

The Revd Chris Tebbutt, Team Rector at Canford parish church in Dorset, initially set up a fresh expression congregation based around sharing a



a remarkable 10 year period. Leadership since the set up has
ins intact.

How it got started

When I arrived in the Parish the last cohort of 'children' were just leaving, most of whom were going off travelling or to uni. We had no kids or young families and so we tried a 'Family Service' approach. Christening families came, but didn't return. We had to try something radical and were open to what God wanted to do.

The idea behind Breakfast@9 came from a meeting of the clergy chapter. Someone was sharing how they were serving bacon butties to young families before church. We thought, 'that sounds a great idea – we can develop that'.

As Rector, I started it off with the help of my wife, who is also ordained, and our lay part-time Children and Families worker. A lot of prayer went into the original idea, and as we went on. We listened to God through the pictures and words he gave us.

We started by inviting people from our lists of young families who had tried the church and then not come back. There were those couples who had stuck with us and were about to start a family, and we had folk who were single and a bit disenchanted with traditional worship. We were surprised at how fast it grew, from about 25 to a peak of about 70 in only a year or so.

Despite the heritage congregation welcoming the Breakfasters, it soon became apparent that the congregations were different and this was a new missional community.

How did the leadership team develop?

In a (hopefully) God-inspired leadership move, I purposely encouraged lay people without the traditional background or 'qualifications' to lead with us as we went along. Most of those have gone on to be trained as Lay Worship Leaders and they now serve in both Breakfast and the heritage church.

We've been delighted to see God raise up new leaders. In the beginning, it was a bit of a family affair. One of the 'catalyst couples' was my son and his wife, who had just had their first baby. My son is a worship leader and helped with the music. They are just a great couple who gather people their own age. We saw a lot of growth in those early days.

Since they moved on, Jenny and Pete, two lay people, have taken the reigns. They came to an alive faith in Jesus through Breakfast@9. Our core team is still there, but more in the background, encouraging, overseeing, rather than doing.

Have there been tough times?

Yes. We moved to another venue when we were refurbishing our hall and we lost a few then. When we moved back in, our numbers picked up. Just as we were beginning to grow again, COVID hit and I'm sad that we've lost some of our fringe. We're waiting to see whether folk will return.

How have you coped with pandemic restrictions?

Initially, Breakfast@9 did not translate well to online for obvious reasons. Then our lay pastors decided to take the initiative and discuss with their children to see what could work. They came up with something fun and interactive - a leader being splatted each week, and a 'lightening craft' which connected to a shorter, more challenging talk. It's preceded by a Zoom call where members come on and share their lockdown experiences and how God's been moving in their lives. We also have a very deeply connected WhatsApp group for prayer and practical help. God still speaks to us as we plan and pray about the Services.

We are greatly encouraged at how the core membership has developed, who tune in nearly every week. They've really grown in prayer and going deeper with the Bible through a Life Group. We have also found real growth in our leadership team during lockdown, as our lead couple have had to step up and take online worship and make it their own, which they have done brilliantly.

What have you learned throughout this fresh expression journey?

We've learned that it is better to do something than be paralysed by fear and do nothing. We've had a lot of fun - it has changed the church as heritage people have served in the kitchen at Breakfast. We've learned that it is quite easy to get people to come to an 'event' but very hard to move them to a position of mature discipleship – this has to be a Holy Spirit thing, however hard we try in our own strength.

What are your hopes now for B@9?

Our hope with the new roadmap from the Government is that we can return reasonably quickly to meeting face-to-face. I'm encouraged that new leaders have stepped forward, and I am hoping that, on the promise of a return to social gatherings, at least some of our fringe will return and they will step forward and step up to rebuild something like we had before. It is time to reappraise the model of Breakfast@9, but, like the 30 or so other churches who have tried it and still run it, I believe it will re-emerge and become again a great way of attracting people of faith or no faith to explore their relationship with Jesus in an inviting and relational way.

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