

What are fresh expressions of church?

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expressions

Fresh expressions are catching on across all streams of the church. One in eight Church of England parishes have one for example.

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.

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.

freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/cookatchapel

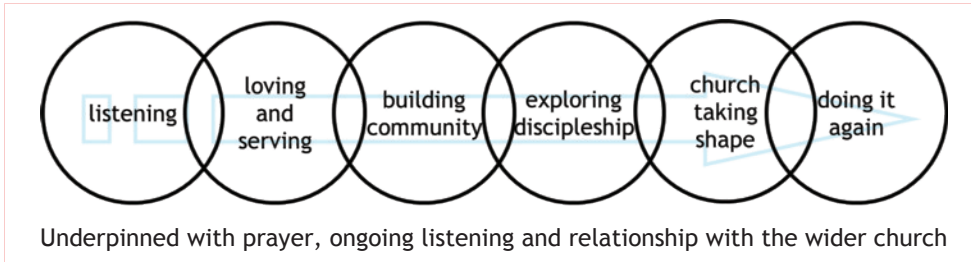
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Three-minute Guide



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.

example

Stepping Stones began with some Christians asking how they could lovingly serve families in their toddler group. They held beach picnics, dads' curry nights and mums' pamper evenings.

Other groups offer different forms of loving and serving. For example:

- a language café for women from ethnic minority communities;
- all-age events with a meal;
- initiatives with walkers, people playing sport and unemployed people;
- a Christian community in an online computer game;
- a knitting group;
- witnessing communities in the workplace.

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. Stepping Stones grew so much that it split into two.

Of course real life is messier than diagrams! The circles usually overlap and may be taken in a different order. Later guides will provide more detail.

Practical mission

Fresh expressions are great for mission (but are not the only approach). Their leaders say that a third of people at their main meeting once went to church but had stopped; two fifths have very little church background. So three quarters are from outside the church!

Most have yet to find faith, but a number have begun the journey. Lives are being transformed!