

Fresh Expressions (Part one): more than just a facelift for church

I have been writing about our mission context: that we are not in Christendom anymore and therefore re-learning *The Forgotten Ways* (title of the book written by our clergy conference speaker, Alan Hirsch). In Christendom the majority of people came to Sunday services and believed in God. That is no longer the case.

Thus, being bearers of the message of the love of God that Jesus has called us to share, our missional context requires that we re-learn how we share that love. It is now imperative that we 'go.' In fact, our context reminds us of a vital truth that became blurred in Christendom. To share Jesus' grace, truth and love, being a 'sent' people who 'go,' living Jesus-shaped lives, is the calling of us all.

I have mentioned the Anglican *Mission Shaped Church Report of 2004* which highlighted the phrase of 'Fresh Expressions of Church.' We looked briefly at what a Fresh Expression is and is not. Now to go deeper. What is a Fresh Expression of Church?

A Fresh Expression is 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 'real' church (i.e. getting people to attend Sunday morning services), but is church in its own right.

Fresh Expressions are brilliant in helping people who have been disillusioned or damaged by the Church, or want to belong to a good, loving community where they can explore matters of God, Faith and Christian values without having to first walk over the threshold of a traditional church on a Sunday morning, with all its customs and rituals. There are many different types of Fresh Expressions: Messy Church, Older-people's Church, Cell (small groups) Church, Café-Church and many others. In fact a recent survey of over 1000 Fresh Expressions, some of whom have been in existence for ten years, has fascinating results.

How do they work? That's where we will pick it up next time.