Mission-shaped Church

A summary of the report “Mission-shaped Church: Church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context” (Church House Publishing 2004)

This report, compiled by a working group of the Church of England, was presented and adopted by the 2004 General Synod. It is intended for study, discussion, and hopefully implementation across the breadth of the Anglican Church in the U. K. While the church context is not the same in Australia, this report has some helpful understandings of church planting and fresh expressions of church which may be applied in our context.

Chapter 1 reflects on “Changing Contexts”. It looks at:

- social trends – changes in housing, employment, mobility, family life, use of free time, and fragmentation of society. Although the figures may be different, the social changes are remarkably like those in Australia
- the power of networks – and the changes that brings to neighbourhoods and community, and the willingness of people to make lasting commitments to a particular organisation or community
- consumer culture – the freedom to choose, the shaping of identity, and self-indulgence
- post-Christendom culture – the demise of being “Christian” as part of personal or national identity and the lack of connection to any religious interest
- the challenges and the opportunity that this presents to the church.

Chapter 2 reports on what has happened since in the decade since the 1994 report on church planting entitled “Breaking New Ground”. It affirms much of the earlier report but expands and redefines some of its concepts. It contains a few relevant concepts worth remembering:

- church planting is legitimate
- church planting is not restricted by established parish boundaries
- there has been an explosion of diversity in fresh expressions of church
- church planting should not produce a clone of a sending church – “The planting process is the engagement of church and gospel with a new mission context, and this should determine the fresh expression of church”
- attention needs to be given not just to planting churches but to the process of helping them mature
- church planting is post-denominational

Chapter 3 explores “What is church planting and why does it matter?” After discussion about the evolving understanding of “church planting”, it offers the following definitive statements:

- Church planting is the process by which a seed of the life and message of Jesus embodied by a community of Christians is immersed for mission reasons in a particular cultural or geographic context.
- The intended consequence is that it roots there, coming to life as a new indigenous body of Christian disciples well suited to continue in mission.
- Planting is a process, but unless and until the kingdom and the mission are in the DNA of the seed of the church, what is planted will prove to be sterile. If mission is not located within the identity of church, planting is very unlikely to recover it.

They then discuss the labels which have been used to describe varieties of ‘new’ church and explain why they favour the phrase ‘fresh expressions of church’ used in their report.
Finally this chapter explores the spectrum of church relatedness found in English society, the subcultures in which we need to plan to work:

- Regular attenders – 10% of population who attend 5-8 times in 2 month period
- Fringe attenders – a further 10% who attend 1-3 times in 2 month period
- Open de-churched – some 20% who have left the church at some point in their life journey dropping out because of change of home, job or lifestyle, or because church did not cater for their age group, children, lifestyle, theology, etc. They are open to return if suitably contacted and invited
- Closed de-churched – a further 20% who have left church because of some hurt. They are damaged and disillusioned, having experienced rejection, lack of acceptance, a personality clash or relationship breakdown, or the church as a culture of control. Their radical disenchantment means that they have no intention of returning; experience has inoculated them against church
- Non-churched – the remaining 40% (which includes people of other faiths) have never been to church, except for wedding, funeral, etc.; they have no family history – at least for 3 generations – of belonging to church. Church is “an alien and expensive building that I wouldn’t know what to do in; worse it is occupied by people I wouldn’t be seen dead with”

In the light of the words of David Bosch, “Since the seventeenth century more and more people have discovered, originally to their surprise, that they could ignore God and the Church and yet be none the worse for it,” they define that “the task is to become church for them, among them, and with them, and under the Spirit of God to lead them to become church in their own culture”.

Chapter 4 looks at a variety of “Fresh Expressions of Church”, offering a critical assessment of each variety often supported by a story of an actual situation. Some of the common features of fresh expressions of church are:

- importance of small groups for discipleship and relational mission
- do not meet on Sunday mornings
- relate to a particular network of people
- are post-denominational; leadership may belong to a particular denomination but membership will have very slim denominational identity/allegiance
- may have connection to more than one support network

However, if these fresh expressions of church are to be missionary churches, they need to retain these five values:

- a missionary church is focussed on God – worshipping, serving, and sharing in the mission of a missionary God
- a missionary church is incarnational – shaping itself in relation to the culture in which it is locate or to which it is called
- a missionary church is transformational – seeking to transform whatever community, neighbourhood, or network in which it exists
- a missionary church makes disciples – calling people to live out a faith in Christ which is often counter-cultural to the world in which they live
- a missionary church is relational – creating a new community of faith which encourages and sustains its members

Their categories of fresh expressions of church (alphabetically listed) are as follows:

(1) Alternative worship communities

The alt.worship stream is strongly post-denominational, populated by people departing from and critical of existing church. Nevertheless it seeks to connect worship and culture. They act more as safety net for those falling out of church than a fishing net to for those still outside the church. They are sometimes clearer about what they are not their own self-identity. Being responsive to post-modern culture, they tend to:

- have a preference for ambiguity and antiquity, and use of multi-media
• operate in a diffuse, local, contextual, and symbolic style
• be subversive and open-ended rather than didactic.

Despite some stereotypical labelling by those not involved, alt.worship is not:
• mainly for youth – but are populated by young adults upwards
• a culturally cool Seeker service for the artistic
• an attempt to socialise people back into ‘real’ church
• necessarily a regular weekly event – but is still a valid worship alternative

(2) Small Christian Communities (SCCs)

Modelled on Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs) which originated in Latin America, they identify with people at the bottom or edges of society, offering a gospel of liberation – hope for the oppressed and challenge to work together for a better society. Interest in this stream comes from those disillusioned with existing church structures which deaden, divide, and drive away those looking for a helpful pattern of church life. They also critique the house groups of many churches which exist for the needs of existing members rather than renewal of the church and engagement in mission. They are able to provide a place where:
• the reality of daily life and the life of Christian community are connected and both are reflected on in the light of the Bible
• people are empowered for local, collaborative ministry
• in groups of manageable size, intimacy replaces impersonality, each person is accepted and given space to discover their role in the church’s ministry to the world

Three of the characteristics that were important in the formation of BECs in South America are emerging trends that point to the potential growth of SCCs in our culture:
• a shortage of priests and a large number of impoverished or marginalised people forced BECs to grow up from below. This is reflected in our times in a diminishing number of clergy, and the diminishing ability of churches or communities to afford ordained ministry especially in lower socio-economic areas.
• in South America, emphasis was put on theological and community development training of lay pastoral agents, many members of religious orders. If SCCs are to flourish in Western culture, lay education models will need to be adapted to prepare pastoral agents appropriately trained for work ‘from below’ rather than leadership enculturated into middle-class church.
• while institutional church is concerned about buildings, clergy, and finance to support both, the SCC movement will engage directly with community using whatever resources are available.

(3) Café Church

Often using secular venues such as cafés, community centres and pubs, this stream attempts to engage with and transform café culture. Gatherings are usually around tables, serving food and drink from the beginning, encouraging conversation and interaction – all designed to create a sense of belonging to community. Worship is often informal, though not necessarily dumbed-down spiritually or liturgically, with some groups developing their own ‘table liturgies’. The mission style is relational.

Café church may be a venue for alt.worship, or may be used by other fresh expressions of church such as cell church.

(4) Cell Church

This stream recognises that both large and small expressions of Christian community are equally valid and viable – but where the small cell is primary and the large gathering/celebration serves the needs of the cells. Each cell is a building block of the church yet each cell is truly church. Each cell expresses the functions of worship, word, community, and mission. Each cell has its own facilitator leader and apprentices members for leadership as the cell network multiplies. Every member of a cell has the potential to be involved in ministry. Cell church responds to a culture in which
community has been eroded and provides a conduit for the unchurched to explore a journey into faith.

Some existing churches have made the transformation to cell principles by working to become a church where the primary unit of church is the small group. Each cell becomes a full expression, in microcosm, of the church building community, offering worship, nurturing faith formation and engaging with society; and each cell deliberately seeks to grow, through relational evangelism, and to reproduce new cells. Some churches have only gone halfway in such a transition, producing what is sometimes known as meta-church where the large congregation and the cells are equal partners, the two modes complementing each other’s strengths.

Churches that make the transition to a cell model often do on the premise that it helps to create a growth mentality among existing members. Some observers say that because cell church originally arose in parts of the worldwide church where evangelism and growth are the norm, it was devised to cope with and channel the attendant growth, not to create it.

In other places, cell principles have been used to plant new churches, sometimes in parallel to an existing congregation, and sometimes from scratch in a new area. Where a cell church is planted alongside an existing congregation, members are given the choice about the form to which they wish to commit – and are discouraged from hopping from one form to the other. Where the desire is to start a church from scratch e.g. in an urban area where there are many unchurched and existing churches are old and ineffective missionally, cell church makes it easy to travel lightly and not take too much of the established church’s baggage. Thus cell church is both a counter-cultural alternative to existing church and may provide authentic and attractive community where none currently exists.

Cell church raises a number of unresolved issues:

- cell church allows the development of a fresh way of being church in an area where traditional church is seen as alien. Because of its size, each cell is able to identify with the needs of an area and its members and be flexible. The counter to this is about the maintaining of some sort of ‘corporate identity’ or oversight among those cells that see themselves as belonging together without having an overly-directive leadership structure. This raises the related question of what connection each cell has – or needs to have – to the wider church
- cell church assists with the multiplication and training of indigenous leaders through a deliberate apprentice-style. However, one of the problems in a successful cell model is to produce sufficient new leaders of a suitable quality. Another problem arises around appropriate training and recognition of cell leaders and the question of celebration of the sacraments.
- the question has already been raised above about whether cell church stimulates growth or only helps to respond to it. Cell seems to be able to help some church break through growth barriers by breaking down the unit size, by encouraging each cell to grow, and by enabling each member to be engaged in ministry including evangelism.

(5) Churches Arising out of Community Initiatives

Churches in this stream often arise “accidentally”, as an unintended outcome of a community outreach initiative – often in an area of social deprivation or amongst people who have experienced significant dislocation from existing forms of church. In such areas, invitations to attend worship or some other programme of the church have little impact. Instead, the church has attempted to engage with the local community through responding to a significant need, allowing local people to set the agenda for what can best help rebuild or regenerate that community. Through such partnerships, levels of trust are built leading to growing curiosity about the commitment, style, and motivation of the church and its people.

Although a church may approach a local mission project with a specific outcome in mind to develop a new faith community, it is often more effective to engage in an open-ended approach to a community development project that may lead to a fresh expression of church arising in that neighbourhood.
(6) **Multiple and Midweek Congregations**

The strategy of working with multiple congregations is not new. Many established churches have used multiple congregations to cater for their growing numbers and/or to provide different liturgical or communal styles so that different social or cultural groups are sustained within the same building. This needs to be distinguished from multiple services, where there is little distinction between each service and where members of the church choose to attend which they attend on a particular day depending on their personal preference or their social calendar. Having multiple congregations implies that each congregation is a separate and distinct unit of the church with its own worship style, leadership and mission – and that the majority of people who attend that congregation see it as ‘their church’.

Many new congregations in a multiple-congregation church are midweek services. They may target a specific cultural group, e.g. evening services for youth, early morning or lunchtime services for business people; they may provide a transition for a group of new Christians e.g. from an Alpha course, who would find the time and style of the regular Sunday service problematic; or they may just cater for changes in lifestyle, employment, or family situation of regular attenders. Whatever draws these people together as a new congregation, it is now their ‘proper’ church because they don’t, can’t, or won’t attend on a Sunday.

It is important that each congregation enhance its own sense of identity by putting in place as many of the following as possible:
- a planned and consistent style of service, distinct from other congregations of the same church
- a dedicated and recognised leadership
- a particular mission focus – which might be related to the age-group or cultural focus of the congregation
- discrete pastoral care structures
- refusal to acknowledge that any one congregation is the ‘main’ congregation
- creation of an overall ministry structure on which each congregation has fair representation

When planning to add a congregation to a multiple-congregation church, the approach needs to be missional i.e. directed at a particular segment of the community outside the church and not just a way of keeping existing members happy.

(7) **Network-focussed Churches**

It is an increasing social reality that many people’s lives are best described, not by the place where they live, but by the networks of people to whom they relate at work or at leisure. This is where important friendships are made and important experiences happen. Network-focussed churches attempt to relate to this reality. Instead of a ‘come and join us’ approach, they encourage a ‘go and inhabit’ approach in which they hope the gospel and church will become a reality within the culture in which people are living. It used to be thought of as cross-parish boundary planting; increasingly it is being seen as non-boundary planting.

Network churches are developing mission shaped by engagement with a particular context and culture, and by engagement with the essentials of the gospel. They are committed to being culturally accessible to outsiders and so often appear counter-cultural to aspects of church life, culture, and structures which seem to be a hindrance to their mission. Some of their hallmarks are:
- identifying social gatherings and meeting points within the culture within which to develop relationships with people
- use of small groups in which people can experience community, meaning, and significance
- mission expressed through relational evangelism and practical acts of service to the community
- personal mentoring and mutual accountability
Several other factors are worthy of note in relation to network churches:

- Many network churches start with a core of churches people; they seem best suited to attract de-churched people; it is unclear what impact such churches have yet had on unchurched people.
- One point of failure that has been observed was having a too broad approach to the unchurched rather than spending time clarifying which sub-culture or segment are really the target of their mission.
- The team for a network plant may come from a number of different churches and time needs to be given to developing a cohesive team with agreed vision and values.
- Resourcing for network churches may best come from other established networks.

(8) **School-based and School-linked Congregations and Churches**

Two strands of school-based churches have developed – predominantly in Church-owned schools. One makes use of school premises for mid-week, after-school gatherings drawing together students, parents, and grandparents. They often begin around food, conversation, and community-building, and may progress to become worshipping congregations. The other strand makes use of, and builds on, school-based worship events. These are often the only experience of church which the students know and, particularly in primary schools, can be extended to include parents, offering them an experience of church which they might not otherwise have.

(9) **Seeker Church**

This stream, pioneered by Willow creek in the USA, attempts to create an experience of worship and teaching in which ‘seekers’ will feel comfortable. This means that seeker services:

- Need to be made to be accessible and meaningful to people with little or no Christian background.
- Make no assumption about the faith commitment of those attending.
- Explore everyday issues of life themes rather than biblical exposition.
- Use drama, music, creative arts, and contemporary media to connect through a variety of senses.

Many seeker services take place on a Sunday although they could happen at any time that suited the potential audience. When they take place on Sunday, they may – as they did in Chicago – displace the founding, supporting congregation to a midweek time slot.

There are few examples of churches establishing a regular seeker service in the Willow Creek style, although many churches draw on this model for frequent guest or all-age services. One of the difficulties is that this style of worship requires a large and creative team if the services are to be done regularly with a high degree of competence. It also appears that seeker services in England have been effective mainly in restoring lapsed church members rather than reaching the unchurched. This has raised the criticism that seeker services are not really a fresh expression of church to which new members make an on-going commitment, but more of a conduit to channel to connect people to a regular, conventional congregation.

(10) **Traditional Church Plants**

A ‘traditional’ church plant will have all or most of the following characteristics:

- Often located within the geographic area of the sending congregation, it retains close links to the sending congregation, but is clearly seen as a separate congregation.
- It begins as a response to a geographic area, or a social grouping that the sending congregation is not reaching.
- It has a planting team of 20 or more (though a few start with a lot less) who have time for preparation for the task ahead. It may have an ordained/trained leader as well.
- Some form of mission audit, or visiting of prospective members takes place prior to any public launch.
- Often a secular venue e.g. a school or community centre is identified as a place of meeting.
• worship is most often in then style of the sending church, with a tendency to be more informal in the plant
• a public meeting, with a significant speaker, may be used to launch the new plant
• numerical growth might experience a initial surge, then a decline before creeping back to the size of the starting team and beyond
• small groups for pastoral care and nurture may be established, but otherwise structure is very light
• financial costs may be covered by the sending church in the beginning, but with the expectation of break even by year five
• will flourish, plateau, or whither depending on how they deal with issues like:
  ➢ finding the next leader after the founding leader moves on
  ➢ changes in the leadership of the sending church, particularly the arrival of an incumbent who is less enthusiastic about church planting
  ➢ enabling a significant proportion of the membership to remain in missional mode
  ➢ handling the weekly struggles of setting up in a rented or shared building
  ➢ finding the next home when the initial venue is outgrown
  ➢ gaining an identity and independence that reflects a growing maturity

Traditional church plants may be effective in developing a strategic response in new housing areas but these areas will probably require a variety of the fresh expressions of church described in this report.

One particular form of church plant is the “replant”, where a church planting team is sent to a closed church or a moribund congregation. Replants happen best in urban areas when a number of members from the sending church live in the area of the plant and want to make the replanted church their new congregation.

(11) Traditional Forms of Church Inspiring New Interest

As part of the search for mystery, beauty, stability, and a sense of God’s purpose, people are re-discovering forms and styles of church that are part of its heritage. For example, some people are being attracted to old models of liturgy and worship, while others are experiencing a growing interest in guided retreats. An expression of church does not need to be new to be able have a missionary focus to its communal and worship life.

One particular traditional form that is gaining considerable interest is what is best described as “new monasticism”. Most expressions of new monasticism have a dispersed community, rather than a gathered or enclosed one. Some, like Taizé and Iona, have a ‘mother house’, although not all those influenced by the spirituality of that community will have visited the main community. Common to these communities is an increased focus on Jesus, prayerful seeking after God, and often a rule of simplicity, purity, and accountability.

Some of these movements, such as the Northumbria Community and the Order of St Thomas, are intentionally mission focussed, and church planting teams could learn from them about disciplined spirituality and community.

(12) Youth Congregations

Youth congregations i.e. regularly gathered congregations, led by and for young people, with their own leaders, pastoral structures, and mission focus, are relatively rare. Many churches have youth services i.e. regular or occasional events for youth that may or may not be led by young people – often as one of the multiple services they offer. In other places, youth services are held regionally, linked to youth cells in surrounding churches.

The growth of youth services and congregations is one sign of the increasing difficulty that churches have in holding, attracting, or discipling young people. Not only are they struggling to care for youth from church families, but making no recognisable impact on unchurched young
people. This is not helped by having old buildings, outdated liturgy and music, middle-aged clergy, and budgets which don’t allocate funds in proportion to the size of the youth population in the community.

The gap between membership of most churches and the young people they would like to reach is not just a ‘generation gap’ but a ‘cultural gap’; young people are growing up in a different cultural world – and will not “grow out of it in time”. So youth congregations are necessary because they are not a transition or a bridging strategy to get young people into existing congregations. Youth need styles and forms of church that are culturally relevant, and which will forever remain culturally distinct from existing congregations of the church.

Chapter 5 examines “A Theology for a Missionary Church”. It provides a good summary of what is essentially conventional Protestant theology. For the sake of this summary, it is sufficient to share its main headings:

- “Salvation History” including:
  - the nature and mission of God in creation and redemption
  - the work of Christ – incarnation, cross and resurrection
  - the Spirit of Christ
  - Christ and culture – inculturation/contextualisation
  - the challenge of syncretism
- “The Church is Designed to Reproduce” including:
  - the genesis of the church
  - Jesus, the church and the kingdom
  - the ultimate destiny of the church
- The Marks of the Church
- Anglican Ecclesiology and “Fresh Expressions of Church”

Chapter 6 provides “Some Methodologies for a Missionary Church”. The most important point made by this chapter is that context should shape the church (a principle that applies to the whole church not just church plants). While this seems obvious, it is not always applied in practice. The groundwork for applying this principle is ‘double listening’ – listening to the culture where a church might be planted, and listening to the inherited tradition of the church. This not only helps to shape the church plant appropriately but also enables it to evolve appropriately as its context changes.

Three dimensions to church planting are explored.

- **width** - who is the church plant for? – explores mission goals:
  - is it for neighbourhood or network? (requiring different team sizes and mixes of gifts)
  - is it for the non-churched or the de-churched? (the same strategies won’t necessarily work for both groups)
  - is it for a specific cultural group? (different cultural groups have different ‘cultural gaps’ to be bridged)
  - is it about widening choice or increasing access?

- **height** – who is the plant by? – explores mission resources:
  - is the need for progression or pioneer planting? (is there an existing base of Christians in the context who will form the basis for a plant or is a planting team being sent into a context in which there is no known Christian presence?)
  - what size of planting unit? (about both the size of the planting team that the sending church is able to give and the appropriate size team for the context)
  - is the need for multiple congregations or to work from another site? (working from a base within the context, and considering the message that the choice of venue sends)
  - how dependent or mature is this church plant intended to be?

- **depth** – who is the plant with? – explores mission partners:
  - who are the partners in mission for those sent?
  - to whom do they relate and belong?
  - what strength or reserves are behind the church planting team?
Four different categories of church plant illustrate the different partner relationships:

- **runners** (like strawberry plants) – sending out a biological link from which the new plant takes root, after which the runner naturally withers:
  - start within, and usually remain within a geographical parish
  - are supported by a single congregation
  - have a team fewer than 50 – but more than twelve
  - is an easily repeatable process
  - produces a church plant very similar to the sending church

- **grafts** – introducing a fresh shoot onto old stock:
  - work across boundaries
  - have a small incoming team (smaller than the stock that receives them) – planting team is the junior partner
  - usually meet within the building of the receiving church
  - are more concerned with reviving and renewing the host rather than creating something new

- **transplants** – dividing off a healthy part of an existing plant and replanting it in a new location:
  - work across boundaries
  - have a team sent that is larger than the receiving church – often 50 or more people – planting team is the senior partner
  - usually meet within the building of the receiving church
  - aim to become independent quickly from the sending congregation
  - plant out of strength and so more rapid growth may result
  - lack flexibility to create something new, but usually have the resources do so if required

- **seeds** – tiny seed takes root along way from its sending host – both in terms of distance and environment – and makes a new beginning where perhaps this kind of plant did not previously grow:
  - cross boundaries more easily than any other – more like mission partners working overseas
  - are a small group (one to six people) highly motivated and possibly highly skilled people – may have been drawn together from different sources
  - move into the area or context in which they wish to plant in order to identify more deeply
  - exemplify the principle of dying to previous identity in order to reincarnate the gospel in a different context
  - can take years to make a significant difference – and so raise problems of how to recruit and sustain such teams for the long haul

Church planting in rural areas has its own characteristics. The most common expression of church is a ‘multi-parish benefice’ (in our context would be a multi-congregation parish or group of congregations in association) – each village, town, community having its own church building and sharing an ordained person across all churches. In this setting, more church buildings are not required. In fact, the presence of a large number of buildings can be a distraction from mission with the resources for their upkeep depleting the potential resources to support new initiatives.

What is needed are fresh expressions of church that can relate to rural dwellers who do not connect with the current ministry in their locality. And although traditional expressions of church are still relevant in rural areas, they frequently fail to reach the young or the new immigrants who are moving into rural communities as part of social and lifestyle changes. So network-living, choice, and mobility are now more strongly influencing life in the rural scene.

One of the problems in the rural church is a scarcity of leadership. Clergy and lay leaders are already stretched across the needs of multiple congregations and have little time and energy to sustain new initiatives. This means that some fresh expressions of church are working regionally rather than locally. It also means that many church plants will be working post-denominationally and will draw their leadership team from a variety of denominations. This can be a source of benefit, but also tension. Another source of tension is the relationship of any fresh expression of church to the established churches of the community.
An area in which work still needs to be done is that of helping church plants develop into maturity. The best that this report offers is Henry Venn’s 1846 principle for churches being established in a native missionary context, i.e. the ‘Three Self’ formula:

- **self-propagating** – a characteristic which should be demonstrated by all churches, old, and new, the ability to, in turn, send out a leadership team to plant another church is a sign of maturing in a church plant. This ability will be sustained by a commitment to developing the gifts and ministries of all members and a process of continually raising up the next generation of leaders

- **self-financing** – there is a cost to any church plant and this needs to be visible to both the sending church and members of the planting team. This will lead to honesty, trust, and better decision-making. A budget, for several years ahead, needs to take into account the costs of salaries (if any leaders are to be paid), housing, building, equipment, training, and outreach into the community. Fresh expressions of church will often have high levels of fringe members and those with no history of belonging to, or supporting, a church who will need to be helped to understand how churches are financed

- **self-governing** – all church plants and fresh expressions of church will benefit from being responsible for running their own affairs (as far as they are able). Learning to make decisions and take responsibility – including permission to fail – are part of growth and maturity. Sending churches need to discover how to give away control and power, and to celebrate independence or interdependence of the new church.

The final chapter (Chapter 7) engages with the question of “An Enabling Framework for a Missionary Church”. The chapter opens with some discussion around the problems of:

- what will work for networks in a parochial/diocesan structured church
- recognising existing plants as ‘adult’ churches moving away from an atmosphere of control and dependency
- how well the existing range of legal entities in the Anglican church support church plants and fresh expressions of church

It then explores some of the factors that have limited the church planting movement in the past, including:

- the inability of the parish system to foster new expressions that cross boundaries
- permission to reopen redundant churches or rescue moribund ones is difficult to obtain
- few parishes are large enough to sustain multiplication or to recruit the leaders that would be needed
- pioneer leaders and entrepreneurs find life difficult within the structured church – there being no vocational structure or support for them
- many leaders oversee the start of creative and contextual expressions of church but then move on to new positions where they don’t use these skills – nor do they pass them on to other suitable leaders

The established church has grown up through an era of slow evolutionary change – with which most of its membership is comfortable. However we are increasingly in a time of rapid change in culture and the church needs to find levers that will accelerate its response. In addition, pioneers in fresh expressions of church find themselves caught in a tension between the church that has nurtured them until now and their call to be apostolic in the world. This tension can be constructive but sometimes become impossible to maintain. Meanwhile, the Spirit is enabling fresh expressions of church to spring up that connect with the changing culture.

So, the church needs to learn from its growing edges ‘what is needed now’ to resource a church planting movement.

**A new missionary order?** Many church plants do not fit into the legal categories the church currently uses to describe congregations, or groupings thereof. A new category of ‘Bishop’s Order’ could provide a structure for nurturing, validating, and multiplying fresh expressions of church. It would provide a lightweight, yet recognisable, level of accountability to the church while offering an
environment for mutual support, spiritual reflection, and conversations about joint strategies for those involved in church planting.

**Appropriate local leadership** is the key effective church planting.

- Some church plants or fresh expressions are primarily the work of individual pioneers responding with entrepreneurial ability to a God-given call to mission. The church needs discernment and authorising procedures that can recognise and release such pioneers within appropriate frameworks of accountability.
- If pioneers are to establish work that endures, they quickly need to become team leaders. Many new initiatives only begin when a suitable team is in place. Team leaders need to be able to lead and develop a team and have the appropriate balance of visionary and relational skills.
- Team members should each be encouraged to develop their particular giftings and teams ought to contain members who can outperform the leader in their particular area of gifting. This requires the team leader to be secure and to know themselves.
- Team leaders need to develop skills as mentors and trainers, so that new members of a church plant are drawn into ministry. At an early stage, the planting team should begin sharing power with those they are seeking to reach and training/coaching and mentoring are essential to this process.
- Second generation leadership is crucial to long-term health of a church plant. Careful attention needs to be given at the time of leadership change to find a leader to enrich the original vision – more likely to come from within the team than from an outside appointment.
- The church needs to give priority to processes that identify, call, and train leaders for pioneering missionary projects. This may require establishing or identifying a particular college or institution as training place and the use of field education with proven leaders of church plants and fresh expressions of church. This will include ‘mixed-mode’ training, where training takes place whilst engaged in mission, rather than withdrawing candidates for an extended period of training and then sending them back to the mission field. Once trained, such leaders should not be pressed into parish service but deployed in pioneering contexts.
- It is important to note that, in all of the above, the focus is not just on ordained or similarly trained and authorised leadership. Many new initiatives will be lay led. Appropriate strategies for identifying, calling, training and placing leaders need to provide for the equipping of lay leaders. Lay leaders are more likely to emerge ‘from below’, out of an unplanned response to the discernment of the mission of God in a local area. This raises questions for the church as to how it discerns, recognises, trains, and authorises such leadership without quenching the spirit in which it arose.

**The role of the bishop** as leader in mission is crucial to these developments. The bishop has a key role in authorising church plants and other strategic mission initiatives. Bishops ought to be freed from administrative overload in order to invest time in mission development. This includes the ability to send fresh apostolic teams into cultures or areas where the mission presence is thin or non-existent. In doing this, the bishop

- acts as the broker between the sending congregation and the place where planting is envisaged to take place
- works to ensure that fresh expressions of church are complementary to inherited traditions of the church
- arranges consultation where established boundaries need to be crossed or incumbent clergy are recalcitrant
- maintains ongoing review of the whole church’s mission across the diocese

One way for the bishop/diocese to oversee these functions is to invite deaneries (networks of neighbouring parishes) to have a specific and strategic role. Just as networks have an increasing influence on the shape of community, so networks of churches could work together to shape the mission response of the church.