved with fresh expressions of church - practitioners, people in training, encouragers, supporters and researchers.



There are many common questions arising about fresh expressions which the Share website has very helpful discussions on, such as:

- Q. What are fresh expressions all about? www.sharetheguide.org/section1
- Q. How might we start a fresh expression? www.sharetheguide.org/section2
- Q. What are some examples of fresh expressions? www.sharetheguide.org/examples
- Q. How can we sustain our fresh expression? www.sharetheguide.org/section4/sustaining

Look out for...

the following resource areas, which all offer excellent materials and practical help

Stage	Preparing the ground	Starting something	Maturing and sustaining
Resource			
vision day on fresh expressions	Excellent for first steps	A great way to build ownership and extend vision	Stories of the developing journey encourage perseverance
Training opportunities	msi + mission-shaped introductory course (6 sessions) in a free download from: www.freshexpressions.org.uk/mission-shapedintro	msm + mission-shaped ministry course (24 units taught over 3 Saturdays, 1 weekend and 8 evenings throughout the year). Very helpful for the leaders and team.	msm + Growing Leaders or Arrow Leadership Programme – training leaders by CPAS. (www.cpas.org.uk/)
	Extending Discipleship and Exploring Vocation (EDEV Course, 1 year) (http://www.sysiphus.org.uk/)	The Start Course. (www.start-cpas.org.uk/) Very helpful in certain contexts with those who know nothing about Jesus etc to begin with.	40 Days of Community (Rick Warren, 2004)
	Lost for Words (6 sessions) (www.cpas.org.uk) Time to Talk of God (6 sessions) (www.mph.org.uk) Blowing Your Cover (6 sessions) (www.blowingyourcover.com/) Come As You Are (10 sessions)	Resource www.resourcechurchplanting.com A series of 4 weekends helping to create church in the emerging culture	MA in Emerging Church /Theology and Ministry/ Evangelism
Books	<i>More Ready Than You Realize</i> Brian McLaren (2002) (Encourages excellent values and practical action which underpin contextual evangelism.)	<i>Mission-shaped Church</i> Graham Cray et al (www.cofe.anglican.org)	<i>Mass Culture: The Interface of Eucharist and Mission</i> Pete Ward (2008)
	<i>Evangelism in a Spiritual Age: Communicating Faith in a Changing Culture</i> (2007)	<i>Pioneer Ministry and Fresh Expressions of Church</i> Angela Shier-Jones (2009)	<i>What is Mission?: Some Theological Explorations</i> J Andrew Kirk (1999)
	<i>Changing church for a changing world</i> Pete Pillinger and Andrew Roberts (2007) (www.freshexpressions.org.uk)	<i>Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens</i> Neil Cole (2005)	<i>The Human face of Church: A Social Psychology and Pastoral Theology Resources for Pioneer and Traditional Ministry</i> Sara Savage and Eolene Boyd-Macmillan (2007)
	<i>The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul</i> Wayne A Meeks (2003)	<i>High Street Monasteries: Fresh Expressions of Committed Christianity</i> Ray Simpson (2009) (www.chbookshop.co.uk)	<i>Intelligent Church: A Journey Towards Christ-centered Community</i> Steve Chalke and Anthony Watkis (2006)
	<i>The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier</i> Loren B Mead (1991)	<i>The unchurched next door: Understanding Faith Stages as Keys to Sharing Your Faith</i> Thom S Rainer (2003)	<i>The Spirituality of Fund-Raising</i> Henri J M Nouwen (1985)
	<i>Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times</i> David Lyon (2000)	<i>Emergingchurch.intro</i> Michael Moynagh (2004)	<i>Sowing, reaping, keeping: People-Sensitive Evangelism</i> Laurence Singlehurst (2006)
	<i>Mixed-up Blessing: A New Encounter with Being Church</i> Barbara Glasson (2006)	<i>Planting Churches: A Framework for Practitioners</i> Stuart Murray (2009)	<i>The Healthy Churches' Handbook: A Process for Revitalizing Your Church</i> Robert Warren (2004)
	<i>Mission Shaped Questions</i> Steven Croft (ed) (2008)	<i>Church Unplugged</i> David Male (2008)	<i>Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches</i> Christian A Schwarz (1996)

Useful contacts and websites

- **Fresh Expressions** (www.freshexpressions.org.uk)
Fresh Expressions encourages new forms of church for a fast changing world, working with Christians from a variety of denominations and traditions. The initiative has resulted in hundreds of new congregations being formed alongside more traditional churches.
- **Share** (www.sharetheguide.org/)
Share is for all involved with or exploring fresh expressions of church: practitioners, people in training, encouragers, supporters and researchers. The guide contains how-to-do-it advice on starting, developing and sustaining fresh expressions of church based on shared experiences.
- **Venture FX** (www.methodist.org.uk/venturefx)
The Pioneering Ministries scheme is a bold and exciting initiative designed to reach young adults with no Christian heritage. Over the next 5 years it is planned to identify 20 people with the gifts to pioneer new Christian communities, and 20 locations where this can happen.
- **Activate** (www.activateyourlife.org.uk/)
Helping Christians to rethink friendship and evangelism.
- **Catholic Agency to Support Evangelisation** (www.caseresources.org.uk)
Website dedicated to enthusing, engaging and equipping individuals, parishes, schools, communities and organisations to become involved in “the urgent task of evangelisation”.
- **Christian Enquiry Agency** (www.christianity.org.uk)
Provides opportunities for people to enquire about Jesus Christ and supplies a wide range of resources about the Christian faith. Links with local churches are offered to all enquirers.
- **Church Army** (www.churcharmy.org.uk) and **Encounters on the Edge** (www.encountersontheedge.org.uk)
Church Army is a society of evangelists linked to the Anglican Church but working outside church buildings to enable people to come to a living faith in Jesus Christ. Their video stories are worth hearing or reading in Encounters on the Edge (a series of booklets). Additional material to accompany ‘Mission-shaped Church’ can be found here.
- **Church Pastoral Aid Society** (www.cpas.org.uk)
Consultants from the Church Pastoral Aid Society’s ministry team work with local churches to resource them to move forward in mission.
- **Cliff College** (www.cliffcollege.ac.uk)
Cliff College offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes on mission, evangelism and leadership, including new programmes to support fresh expressions and the emerging church.
- **Emerging Church** (www.emergingchurch.info)
Stories, reflections and discussion on the emerging church.
- **Group for Evangelisation** (www.gfe.org.uk)
Website supporting evangelisation and outreach, operated under Churches Together in England.
- **Leap of Faith Ministry** (www.leapoffaithministry.org)
A new creative arts ministry aimed at helping new and existing churches in areas such as publicity, art, drama, music, humour and IT, delivering relevant messages to each generational demographic.
- **London Institute of Contemporary Christianity** (www.licc.org.uk)
Works to equip Christians to engage biblically and relevantly with the issues they face, including: work, capitalism, youth culture, media and communication.
- **REJESUS** (www.rejesus.co.uk)
Website of contemporary explanation and ideas explaining the person and relevance of Jesus.
- **Twelve Baskets** (www.twelvebaskets.co.uk)
A shareware site which offers creative resources at a very reasonable subscription rate and a great way of offering your own creations for others to benefit from.
- **The Good Bookstall** (www.thegoodbookstall.org.uk)
A site staffed mainly by volunteers that reviews Christian books from writers of all denominations.
- **The Methodist Church** (www.methodist.org.uk)
The official website of the Methodist Church of Great Britain. Includes history, explanation of Church structures, belief, news, the Methodist Conference and public statements.