how to measure fruitfulness

7 essential fresh expressions

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.

Embed it in your praying

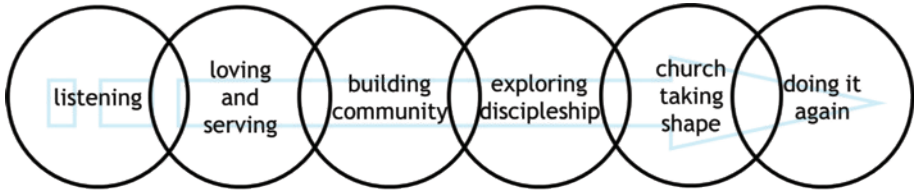
Evaluation should be continuous, not something you do every so often. So include it whenever you pray and plan.

Indeed, evaluation can be a framework for your praying and planning. Base it on these questions:

- **what is?**
  Where have we got to? What happened since we last met? Offer your answers prayerfully to God.
- **what could be?**
  What are possible next steps? Ask God to stretch your imagination.
- **what will be?**
  Agree who will do what, when. Seek God's help.

Use *A fresh expressions journey* to prompt your praying.

Every now-and-again, pray about these same 'discernment questions' in relation to the journey:



Underpinned with prayer, ongoing listening and relationship with the wider church

- **what is?**
  What stage of the journey have we reached?
- **what could be?**
  What are possible steps to the next stage?
- **what will be?**
  Which of these steps shall we focus on?

If you oversee a fresh expression on behalf of your parent church or denomination, these questions can be a simple and effective form of accountability. You can discuss them with the community's leaders.

fresh expressions

Three-minute Guide

You will be measuring fruitfulness not simply as ‘bums on seats’, 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 (Matthew 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 - ‘reach the next stage of the journey in 12 months’ - 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. ‘The church side of the Ark keeps taking us in surprising directions!’ freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/thearkatcrawcook
- leaders may be so keen to hit a target that they hurry through the vital process of listening - ‘we can’t keep listening to the context, we must show we’ve started something’. Without enough ‘market research’, the initiative flounders.

more

You can further explore this approach to accountability, including sample questions, in *Being Church, Doing Life* (Michael Moynagh, Fresh Expressions, 2014, pp319-44).

Evaluate growth in discipleship

As the fresh expression nears the right-hand side of the journey, 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)

Once a year, you might ask the three ‘discernment questions’ in relation to each set of relationships - for example, for UP:

- **what is?**
  What are the strengths and weaknesses of the community’s current relationship with God? Have we achieved our goals (e.g. to run a course on the gospels)? What was the impact?
- **what could be?**
  What might we seek to achieve in the next 12 months?
- **what will be?**
  Which of these possibilities shall we go for?

This will provide a framework for setting goals and evaluating the results. But again: don’t be a slave to your goals! The Spirit may unfold something new.

Finally, might all churches do something similar?

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