

How do we connect with people who don't 'come' to church? - part one

Previously we reflected on those who are not attending our services and found we could describe four groups: the Fringe, the Open De-churched, the Closed De-churched, and the group which gets bigger as each day goes by: the Unchurched. So what does this mean for us?

Well to start with, if we are wondering 'what must we do to encourage people to come to Sunday morning services?' we are asking the wrong question. Why? Whatever ideas we come up with, the Fringe won't come. They are comfortable coming on the occasions they do. The Open De-churched won't come, because they already would if they could. The Closed De-churched won't come until the reasons that led to them becoming 'closed' are dealt with, and the Unchurched most certainly won't come. Not only are they not interested, they are sufficiently not interested that it would never occur to them to come or even to notice the efforts we make.

So how do we connect with people who do not attend? This is *the* challenge of the age for all Christian churches in the West. In short, we need *fresh* ways of thinking about what 'church' is.

'Fresh Expressions of Church' was the name given to these new ways of thinking about church in the hugely influential 'Mission-shaped Church report' published in 2004. The report has been very influential across the Anglican Communion but also worldwide in other denominations, too. Indeed, the chairperson of the group that produced the report, the Rt. Rev. Graham Cray, visited Edmonton in February 2013 as part of our Diocesan 'Vital Church conference.' What a gift to the Diocese that conference was.

So what is a 'Fresh Expression?' Here are some indicators:

- A Fresh Expression's aim is to be a new group or 'further group;' a Christian community in its own right, rather than just a modification or adaption of an existing group.
- The starting group seeks to engage with 'non-church goers' with the intention of the new project becoming its own 'church.'
- It meets at least once a month.

There are more criteria, but these will do for now. They also illuminate what is *not* a Fresh Expression:

- A group of people from a Sunday morning congregation who also make up the entire congregation of an experimental service held in the same church building is not a Fresh Expression.
- An outreach project from an existing church that seeks to be a bridge back into the existing church is not a Fresh Expression.
- Doing something new, even like 'Messy Church' just a few times a year is not a Fresh Expression.

It is too easy for us to do the same things in different ways and think we are doing something new.

We'll pick this up next time in part two...