

Michael Moynagh: Emergingchurch.intro

Monarch 2004

summary by Alison Morgan Dec 2008

Book for people who want to know more about fresh expressions.

1. Goodbye models, hello mindset

Fresh expressions are often not dramatic, but rather bite-sized and unobtrusive. Eg a Monday morning 'LunchBox' service in Halifax. Compare Saddleback's vision of a cineplex church running in multiple venues throughout Sunday and offering 5 worship styles at 13 services (with a video sermon) – 'leaders like it bigger, but the people like it smaller' (pastor Larry Osborne).

Emerging church is church from below, starting with the desire to express church in the culture of the group involved. Some are for Christians disillusioned with church; others for those with no church background. George Lings describes 5 bundles of emerging church:

- Those plugging into a network rather than a neighbourhood
- Those focussing on small groups
- Those keeping the congregation but changing where it meets and what it does – eg café church, al worship, midweek church, youth congregations
- Those engaging in community development, eg drop in centre spawning a small congregation
- Those mixing these approaches

In its evangelism, existing church tends to treat people as if they are the same, like the standardised world of the 50s-60s. It doesn't fit the new customised world in which diversity is celebrated – from any colour as long as it's black, to the Smart car. In this it-must-fit-me world, Planet church will be in outer orbit if it continues to treat everyone the same.

About 1500 people leave the church in the UK every week; many are long standing members. Many initially welcome certainty; but eventually are forced to wrestle with the questions of their contemporaries and b/w answers begin to jar (Jamieson).

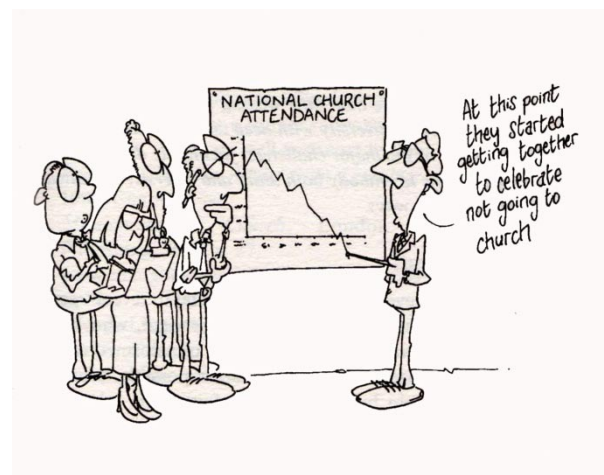
Between 1989 and 1998 1,867 churches opened in England; 2,757 closed. Many church plants just replicated the parent church, and collapsed under the struggle to crank up the pre-existing model of church every Sunday in a hall/school. They replicated obsolescent models of church.

Social gospel will be unsustainable if evangelism stops – where will these Christian volunteers come from? Evangelism must leap the gap between church and culture (Alpha doesn't). 96% of young people have no church background.

2. The seven faces of God

Emerging church is a catch all for a wide range of attempts to re-imagine Christian community. It's interdependent with traditional church; experimental; transformational (not an ecclesiastical theme park, but in the business of change). Single models of church will no longer do – as ministers return from the latest how-to-do-it conference, the model they bring back becomes carsick and never makes the journey. Sacrificial, self-reproducing; diverse. The church had a diversity policy from Pentecost onwards – the Spirit didn't enable every person to understand the one language, but every Christian to speak out a different one.

Stuart Murray Williams: 'too many emerging churches are culturally creative but theologically conservative' – new theological insights are needed if new ways of being church are to have lasting missiological significance. United.



3. New world, new church

Huddersfield survey in 90s found 58% of adults claimed never to have been in church.

% population attending on average Sunday was 11.7% in 1979; 9.9% in 1989; 7.5% in 1998 (P Brierley).

It's top heavy – 25% of churchgoers are over 65, only 15% are aged 15-29.

Children are down from 1,416,000 in 1979 to 717,100 in 1998. 35% of children were in church in 1940; now 6% in 2000.

Health of society depends partly on health of the church – much voluntary work is done by Christians.

Story of 40 teenagers finding Christ on Aberdeen housing estate in 70s; advised to go to church; and it died.

Consumerism → the experience economy: consumers have been boring themselves to death in the same old shopping malls, with the same old brands; they long for something new. Has created an appetite for experiences (Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, *The Experience Economy*, Harvard 1999). Retailers have responded by creating them – shopping itself is becoming an experience, with sights, aromas, music. But increasingly people will want life-transforming experiences. Perhaps this explains the quest for 'spirituality'. Can we help?

We worry about increasing individualism. But relationships are at the heart of consumer behaviour – we eat, watch sport, go to the cinema, shop *together*. And relationships are at the core of the church...

'For the first time in human history, a shared mythos has broken down, and commercial messages are now taking the place of shared sacred stories. We know in our hearts that a profession designed to sell products cannot fill this gap. If we take the time to think of how many people are finding the only meaning they have in their lives from consumption of various sorts, we do not feel proud; we feel sad, or even outraged' – marketing experts Margaret Mark & Carol Pearson. Consumerism fails to satisfy because experiences wear off. Choice creates anxiety. People have big questions – can we answer them? Can we be confident we have something unique to offer the world – or will we set our standards too low through fear?

Traditional church still has a place – Anglican cathedrals have growing congregations. 'Rooted' local churches also – people are moving less not more often (14% moved home in 1952; 10% in 1992; relocation halved between 1984 and 1994). Rooted churches minister to each local culture in an appropriate way. Brand churches will work too – eg Vineyard, NW, Reform churches (nb we don't yet have any that appeal to people with no Christian background). Liquid church may flourish – working through networks. Workplace church is possible.

4. Talking strategic sense

Need to find ways of growing inherited church (see Bob Jackson) but also make experimental church a growing priority. Bob analysed a database of 369 Anglican church plants over 23 year period. Each was launched on average by 27 people, and grew within 3-4 years to 70 people. In a mid 90s survey, 64% of attendees of plants were new to churchgoing. Large churches grow, but often by recruiting Christians new to the area, or evangelising people with a church background. There are fewer and fewer of these.

5. A u-church for an i-world?

Emerging church isn't consumerism; the existing church often is – embracing uniformity, individualism, dependency. Emerging church is trying to do better. Can we affirm diversity, as scripture does, rather than offering menus, through drawing 'tribes' together? What about worship – using different styles and forms? Consumerism sees friendships replacing larger groups (middle sized communities are on the way out). But we need them – to provide belonging, be inclusive of newcomers/the lonely, offer long-term support, build people into strong networks, offer more opportunities for personal growth by being part of a non-homogenous group.

Many inherited churches have colluded with the shift from middle-sized community to friendship – they offer small group fellowship, but personal interaction on Sundays is minimal (real community begins after the service, when individuals mingle as they leave church, or over coffee; as if the service is the entertainment, and community happens once it's over. But the entertainment is often tedious – an hour of tedium for 10 minutes of fellowship'). Astonishing numbers of Christians say their church (worship) is boring. Can emerging church do better? Simple church – over a meal, in an afternoon, in a way which doesn't require hours of prep and which involves everyone in discussion?

6. Church! Get me out of here!

Emerging church raises the basic question, what do we mean by church? Some fresh expressions are just worse –Mickey mouse church. Church needs the dimensions of up (towards God), in (relationships with one another), out (mission), and of (identifying with the whole church).

Question – does church need the same-people-in-same-place gathering that characterises inherited church? Not sitting in rows but keeping in touch with friends. Bob and Mary Hopkins point out the C1st Jewish model of religious community is extended household where sabbath/passover meals were celebrated and the law taught; synagogue which was interactive and comprised a small no of households; and festival/pilgrimage centred on the temple in Jerusalem. Pattern continued in the medieval church; but gradually the festival type of worship became the weekly norm. Cells now try and recapture the missing sense of community, with periodic bigger gatherings.

Is there still a place for church buildings? They offer identity, a sacred space, a practical HQ. Even in a network society symbols of place provide a sense of belonging. The issue is the presence of the Spirit, not building or no building.

7. Down to the local

Dangers of churchplanting include cloning not creating, failing to let context shape the church and the mismatch of resources to the task. It has to be kept simple if it is to work (Lings/Murray in 90s survey). Questions to ask of a new venture: who's it from – who initiates, who owns the vision? Who's it by – leadership, team skills, resources, training? Who's it with – who is it for? What will go on. The church in Ukraine intends to plant 28,000 churches by 2015, and is up to 6000. Its strategy is to find ways of meeting human needs in the cities church plans to reach, practising grace before it is preached. How will it move on – no catches, but spiritual value from the start. Why keep it on – staying simple, not skimping on resources, valuing each phase, connecting to the main church, keeping on track. Becoming self financing, self governing, self propagating.



8. Fast-tracking new church

We need to make emerging church a priority. Mission is at the heart of God; the church is most like God when it engages in mission. There is no evidence that people are turning from consumerism to traditional church in significant numbers. Time has shown it can work. Vision within a denomination can make a difference – eg CofE's initiative to train youth workers. Emerging church has to be implemented on the ground – but has to be led from the top. Put it on the map. The need for learning is urgent – not for 'you come to us' training in colleges, but (in line with emerging church ethos) 'we come to you – we'll provide training and support where you are, in a way that matches your circumstances and at times that suit you'.

Key drivers for change: decline of the church; mission opportunities; fragmenting society; busyness (→ simple church).
Key barriers to change: stretched ministers lack energy/confidence to implement change; failure to create collaborative networks; fresh expressions being taken over by existing churchgoers with weak mission hearts; inadequate leadership.

Will we manage it? We won't stay the same, watching decline – too scary. We may give it a go, but fail. Or we may hack it, with emerging church rising up the agenda.

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