

Why don't people come to church on Sunday anymore?

We have spent the last few articles looking at our missional context. We saw the importance of being welcoming and having a wide open 'front door' in our churches, while ensuring we close the 'back door' too. But what about the vast majority of the population who will not come through our doors at all? How can we connect with them?

To help aid us with this conundrum, a piece of research came out in the *Mission-Shaped Church Report* (2004). This report swept across the Anglican Communion and, although somewhat dated now, it still contains good information.

The research sought to identify those who no longer come to church. It described the situation using four headings.

The Fringe: These are the people who come along to church occasionally; Christmas, Easter and perhaps several other times during the year, but no more!

The Open De-Churched: These are the ones who used to come but have stopped. Perhaps this is due to a change of circumstance such as their work schedule or they've had a new baby, that makes getting to Sunday morning worship too much of a challenge. Perhaps they have moved to a new neighbourhood and simply haven't found a new church home. These are open to return given the right event at the right time or on the right day that works for them.

The Closed De-Churched: These have stopped coming to church and for very serious reasons. Perhaps a crisis of faith, disillusionment with church, an argument with a church member or the priest; something has resulted in hurt, pain and withdrawal. Going back to the place where the 'hurt' was caused is unlikely without at the very least a great deal of love, care and reconciliation.

The Un-Churched: This is exactly as described. It's not that they choose not to come to our services. It simply does not occur to them. As each day goes by in our post-Christendom world, so the percentage of the Unchurched grows. I can perhaps illustrate this most simply by describing how I met someone last year who came along to a Christmas pageant. It was her first time in a church. It was the first time she had ever sung Christmas carols. She was 27 years old!

So when we think about arranging our church services and events in the hope that people will come, who exactly are we hoping will arrive at the door? The Unchurched won't – why would they? The Closed De-Churched won't for they are hurt. The Open De-Churched won't if our services are the usual Sunday mornings. This leaves just The Fringe.

So as we can see, the old ways will not work anymore with the vast majority of people. This is why we must move toward ensuring that our discipleship is truly a fully missional discipleship in which each of us is living our faith and engaged with our family, friends and community. It is essential, along with exploring more inventive ways of being Church. We'll pick this up next time.