



At the moment a great deal of energy, and in some areas resource, is going into the creation of new forms of church. As the church landscape changes and new models appear, it is inevitable that new language emerges to try and makes sense of what we see. It's also inevitable that some confusion results!

Resource churches (or church plants) and the Fresh Expressions movement share a common purpose to explore new forms of church for a changing world. We each share a recognition that some more traditional forms of church can't connect as effectively with all the diverse cultures and contexts of our rapidly changing society. We each share a conviction that one response to this is to explore the creation of new forms of church that will better connect with these cultures and contexts. Because of this, sometimes people see these movements as more similar than they really are.

For whilst we share a lot in common, there is a fundamental difference in our approach.

The starting point for resource churches, whilst mindful of context, is a clear vision of the kind of church that will be formed in a place, and a clear strategy in terms of staff, resources and the programmes offered. They know where they want to get to, and how to get there.

For fresh expressions, however, the starting point is the context in which it will exist, and how the traditions and practices of church could be to be authentically expressed *by the people of that context*. This is a process that can take time and will employ principles of listening and experimentation. What it will eventually become is a journey of discovery.

So, does this mean that resource churches cannot be attentive to context or be experimental? No, not necessarily. And there are examples of where resource churches have adapted to context, particularly as initial church plants in an area give rise to further plants. However, it is also true to say that leading with a clear model of what is needed when establishing a new form of church makes it less easy to then mould that model to a cultural context. Where there is a significant mismatch between model and context, it may be too difficult to adapt effectively.

Does this also mean that fresh expressions are not able to form mature and sustainable new forms of church (something it is argued that resource churches are really good at)? Not at all, (and in fact, that is precisely the goal of the Greenhouse process through its 'Loving first' development cycle). However, it may take them longer.

As Dutch theologian Stefan Paas has said: 'Much would be gained if some distance could be created between "church" and "planting"'. This is precisely what fresh expressions do. Those enabling their creation go on a *journey* which has the hoped-for emergence of a new contextual Christian community as its purpose, but which is also committed to the intrinsic value of loving and serving people in their context without agenda.

Are we arguing for one over another? No. Both have their place in the mixed ecology of church. Both need to be mindful that the nature of the

church has always been one of *becoming*. It is precisely in the exploration of new forms of church for new contexts that the church discovers her nature. Church is never a fixed model but is rather a movement being formed in the wake of God's Holy Spirit.

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