

## Fresh Expressions: Part two

In a previous article, I wrote about 'Fresh Expressions' of church. I described Fresh Expressions as: "any venture that works mainly with non-churchgoers and aims to become church for them. A Fresh Expression is a way of thinking afresh of connecting in new ways with those in our communities. An authentic Fresh Expression of church has the following four qualities:

1. Missional – it is intentional in its focus on non-churchgoers.
2. Contextual – it seeks to fit the context of the people with whom it engages.
3. Formational – it aims to form disciples.
4. Ecclesial – it intends to 'become' church. The key here is that it is not seen as a bridge back to what some of us might think of as 'real' church (i.e. getting people to attend Sunday morning services), but is church in its own right.

Do you see the trap that we very easily fall into?

Perhaps I can illustrate the trap by asking you what does 'church' look like to you? The image in your mind is most likely that of the venue of where you go each Sunday and the activities of your church family. What are the expectations of your church family about attendance, participation, giving and service?

However you answer these questions, whatever expectations you have church and your church family, the mistake we make and the trap we so often fall into is that we apply that same model of church and those same expectations to our Fresh Expressions.

The ultimate expectations of a Fresh Expression of church are the same: to be loving, praising, praying, witnessing and serving disciples who in turn make disciples who do the same. But how discipleship develops in a Fresh Expression, how long it takes and what that journey looks like will be different. How people develop as disciples, the way that 'giving' develops, and what our gatherings look like cannot be compared to a 'normal' Sunday morning congregation. We cannot apply our 'Christendom' model of church as we have inherited it to Fresh Expressions of church. Why? We are engaging increasingly with people who have no knowledge whatsoever of the Christian gospel and whatever image they have of the church is negative. Fresh Expressions work when we allow them to develop in their own way at their own pace.