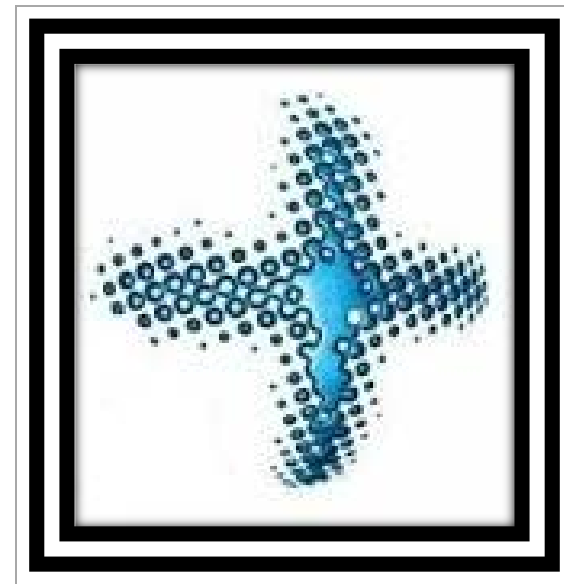


## Definition:

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



# ESSENTIAL FRESH EXPRESSIONS



## For More Resources and Stories:

- **Reimagining Church in the Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island** *free video series* – [www.nspeidiocese.ca](http://www.nspeidiocese.ca)  
'LEADERSHIP' drop-down bar to 'VSST & Task Groups' to 'Healthy Parishes'
- **Vital Church Maritimes Conference materials**  
[www.nspeidiocese.ca](http://www.nspeidiocese.ca)  
'RESOURCES' drop-down bar
- [www.freshexpressions.ca](http://www.freshexpressions.ca)
- [www.freshexpressionsus.org](http://www.freshexpressionsus.org)
- [www.freshexpressions.org.uk](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk)

## 2BADAPTED FROM "THREE-MINUTE GUIDE"

A free resource from [freshexpressions.org.uk](http://freshexpressions.org.uk)

## WHAT ARE THEY?

Fresh expressions of church are missional, contextual, formational and ecclesial. In other words, they:

- serve those outside the church;
- listen to people and enter their context;
- make discipleship a priority: journeying with people to Jesus;
- form church - they are not bridges to an existing church, but an expression of church for others in the midst of their lives.

Fresh expressions can be called missional communities, organic church, church plants, new monastic communities, congregations, gatherings, discipleship groups - almost anything! They come in many shapes and sizes, but always reflect their context.

Fresh expressions are not better than the existing church. They complement it and come to birth alongside it.

Existing churches may connect with people on their fringe, while many fresh expressions serve people well beyond the fringe. Both types of church can affirm and support each other - what's known as the 'mixed economy' church.



## HOW TO MEASURE FRUITFULNESS

Evaluating fresh expressions is about discerning what the Spirit is up to. It is not mainly about targets. It is about recognising what the Spirit has been doing and what you are called to do next. You will be measuring fruitfulness not simply as 'bums on seats' or offering envelopes, but as progress along a path.

Reducing fruitfulness to numbers will always be difficult. What is a satisfactory number? Jesus said the kingdom is like a mustard seed (Matt. 13.31): a fresh expression may look small, but become highly fruitful. Many conventional congregations are tiny. So we must beware of judging success by size.

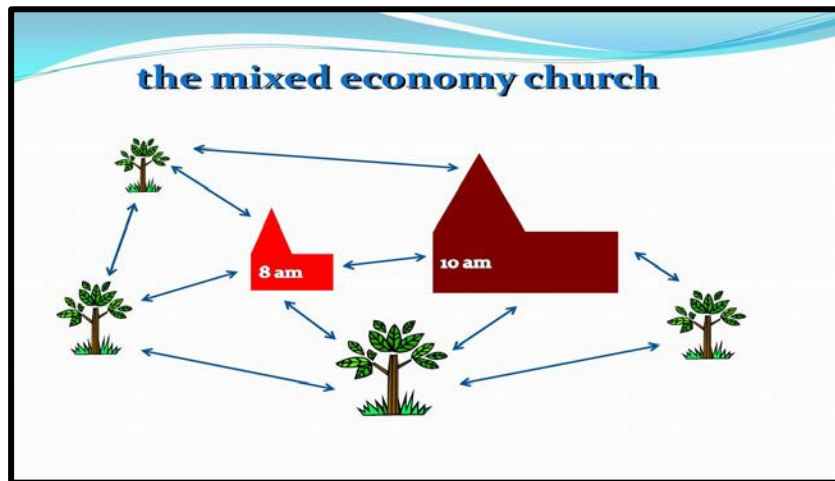
It is better to see success as movement - toward a destination. A fresh expressions journey enables you to recognise movement from one milestone to another. If together you set targets - be flexible. The Spirit is full of surprises and may have other ideas! Remember:

- the journey may be more difficult than you realise;
- fresh expressions often grow by responding to unexpected opportunities.
- leaders may be so keen to hit a target that they hurry through the vital process of listening:

## Evaluate growth in discipleship

As the fresh expression nears the right-hand side of the journey diagram, you will focus more on maturity. How can you measure spiritual growth? You might do so by thinking about each of the interlocking relationships at the heart of church:

- **up** - with God;
- **in** - within the fellowship;
- **out** - with the world;
- **of** - with the wider church (part of the whole body)



**Communal** practices are done together to support individuals' walks with Jesus. People can do them for a limited period, either as a whole gathering or in self-selecting groups.

Examples could include:

- for six weeks, each person does one act of generosity a week and shares with the group about their experience;
- as a form of prayer, one group writes protest letters on behalf of Amnesty International
- three or four people contract to eat more healthily or to read an evening Bible story to their children;
- each evening in Lent, individuals say the same texted prayer of confession in their homes;
- individuals text each other prayers through the week.



**Connect** with the wider church. Christians are baptised into the whole body, and discipleship involves learning from and contributing to it. Connecting up can include:

- shared learning, missional, social and worship events with your parent church;
- attending a Christian festival or conference;
- downloading online Christian resources;
- 'blending church' by worshipping in your fresh expression and, periodically, in traditional church;
- getting involved with a Christian project overseas.

Picture your community as a circle, not rows. Shared leadership involves being part of the circle, inviting others to pool their gifts and mature into leadership.

### **EXAMPLE:**

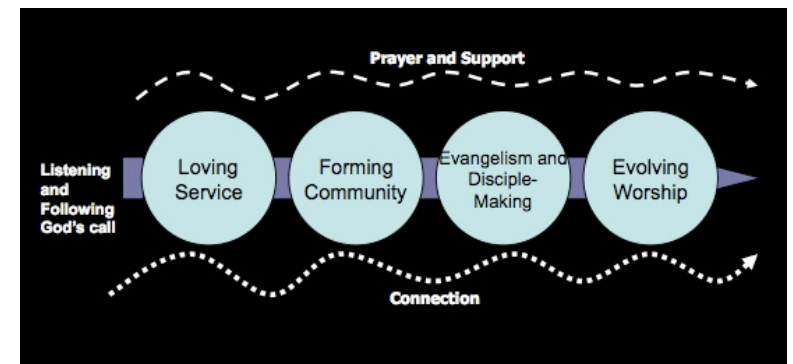
Three Christian women in a village loved cooking. They invited teenagers to learn how to cook - and then eat what they'd made. As they ate together they talked about their lives, and when it seemed natural the women shared what their Christian faith meant to them.

The meals always started with grace. The teenagers were invited to add their own 'thank you', and later their 'asking' prayers. They wrote their prayers on a piece of paper, dropped them into a cooking bowl, passed round the bowl and drew out a prayer to read.

Increasingly, the teenagers chatted about Christianity and eventually Cook@church, a new Christian community, was born. Similar groups are now forming elsewhere.

### **HOW DO THEY WORK?**

Fresh expressions often emerge prayerfully in the following way. Each stage has its own value for the kingdom.



They start with careful listening. As the Christians involved love others, they build community with them.

If appropriate, they begin to share Jesus and provide opportunities for individuals to explore becoming his disciples.

As individuals come to faith, a worshipping community with the character of church takes shape round them. Often the community is linked to a local church, and becomes a new congregation in effect.

At their best, these new Christian communities then repeat the process, starting further fresh expressions. Of course real life is messier than diagrams! The circles usually overlap and may be taken in a different order.



## REASONS TO START A FRESH EXPRESSION OF CHURCH

### 1. God is missional and wants us prayerfully to join him

That's one of the big themes of Scripture. God's mission – salvation plan - is to bring creation to perfection (e.g. Genesis 12.3; John 3.17; Revelation 21.1-4).

Mission has always been vital to God. The Creator did not wake up one day and say, 'Let's do mission'. He couldn't say that because God's character is the same yesterday, today and for ever (Hebrews 13.8). There is no before and after in God. There cannot be a time when God was not missional and a time when he is.

Mission therefore is not a second step for God. So it cannot be a second step for Christians. Mission must be a priority, not an afterthought. Fresh expressions of church are one approach to mission.

'hidden curriculum' is its common life and values. What are they teaching new believers?

One community invited everyone to contribute to its shared meal, including those on benefits. They wanted to show that each person had something to offer.

**Encourage conversations** about Jesus. People learn by asking questions, putting what they've learnt into their own words, trying out ideas and listening to other people's comments.

Jesus did not merely preach at people. He taught through conversations and left room for dialogue (Mark 8.27-30; 10.17-31; John 6.25-59). Allow plenty of time for Christian discussion.

**Connect worship to life.** The Spirit works through worship that engages the everyday. So as you introduce new Christians to worship, ask them whether it connects with their lives. Ask, too, how their daily experiences can lead to worship?

The worship of one fresh expression followed this sequence:

- gathering - songs and prayers as people gather round Jesus;
- introducing the theme - e.g. Bible passage and short talk;
- exploring the theme (e.g. reflecting the theme on your Facebook page or journal your thoughts);
- offering - feedback from groups is offered to God, sometimes with communion.

Keep your worship:

- simple - e.g. as part of a shared meal;
- helpful - relevant to life;
- authentic - e.g. using language from the heart;
- rich - vary the diet;
- enabling - are worshippers pooling their gifts?





## HOW TO START MAKING DISCIPLES

Find a framework - Jesus called his followers to make disciples (Matthew 28.19). A fresh expressions journey offers a framework for this.

The first three steps – listening, loving & serving, and building community - have intrinsic value for the kingdom, but also create opportunities for individuals to explore Jesus.

Put in *stepping stones* to 'exploring discipleship' - by starting a distinct group for this purpose. Share stories about Jesus. When people attend one of your stepping stones, such as an enquirers' group, you can introduce Jesus by discussing gospel stories about him, including stories he told. You might ask:

- if that story happened today, what would it look like?
- what does it mean to you?
- how could it make a difference to your life?

Above all, be a good friend! Don't force people to explore Jesus if they don't wish to or more quickly than they want. Be patient, pray and trust the Holy Spirit.

## HOW TO GROW MATURE DISCIPLES

Be a good **companion**, whether as a friend, mentor or leader. New believers may have little Christian background and their faith journey may be very different to yours. So be understanding. Walk at their pace. Remember how patient the Holy Spirit is with you, and be patient with them. Don't be an expert, but a fellow disciple.

Let the **community** do the talking. Teachers know that pupils learn from the 'hidden curriculum' - relationships and values - as much as from the official curriculum. Your community's

## 2. God wants mission to be done by communities in life

As far as possible, we are not to do mission alone, but together - like the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus, for example, was constantly in touch with his Father (John 8.28) and was led by the Spirit (Luke 4.1).

Jesus also did mission in community with his disciples - in the middle of everyday life. They attended the wedding at Cana, for instance (John 2.2). When he taught his disciples how to do mission, he sent them in pairs - in community - to the villages and towns, to ordinary life (Luke 9. 1ff; 10. 1ff).

The first churches were in people's homes, which were the epicentre of family, networks and often work. These communities witnessed to Jesus in day-to-day life. Fresh expressions of church follow this example. They are communities for mission in the everyday. They herald the time when Jesus will fill 'all things' - all slices of life (Eph. 1.23). He will be in every part of existence.

## 3. Fresh expressions offer the gift of being community with Jesus

Like any gift, this must suit the recipients. Would a bottle of wine be much of a gift if the other person was a non-drinker?

Offering community appropriately could mean inviting someone to an existing church. But other people will need something different. Say a church meets at a time, place and in a style that is inaccessible. It won't be a gift if it can't be reached.

In these cases, the gift of the church will take the form of a new community with Jesus - a new expression of church that's available to them in their circumstances.

Fresh expressions echo holy communion: a piece of the church is broken off to become a new community, shared with others.



#### 4. Fresh expressions are a rounded form of mission.

They hold together the great commandment (to love others) and the great commission (to make disciples). Jesus combined the two and so did the early church, which cared for the poor alongside sharing the gospel. Fresh expressions unite both today. Many start with loving service - from providing a place to chat, to passing on skills, to working with homeless people.

Community is formed with those being served, individuals are introduced to Jesus if they want and something with the character of church emerges. The aim is to see individuals - and their neighbourhoods and networks - transformed by the Spirit.

#### 5. Fresh expressions work - numerically!

Over 3,500 have been started in the UK across the denominations. Research suggests that in 2014 they existed in 13.5% of Church of England parishes. Their leaders said that three quarters of people attending came from outside the church. Fresh expressions help grow the kingdom by strengthening the church's mission.



#### HOW TO START A FRESH EXPRESSION OF CHURCH

Ask another Christian. God wants us to work in teams. That's why Jesus sent out his disciples in pairs (Luke 10. 1). So if you want to start a fresh expression of church, prayerfully find someone to do it with.

Begin with what you've got - who you are, what you know, who you know and what you have:

- what are your passions and interests - cooking, art etc.?
- what do you know about - repairing bikes?
- who could you share your passion with and ask to help?
- what do you possess - a home to meet in, a car to transport people, time to spend with others?

Chat to others - to God directly in prayer, to those you are seeking to serve and to others with wisdom to share. Listen and learn all you can. Don't short change this listening! If you really want to serve people round you, use conversations with them to propel you forward.



#### EXAMPLE

Hot Chocolate started with a small group of Christians offering cups of hot chocolate to young people in the centre of Dundee. As they got to know each other, the young people described how they were looking for a place to rehearse their band. The Christians offered them the church building. That was the beginning of what became a thriving community, with a worshipping core. It started with what the Christians knew - how to make hot chocolate! But it developed because they listened to the young people and responded to them.

Dream up lots of possibilities. Keep asking 'what if...?' 'What if we did this?' 'What if we did that?' Eventually, through prayer, you will come up with a brainwave!

Expert designers keep exploring possibilities. Inexperienced ones miss out on creative ideas because they narrow down options too early. Experiment like mad! Don't be shy about trying something to see if it works.