

The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighbourhood.

John 1v14 – The Message Translation



“Fresh Expressions are new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don't ‘go to church’”

Believing that God is already at work in the world, Fresh Expressions reimagine how the Body of Christ can live and work in diverse and changing contexts.



Over 3000 Fresh Expressions are now active around the world. From the initial vision of Archbishop Rowan Williams and the Mission Shaped Church report (2004) a growing movement of practitioners and pioneers have formed Fresh Expressions of Church in the UK, across Europe and in North America.

The Mission Shaped Ministry Course is exactly what it states “on the tin” a chance to equip ourselves with planting and sustaining a fresh expression of Church. The course, once a month after work for a year and a residential weekend, was held at the Bluewater Shopping Centre Kent. Thankfully, I only worked down the road so the logistics of getting there not reliant on special flights!

Our group was ecumenical alongside the usual “breadth” of the C of E. Although it became clear early on that a couple of vicars had been “sent” rather than “called”. I asked one what they were going to apply when they finished the course and he said: “I’m going to apply for retirement!” I suppose that encapsulates one of the key things I learnt and had experienced. Church can be an alien environment of books and formality that caters for the existing crowd who know what to say, where to look in the book and when to stand. We live in a changing, technology driven world and that is one, among many reasons, why Church on Sunday fails to touch an unchurched generation glued to their iphone who choose what to see and hear!

What the training hinged on was how to reach your community. How to be seen as part of the community and along the way to do some “myth busting” about Christians and Christianity. Creating a safe environment to ask life questions, to get people engaged with Jesus and to be seen as part of a worshipping community as they develop as disciples.

Covering all aspects of where we worship through to challenging our thinking on what a Mission shaped Church could look like the trainers focussed the group on different ways to deliver the word in today's world. It was a mixture of reviewing institutionalised delivery of outreach and worship through to looking at what worked in other areas. In short, the whole course pointed to the obvious: “The **definition of insanity** is doing the **same thing** over and over and expecting different results.” A Church should be in a constant state of development looking outwards and being innovative in delivering the Good News.

In Eymet, we are developing the rhythm of Church musically and we are seen “within” our community. People know we are in the Temple and that every week something happens (Continuity). Some people may view it as a turn “off” not having a hymn book and organ, others feel at ease seeing every day workplace technology as part of worship (Contemporary). Eymet Temple is a Mission Church that is aimed at English and French speakers (Accessible). This is a different way of reaching out to people in an urban setting so that even if it is by accident drawing people through sound and vision, they are made aware of the love of Jesus. Unknown to the outsider, prayer is part of this rhythm in the Temple and prayer is a powerful call! The applied learning guided by God is – Continuity, Contemporary and Accessible – or - The Word has moved back into the neighbourhood!

- Allan Petchey