Mission-shaped Church
Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context
A report from a working group of the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council (175 pages, Church House Publishing, 2004)

1. CHANGING CONTEXTS

Social trends in the last 30 years
The context in which the Church of England ministers in the new millennium paints a picture of increasingly fragmented lives:

- ✠ the average household size has fallen from 2.9 to 2.4
- ✠ more people own their homes, and spend Sundays improving them
- ✠ more people work outside the home, especially lone women with children, and people work longer hours
- ✠ the annual distance travelled in cars and vans has doubled from 313 to 624 billion kilometres.
- ✠ the number of divorced people has risen from one to eight per cent of the population, not including those who have remarried. 22 per cent of children now live in lone-parent families.
- ✠ the number of single men has risen from three to ten per cent of households.
- ✠ adults now spend an average of 20 hours a week watching television.

The power of networks
The western world today is a 'network society', a fundamentally new social structure. Mobility, the ability to navigate the flows around which the emerging society is structured, has become the major marker of inclusion or exclusion. The gospel has to meet people where they are, both among the mobile and among the excluded 'poor', before it can enter and affect their lives.

> To live in one place no longer means to live together, and living together no longer means living in the same place *Ulrich Beck*.

There are two distinct processes at work.

1. community is being re-formed around networks *a change in the structure of community, with which the church must engage.*
2. people are more reluctant to make lasting commitments *a corrosive force that the church must resist because it undermines all community.*

Consumer culture
We were once shaped by what we produce; now we are shaped by what we consume. The core value of society has moved from 'progress' to 'choice'. Even truth is a personal choice, because in the marketplace, we have no way of rejecting a dogma as false, we can only 'buy into' a belief or 'not buy it'. The church has no alternative but to work *in* a consumer society, although it must avoid being *of* it. An important way to do this is to remember the poor, because

> for the first time in history the poor are un-functional and useless. *Zygmut Bauman*

Our call is clear:
- ✠ to proclaim the gospel within these different structures
- ✠ to repentance that we have allowed the church to drift apart from culture

Make a list of geographical groups, people groups and networks operating in your community. Compare this against a list of networks with which your local church is involved. Are there places where the church is not involved, but should be? What might be done about this?

2. THE STORY SINCE BREAKING NEW GROUND

In the late 1970s, church planting was largely unknown, although 'daughter churches' were opened in the 1920s and 1950s. In 1978 only three churches were planted, in 1983 there were nine, and in 1985 fifteen. In 1987 Holy Trinity Brompton held a church planting conference, which became an annual event. Between 1990 and 1992 40 churches were planted each year, many crossing parish boundaries. Media attention focused on the four cases which upset the 'invaded' incumbents, and the resulting working party produced *Breaking New Ground* in 1994. This report legitimised church planting, affirmed both parish and network as valid, and provided stories and guidance.

Breaking New Ground was permission-giving, not future-looking. The hope was to increase planting activity which flagged after 1992, but what increased was not quantity but diversity. It became clear as many plants failed that development needed as much attention as establishment. Causes of failure included poor planning, leadership issues, inward focus, cultural blindness, part-time leadership and lack of resources. It was assumed in 1994 that church plants would be bridges to bring people back into 'proper' church, but this was proved wrong because traditional churches are just not attractive to most post-Christian people:

> Since the seventeenth century more and more people have discovered, originally to their surprise, they could ignore God and the Church and yet be none the worse for it. *David Bosch*

Breaking New Ground emphasised legality, safety and gradual development. But its 'how?' question is being overtaken by a more radical one, 'what is church, and what is it for?'

Further afield

> A notable recent contribution in this field is the Presbyterian Church of Scotland's report, *A Church without Walls*. It gives excellent summaries of the changes in mission climate they face; the contours and processes of the emerging church as they envisage it; an honest list of the inhibiting factors in existing church life to overcome, and proposals for continuing reform.

Wales has produced a similar document, *Good News in Wales*, which uses stories. Both of these are suggested as companions for study along with *Mission Shaped Church*.

All churches were once church plants of one sort or another – a new initiative designed to connect the gospel with different people and/ or in a different way. How and why was your local church started?

## 3. WHAT IS CHURCH PLANTING AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

> Church planting is creating new communities of Christian faith as part of the Mission of God, to express his Kingdom in every geographic and cultural context.

1 Corinthians 15 (albeit out of context) provides a good analogy for the freedom a church plant needs to find its own shape:

> What you sow does not come to live unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed... But God gives it a body as he has determined.

The seed was part of the sending church with its particular manifestations and culture, and crosses into a new culture. The most important lesson to be learned since *Breaking New Ground* is that a functional approach to church planting results in non-missionary churches that do not thrive. Unless and until the kingdom and the mission are in the DNA and the seed of the church, what is planted will prove to be sterile. If mission is not located within the identity of the church, planting is very unlikely to recover it.

Church planting and Anglicanism
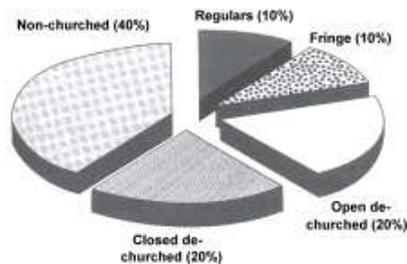
The parish system is failing to fulfil the Church of England's call to be the church for the nation. In urban areas the non-churched figure may rise to 80%, showing that the parish system is full of holes, like a Gruyère cheese. Most of our missionary work is actually amongst the fringe and the open de-churched. What about the other 60%?

What can be done in your area to enable the non-churched to see and hear the gospel, and to experience Christian life and faith?

4. FRESH EXPRESSIONS OF CHURCH

Some common features of many expressions of church described here include:
- ✠ the centrality of small groups
- ✠ not meeting on Sunday morning
- ✠ relating to a particular network, eg workplace or school
- ✠ post-denominational
- ✠ stronger connection to a resourcing network, eg Holy Trinity Brompton or Soul Survivor, than to other churches in the deanery

Alternative worship communities These prefer to work in a way which is diffuse, local, symbolic and subversive rather than focused, central and didactic. They are one of the most thoughtful attempts to relate worship and culture, but are uncomfortable with blatant evangelism. They tend to be a safety-net for people falling out rather than a fishing net for people coming in. They need encouragement to rejoice in their identity in interdependence with the sending church.

Base Ecclesial Communities Originating in Brazil in the 1950s, BECs are strongly identified with people at the bottom or edges of society, and offer a gospel of liberation for and of the poor. In South America theological and community development training exists to resource lay 'pastoral agents' to help the BEC reflect in the light of scripture on their experience, and to co-ordinate and develop the life of the community. Some are members of religious orders.

Café Church The main distinguishing characteristic is the ambience: people gather around tables and not in pews, and refreshments are served at the start of the service, not at the end. It provides a relaxed opportunity for finding out about faith, and encourages a relational approach.

Cell church affirms that:

- ✠ cell and celebration (small and big meeting) are both viable expressions of church
- ✠ every cell member has the potential to be involved in ministry
- ✠ each cell is a building block of the church
- ✠ cell leader support and training are essential

It responds well to a culture where community and family have been eroded. 'Meta church' is a half-way house, where a congregation splits into small groups but remains the primary unit. The key to the process is finding and forming leaders through ongoing apprenticeship. It simplifies the inner life of a small church, releasing energy for an outward focus. There is less clarity around sacraments, ordained leadership, and connection to the wider church, except through the celebrations.

Churches arising out of community initiatives These churches see community, not worship, as the key dynamic of church; and good news as action, not word. They often arise accidentally, when a social initiative creates a group apart from the existing church.

Multiple and midweek congregations These have a long history, especially in the 8am Book of Common Prayer Communion, but are not often recognised as church plants. Lunchtime or breakfast services can attract a completely new congregation from the business community. It is important to recognise these services as 'proper church' just as much as Sunday morning.

Network churches These churches do openly what many parish churches do unconsciously: cater for one particular group of people, through shared music, leisure or disability. They generally complement and do not compete with parishes, and often have a closer relationship with the diocese and wider church. To work well and reach the non-churched, network churches need to have a clear target group.

Seeker church A model started by Willow Creek Chicago, seeker churches aim to be accessible and meaningful to the non-churched. It is very resource-hungry and is not really a form of church in its own right, more a way in.

Traditional church plants These tend to serve a geographical area within an existing parish which is separated from the existing church for geographic or social reasons. They are usually similar to the sending church but with more informal worship and a lighter structure. A 'replant' uses a disused building or revitalizes a dying congregation.

Traditional church inspiring new interest Cathedral worship, retreats, and new monastic orders (such as the Northumbria Community) are all beginning to do this.

Youth congregations These are not the same as youth services. Their growth demonstrates the difficulty of integrating young people into existing churches, and the urgency of attracting younger people to prevent serious decline in the future.

Five values for missionary churches
- ✠ focused on God the Trinity
- ✠ incarnational
- ✠ transformational
- ✠ makes disciples
- ✠ relational

Which of the five values above most characterize the church of which you are a part? Which of these values most challenge the church of which you are a part?

5. THEOLOGY FOR A MISSIONARY CHURCH

Conversion ought not to involve the transfer of individuals from their native culture to the church, so much as the conversion of their culture enriching the church. The Church of England needs to draw on the experience overseas missionaries who are trained in 'inculturation' or 'contextualization'

> Do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, beautiful as that place may seem to you. You must have courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have been before.

The four marks of the church enshrined in the creed remind the church of its true nature and calling. Each mark can be seen as a dimension of a journey.

- ✟ **Holy** is the **up** dimension, *towards God in worship*
- ✟ **One** is the **in** dimension, *towards relationships with each other*
- ✟ **Apostolic** is the **out** dimension, *following Jesus' call to mission*
- ✟ **Catholic** is the **of** dimension, *connecting all parts of the church*

To be a church as Anglicans understand it, a mission initiative must have the sacraments of baptism and eucharist.

List the ways in which your church can be identified as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Are some of these attributes of the church more prominent than others? What more could you do to show people outside the church that these marks are what God calls the church to be?

6. SOME METHODOLOGIES FOR A MISSIONARY CHURCH

Double listening involves listening to the culture where a church might be established, and to the inherited tradition of the gospel and the church. You do not go with empty hands, but you must go with open ears.

The three dimensions of church planting

- ✟ **width –** *who is the plant for?* (goals) this raises the question of the homogeneous unit principle below
- ✟ **height –** *who is the plant by?* (resources) is it progression planting building on an existing group of Christians in the target area or network, or pioneer planting where a team goes out to start from scratch?
- ✟ **depth –** *who is the plant with?* (partners) how is it part of the church catholic? who are the mission partners? Is the plant a runner, a graft, a transplant – or a seed?

The important thing is that these mission-questions drive the church-answers, and not the other way around.

Homogeneous Unit Principle
This principle is that people become Christian without leaving their own racial, linguistic or class culture. Some argue that because Jesus is the reconciler we should resist this.

Others say the diversity reflects the richness of creation, and to reach those traditionally excluded, like the urban poor, it is necessary to take the gospel to their culture.

Three simple questions
- ✞ What is the mission to this area?
- ✞ What kind of community is needed to sustain the mission?
- ✞ What set of spiritual disciplines is needed to sustain the community?

Patterns of worship *Common Worship* has a 'common core' strategy emphasising patterns and structures while giving freedom on specific texts. Church planters should be trained in this way: to understand the underlying structures of the liturgy while being trusted with the freedom to develop culturally appropriate worship from below.

This chapter suggests that the following is wisely observed: 'Start with the Church and the mission will probably get lost. Start with mission and it is likely that the church will be found. What would it mean – in practice – to 'start with mission', and not 'start with the Church'?

7. AN ENABLING FRAMEWORK FOR A MISSIONARY CHURCH

> There is a fabric of the old way of being society and being church. We are not about patching the fabric of that old garment but seeking to set up a new loom to weave the new fabric for tomorrow's society of the kingdom.

Levers for change

The legal options for non-parochial church plants restrict the dynamic of church planting. A lever here might be new 'missionary orders' directly accountable to the bishop allowing work across parish boundaries. Another key lever is the resourcing of local leadership to take the church into the second generation, and this may require new forms of training and ordaining in the local context.

This chapter emphasises the need to identify, encourage, affirm, train and deploy people who have the gifts of 'pioneers' as well as 'pastors'. How can the ministry of pioneering church planters and evangelists be better encouraged and affirmed, and how can their gifts be better used?

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

These include:
- ✞ In each diocese there should be a strategy for the encouragement and resourcing of church planting and fresh expressions of church, reflecting the network and neighbourhood reality of society and of mission opportunity. This strategy should be developed with ecumenical collaboration.
- ✞ In each diocese a member of senior staff should be identified who will be responsible for encouraging, reviewing and supporting church plants.
- ✞ A pattern of training, mentoring and apprenticeship 'on the job' should be developed.
- ✞ Patterns of authorization for a specific task should be developed rather than authorization with the assumption of a potentially lifelong ministry.
- ✞ In each diocese there should be established a 'mission growth and opportunity fund' to support new ventures in cross-cultural mission.