

GS 1648

Presentation to the General Synod

27th February, 2007



The Background

In February, 2004, the General Synod debated and commended the report, Mission Shaped Church (GS Misc 1523). The Archbishop of Canterbury called for the development of a mixed economy across the Church of England: the flourishing of fresh expressions of church alongside and within traditional parishes. In September, 2004 the Archbishops established Fresh Expressions as a five year initiative, in partnership with the Methodist Church, to facilitate this process of change.

In his Presidential Address in November, 2005, the Archbishop of Canterbury defined the focus for the new Synod:

You are here to serve and nourish a vision, to try and find for the Church of England a sense of its mission that is strong and deep-rooted enough to be owned by the whole of our community and owned as part of the work and witness of the entire worldwide Church.

In respect of the developments in fresh expressions of church, the Archbishop went on to say:

In this area let me suggest that Synod reminds itself annually about what is happening, by some sort of report or, maybe better, some sort of celebratory event, so that Synod may measure its work against the background of these new signs of what God is doing.

The presentation on fresh expressions of church will be three years after the debate on Mission Shaped Church and at the mid-point in the five year proposed life of the Archbishops' initiative.

The aims of the Presentation and Questions will be:

1. So that the Synod can “remind itself about what is happening” and “measure its work against the background of these new signs of what God is doing”.
2. To inform Synod on present and proposed changes introduced as part of the follow up to the Mission Shaped Church report and in particular the Dioceses, Mission and Ministry Measure; guidelines on Ordained Pioneer Ministry and new guidelines on Encouraging lay pioneer ministry.

3. To support and inform Synod members within their key role in dioceses by providing an overview of developments across the Church of England and models of good practice in dioceses taking fresh expressions forward.
4. To enable Synod to contribute to and comment upon the evolving work of Fresh Expressions at the mid point in the life of the initiative.

The Presentation

The 30 minute presentation will be in a magazine format with a number of different elements including:

- An introduction from the Archbishop of Canterbury
- An overview of what is happening across the country.
- A premier of part of the new Expressions DVD (to be published in March)
- A report from Paul Bayes on progress since the MSC debate and the importance of the mixed economy vision
- A report from Linda Barley on the statistical picture and fresh expressions
- A summary of what General Synod and its members can do to support this agenda over the next two years.

The presentation will be supported by:

1. A reception for Synod members at 7.00pm on Tuesday 27th February, immediately following the presentation and questions
2. A staffed exhibition area which will run throughout the Synod and give members the opportunity for dialogue with members of the Fresh Expressions team and practitioners.
3. The third edition of our Expressions newspaper published on 27th February
4. Supplementary printed material on the emerging statistical picture and the work of the Fresh Expressions initiative.

There will be opportunity for members of the Synod to ask questions and offer comments immediately after the presentation.

The Fresh Expressions Initiative

Our aim is to resource and encourage fresh expressions of church as part of a mixed economy in every part of the two churches and beyond. Our initial span of activity is five years.

Fresh Expressions is largely funded through the generosity of the Lambeth Partners through the Lambeth Fund. We also have staff members seconded from the Methodist Church, Church Army and the Congregational Federation. We presently work with a dispersed core team of 16 full and part time staff and over 30 Associate Missioners – mainly younger practitioners. We report to a Board of Directors appointed by the Archbishops and the Lambeth Fund which is chaired by Sir Christopher Wates with the Bishop of Sheffield as vice-chair.

Full details of our areas of activity and plans can be found in the two Prospectus documents which can be downloaded from our website (www.freshexpressions.org.uk).

A key area of our work is collaborative partnerships with a range of central church bodies and mission agencies. At present these are informal and structured around five round tables:

1. Resource agencies
2. Research
3. Discipleship
4. Theological Educators
5. Anglo-Catholic practitioners and groups

Members of the Synod may also like to be aware of the following publications produced in partnership with Church House Publishing and others:

- Expressions: the DVD – stories of church for a changing culture
- Moving on in a Mission Shaped Church
- Starting a Fresh Expression
- Listening for Mission
- The Future of the Parish System

Since our inception the Fresh Expressions team have spoken with over 20,000 people about fresh expressions of church in almost every diocese and Methodist district.

Our website receives over 500 visitors per day with 1,000 documents per month downloaded. Over 3,500 people receive regular e-bulletins about the work. The online directory of fresh expressions on the website contains over 600 examples of fresh expressions of church which together connect with over 30,000 people.

More than 38,000 copies of our booklets and other publications have been sold and 40,000 copies of our free newspaper Expressions have been distributed.

Definitions

The term “fresh expression of church” was coined for the Mission Shaped Church report but not defined there. Over the past two years it has become necessary to reach a more centred definition of the term lest it be applied to every mission initiative and therefore, over time, mean nothing.

We published the following definition in May, 2006 after full consultation with key partners working in the field:

A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.

- It will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples.
 - It will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.
-

Local Developments

There is a very great deal of local initiative and development in parishes and deaneries around this agenda and a significant amount of hope attached to it across both churches.

Full details will be given during the presentation on the outcomes of the special question asked in Parish Returns in 2006. We now believe that more than half of all Anglican parishes are involved in some way in supporting or planning a fresh expression of church (though on a broader definition than the one given above).

Taken together, this represents a significant movement of mission affecting every part of the Church of England. There are developments in every Anglican tradition and across different social contexts.

The majority of fresh expressions of church are local endeavours involving a modest budget and no staff or premises. However there are now a significant number of larger projects which are in effect new congregations with their own staff or stipended ministry.

The main needs at local level and the ways we are seeking to meet them are as follows:

To renew the vision of the church in mission and for fresh expressions:

We are seeking to meet this need through a proactive programme of vision days, through publications and through a new six week course for deaneries and circuits: mission shaped intro.

The provision of good quality training and support

We are developing a one year part time course in pioneer ministry for lay people and clergy who will ideally attend in small groups. The course is called "Mission Shaped Ministry" and is based on a programme developed in Lincoln by the Diocese, District and the Ground Level Network and Anglican Church Planting Initiatives. The course began in two centres in January with, we hope, at least 10 more centres up and running by the end of 2007. The course includes mentoring as part of its provision and will lead to further ongoing learning networks.

To establish learning communities of practitioners

We are seeking to meet this need by forming ongoing learning networks around our online guide to fresh expressions – a major knowledge bank of good practice which is to be launched in early 2007 in partnership with Church Army.

There is clear evidence that through fresh expressions of church, both adults and children are coming to mature Christian faith and taking new steps in discipleship and ministry.

National Developments

Again there is significant encouragement and momentum here. In all the areas listed below we have been working in partnership with colleagues in the national church institutions.

Ministry

The ordained pioneer ministry guidelines were agreed by the House of Bishops in January, 2006. All DDO's have been briefed and two meetings have been held for theological educators.

Training institutions are working hard to develop new forms of training for pioneer ministers. Engagement is not uniform with some courses and colleges not yet fully engaged with this agenda but overall progress is good.

There are 25 candidates now in training for these ministries and others in the vocations process.

Guidelines on Encouraging lay pioneer ministry were agreed by the House of Bishops in January, 2007 and are now available on the fresh expressions website.

DPM Code of Practice

The development of the Bishops' Mission Order will be a very helpful tool for dioceses in facilitating and encouraging new communities from early 2008 and will inform and reflect good practice across the field.

Developments in Dioceses

The degree of momentum and innovation in fresh expressions varies very significantly from diocese to diocese. The blessing, encouragement, resourcing and intentional approach at diocesan level have emerged as a very key factor in this variance.

A good number are engaging with passion, commitment and imagination. The majority are moving forward in some way with this agenda. A small number continue to stand back from it or be reluctant to engage.

Reflection on what is actually happening across dioceses and districts has resulted in seven key areas which make a difference. Every diocese and district needs to have all seven in place, ideally, in order to develop the mixed economy to its full potential.

They are:

1. Theology and spirituality appropriate to the task
2. Leadership and ministry for this agenda
3. Building a mixed economy vision everywhere

4. Creating learning networks of practitioners
5. Some funded posts
6. A mission fund
7. Developing training for teams of lay and ordained ministers

Funded posts are particularly important in signaling support for fresh expressions of church and providing models and places of learning for a diocese or district.

Clear leadership is essential as moving forward with a mixed economy is only possible if the different areas of responsibility and energy within a diocese work together.

Theological Reflection and Resourcing

It has been apparent throughout the last three years that there is a need for continued theological engagement with the issues raised by fresh expressions of church within a mixed economy, not least in the areas of ecclesiology and missiology. Every question partially answered leads into others: this is not a time or moment for simplistic solutions.

We are playing our part in that the encouragement of research and reflection, publications and a forthcoming hard questions lecture tour in spring, 2007 with 14 distinguished theologians and church leaders addressing questions of ecclesiology and mission. However, more is needed.

International Impact

Developments in the Church of England and the Methodist Church are a source of inspiration and encouragement at present to other churches throughout the world. The Anglican Church in Australia has just published "Building a Mission Shaped Church in Australia" and is adopting similar strategies. There is great interest in New Zealand, France, Holland and the Porvoo countries. MSC has been translated into German and the EKD have just adopted a strategy of working towards a mixed economy over the next 15 years.

Five years and then....

Plans are already in hand for partnerships of mission agencies to take forward the two major parts of the initiative in the Mission Shaped Ministry Course and the Online Guide.

We have now begun to reflect on what kind of structure might follow on from Fresh Expressions in 2009. This thinking is at an early stage but the present proposal would be for a further five year initiative but working in a different way: a smaller core team providing leadership on behalf of the Archbishops but working in more formal partnerships with mission agencies and other bodies to carry forward to agenda and work towards the full integration of the principles in MSC into the normal, ongoing life of both the Church of England and the Methodist Church.

And finally

The significant progress which has been made is due to a number of agencies and central church bodies being willing to work together and combine their energies for the common good. The partnership with the Methodist Church has been a positive fruit of the Covenant process both nationally and locally. Church Army in particular has played a key role both nationally and locally along with CMS , CPAS and Anglican Church Planting Initiatives and New Way.

By God's grace much has been and is being accomplished – most of all at local level but there is an urgent need for dioceses and the national church to give continued and renewed commitment to this focus and priority in the coming years.

Being part of this initiative thus far has been an immense privilege and a surprising, stretching and humbling journey. It has been particularly good to engage regularly and at depth with those called to begin fresh expressions of church who are a wonderful resource for the present and future Church of England. There are many, many stories to tell of God's goodness and providence and grace. And there is a sense that we are still at the beginning of what God is able to do.

Steven Croft
Archbishops' Missioner and Team Leader

**All Synod Members are warmly invited to the
Fresh Expressions reception in the Harvey
Goodwin Suite immediately following the
close of business on Tuesday 27th February**

