

FRESH WAYS WORKING GROUP 2010 CONFERENCE REPORT

Basic Information

Contact Name and Details	Revd Stephen Lindridge, Methodist Connexional Missioner for Fresh Expressions, Mobile 07821 972624, Email stephen.lindridge@freshexpressions.org.uk .
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolution	The Council approves this report for presentation to the Methodist Conference.
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	None

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	This paper is the annual report to the Methodist Council as directed by The 2007 Conference.
Main Points	Good News Stories FWWG progress Venture FX progress Fresh Expressions Team Update
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	The Blackpool Conference of 2007 affirmed and encouraged the priority of developing fresh ways of being church and the many and various ways in which this priority is being taken forward in the life of the Connexion. The Conference directed the Methodist Council to bring annual reports to the Conference from 2008 to 2013. This is the third of these reports. In October 2007 the Methodist Council approved the constitution of a Fresh Ways Working Group to oversee the development of the 2007 resolutions and to produce the annual reports to Conference.
Consultations	Members of the Fresh Ways Working Group. Good News Stories from Revd Jeff Reynolds, Revd Jackie Bellfield,

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	N/A
Faith and Order	N/A
Financial	N/A
Personnel	N/A
Legal	N/A
Wider Connexional	Encouraging good news and developments. Sharing information widely
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Good communication to our partners in fresh expressions of current Methodist progress.
Risk	None

Fresh Ways Working Group 2010 Conference Report

Introduction

1. The Blackpool Conference of 2007 affirmed and encouraged the priority of developing fresh ways of being church and the many and various ways in which this priority is being taken forward in the life of the Connexion. The Conference of 2009 reaffirmed this for Phase 2 of Fresh Expressions initiative.
2. The Conference directed the Methodist Council to bring annual reports to the Conference from 2008 to 2013 detailing progress made in encouraging the priority of developing fresh ways of being church and with detailed guidance on how this can be further encouraged including any necessary changes to Standing Orders. This is the third of these reports.
3. In October 2007 the Methodist Council approved the constitution of a Fresh Ways Working Group to oversee the development of the 2007 resolutions and to produce the annual reports to Conference. The members of the group are: The Revd Dr Andrew Wood (Chair), The Revd Stephen Lindridge (Convener), The Revd Ian Bell, The Revd Sylvester Deigh, The Revd Jenny Ellis, Ms Daniella Fetuga-Joensuu, The Revd Gareth Hill, The Revd Graham Horsley, Mr Sion Rhys-Evans, The Revd Dr Peter Phillips, Deacon Ruth Poch, The Revd Andrew Roberts, The Revd Dr Angela Shier-Jones.

Good news to celebrate

4. Across the Connexion exciting developments continue to emerge. Just under 1000 fresh expressions were reported in this year's statistics for mission (cf. 21-22 below). Fresh Expressions Area Strategy Teams (FEASTs cf. 5.4) launched in March 2010 will assist local fresh expressions more effectively, as over 15,000 people have engaged with one or more of the core products of vision days, msi ("mission shaped intro") or msm ("mission shaped ministry") training courses (cf. 36 below) over the last five years, demonstrating a renewed commitment to mission. The majority of these initiatives occur in a very healthy ecumenical context. The following three stories illustrate a small part of the greater picture bringing hope, new life and an encouraging perspective in the Connexion.

Twilight in Stafford

5. Revd. Jeff Reynolds Superintendent Methodist Minister writes: "Twilight @ Costa" is the name given to a fresh expression of church that has been running since late 2008. It is a monthly gathering with music, DVDs, quizzes, conversation, speakers and copious amounts of coffee.
6. The aim of Twilight is to try and be a church community outside of the traditional thoughts of church, i.e. day, time and building. We meet on a monthly basis from 7pm. Over the time it has been running we have attracted people from various churches, dechurched people and people who just wander in because they fancy a coffee at Costa. Interestingly, many people with little or no inherited church connection return regularly.
7. We are now seeing a pattern developing in terms of the people who have no or little church connection. They are either becoming "members" of this new type of church community or some of them are starting to sample inherited church on a Sunday morning. It is an interesting dynamic and one that is not easy to understand in terms of Mission strategies.

8. Perhaps we are discovering the need for both new and fresh expressions of church community that can sit alongside more traditional, inherited models of church.

Warrington Methodist Circuit

9. Rev. Jackie Bellfield Circuit Fresh Expression Missioner writes: over the past 3 years the Warrington Circuit has spent time exploring different forms of fresh expressions of church, ministry and worship. Prior to this time, new forms of worship had emerged during radical changes to the circuit structure, whilst undertaking church audits and during the establishment of team ministry. With a greater emphasis on lay ministry, and the recruitment of 10 employed support workers, the results have been over 13 differing forms of fresh expressions emerging within the circuit.

10. These fresh expressions encompass such things as a variety of café worships, including the monthly New Song Café; Loving Hands - knitting for need with a focus on outreach, prayer and building community; Sticky Church - emerging church for young families; Spindles - feeding and nourishing local families through word and food; Warrington Borough Ministry; and other locally relevant expressions drawn from local church contexts.

11. For church members the tangible impact of fresh expressions has been to enable growth and an enthusiasm to think creatively in relation to mission and discipleship. New initiatives and radical thinking are encouraged in line with the development of annual church and mission objectives.

An Anonymous Narrative

12. No one sets out to fail and had we known that is what would happen, we would still have gone ahead. There are two important things that come from the decision to draw to a close the project, an attempt to begin a fresh expression of church. The first is, we tried. It would have been wrong not to. We knew we had to take these steps of faith and be more missional. The second thing is what's been learnt through this experience: we have grown in our discipleship and confidence; we have learnt new skills; we have become better equipped to try again; we hope we have encouraged others - that to try and fail is better than not to do anything.

13. Our story is perhaps not much different to many fresh expressions that got so far down the journey and then struggled with lack of resources, change of leadership, loss of focus, doing many things poorly rather than a few things well and what began didn't work for lots of reasons.

Methodist Fresh Ways Working Group

14. The Fresh Ways Working Group, in partnership with Connexional and Fresh Expressions Team members, is working collaboratively to support the Conference resolutions of 2007 in a range of ways.

15. The Good Practice Guidelines referenced in last year's report have been produced and will be circulated as part of the LINK Connexional mailing called *Visions of Fresh Expressions in Methodism* and this is also available as a download from the Fresh Ways page on the Methodist Church website (www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=openogod.content&cmid=2879).

16. Ongoing learning and development work, discussed in detail elsewhere in the Conference Agenda, is seeking to ensure both (i) that learning programmes pioneered by the Fresh Expressions Team are fully incorporated and owned by the Methodist Church, and also (ii) that all learning programmes which are designed and delivered by the Methodist Church (including within Methodist-sponsored learning institutions and through the Methodist Training Forums) include as a fundamental component an emphasis on enabling and supporting fresh ways of being Church.

17. The Faith and Order sponsored Joint Anglican Methodist Working Party on Ecclesiology of Emerging Expressions of Church is currently writing up a major report on the sustainability and importance of fresh expressions of church. This report will propose an ecclesiology for a mixed economy of church. Already, a number of people are pointing to the importance of this piece of work, both for the Methodist Church and the Church of England. The report, its findings and recommendations will be considered by the Faith and Order Committee and Fresh Ways Working Group, and at Conference 2011.

Fresh Expressions on District Websites

18. A study of District websites revealed that 23 of our 31 Districts had good links about fresh expressions, 11 of these were excellent and being communicated at various levels in the Districts. The websites range from having the Fresh Expressions logo on the welcome or homepage of a District, to links to projects in circuits, to 'mission shaped ministry' training courses, to 'Taster Days'. The more advanced sites have links to Pioneer Ministry and Venture FX, whilst some only have the Fresh Expressions logo on their webpage in a location that is not easy to find, and when it is eventually found sometimes leads to the Fresh Expressions official website and sometimes the link is incomplete leading nowhere.

19. It was noted that of the remaining 8 Districts with no reference to fresh expressions in some cases it was because the site was off line.

20. The report observed that the northern and central regions of the Connexion are very proactive with fresh expressions on their websites, in comparison to that of the south. However it also noted that this may not reflect the current actual activity or number of fresh expressions located within a District but just what the website displayed about them.

Methodist Statistics for Mission

21. This year's statistical returns included boxes for fresh expressions to be counted and named. From this, a total of 953 fresh expressions of church were reported across the Connexion.

22. There will be further refinement of the questions for next year's statistical gathering, which will greatly assist this research. The detailed information requires further processing but early observations show a very encouraging number and diversity across the Connexion with just under 20% of our churches engaging in forms of fresh expressions.

Venture FX

23. VentureFX is the Conference-approved scheme to establish twenty fresh expressions of church and sustain them over a ten-year period. The scheme focuses on 18-35 year-olds who currently have no significant contact with church and seeks to call them to discipleship to Jesus Christ and to form Christian communities appropriate for their culture. These new Christian communities will be financially supported fully for five years and then, it is hoped, partially supported for a further five years as the Fresh Expression of church moves towards becoming self-sustaining.

24. Since September 2009, a selection process has been established to identify pioneer mission leaders, and six people have been appointed to form the first cohort of pioneers. Districts and circuits have submitted proposals for where pioneers might be deployed and six projects have been selected. The projects began to be launched in the early part of 2010 and all should have formally begun by September. The projects are varied and include mission among those involved in city centre night-life; a community based project in a small town; church for people involved in arts and the surfing culture; a Christian community emerging in a large new housing development; and church being formed through arts-based mission in the city.

25. The pioneers will be supported in various ways including coaching, mentoring and participating in a learning network and it is this area which is currently receiving particular attention. As the scheme develops, creative partnerships are being forged with other denominations and organisations and fruitful collaboration is taking place, especially in the areas of selection and training.

26. Whilst not a separate order of authorised ministry, the scheme envisages that VentureFX pioneers will form a mutually supportive network throughout the Connexion, learning and sharing together, and existing in almost covenantal relationship with one another. It is hoped that this experience will gradually enable the scheme to become a wider resource to support others in similar situations and which may inform the church's future patterns of ministry, mission and learning.

The Fresh Expressions Team

27. 2009/10 has been a year of affirmation and has seen the deepening and broadening of the ecumenical coalition encouraging and supporting the development of fresh expressions of church.

28. At the 2009 Methodist Conference President David Gamble reaffirmed the Methodist commitment to encouraging the development of fresh expressions of church, declaring it to be the responsibility of every church, every minister and every circuit.

29. The Church of England General Synod meeting in February 2010 debated the impact of the mission shaped church report on the life and mission of the church. After a very positive debate the Synod voted unanimously to continue to encourage fresh expressions of church, alongside more traditional forms of church as the most promising mission strategy in a fast changing culture.

30. The United Reformed Church has become a full and active member of the Fresh Expressions initiative. Fresh Expressions Team Leader, Graham Cray has adopted the mantra of "more, better and owned" in relation to the development of fresh expressions. "More" fresh expressions that make the love of God known amongst those who have never heard the Gospel. "Better" fresh expressions that deepen discipleship and see Kingdom transformation in communities. "Owned" fresh expressions that play a full part in the Body of Christ and the particular denomination that they relate to.

31. As the second phase of the life of the Fresh Expressions Team unfolds some key issues are being addressed. These include challenges of:

Scale: Whilst encouraging numbers of fresh expressions are being formed the missional need for many, many more continues to increase.

Sustainability: As fresh expressions form they need the resources and support to grow towards maturity and move from dependency to playing a full part in the interdependency of the Body of Christ.

Leadership: More leaders need to be identified and trained. There is a particular need for more indigenous lay leadership.

Theology: The theological task to reflect upon and help shape the new churches that are forming remains. There are particular needs for more work on the ecclesiology of fresh expressions and for a Kingdom centric theological vision.

32. To further the cause of sustainability a major day conference was held in March 2010. The Conference was addressed by the General Secretary, Martyn Atkins and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams and focused on how fresh expressions can be part of a mixed economy Church over the long term.

33. The Fresh Expressions Team is encouraging the development of Fresh Expressions Area Strategy Teams or FEASTs. FEASTs are ecumenical, area based teams which aim to develop a local strategy that encourages or provides prayer, training, support and resources for fresh expressions and those developing them.
www.freshexpressions.org.uk/feasts

34. The Team is continuing to visit Methodist District, Anglican Diocesan and now also URC Synods to share news of how the fresh expressions movement is developing. To date the team has addressed 17 District Synods.

35. Ecumenically developed Fresh Expression training continues to expand across the United Kingdom and beyond.

36. By May 2010 71 vision days will have been held with over 5300 participants.
www.freshexpressions.org.uk/vision . The short introductory course "mission shaped intro" continues to be used across the Connexion and is being adapted for particular use in a cell group setting
www.freshexpressions.org.uk/missionshapedintro . By May 2010 over 1600 lay and ordained Christians will have received training in starting and sustaining fresh expressions via 46 "mission shaped ministry courses" (msm) making this a significant contributor to ongoing lay and ordained training. There has been at least one course in all four countries of the UK. A further 22 courses are being prepared. The course materials have been significantly revised to reflect the latest learning and to cater more fully for a range of learning styles.
www.freshexpressions.org.uk/missionshapedministry

37. A movement of the Spirit that began in Britain is continuing to flow out around the world. People are visiting Britain to learn of what is happening and Fresh Expressions training is now developing overseas with pilot "mission shaped ministry courses" being developed in Canada and Australia.

38. The annual Fresh Expressions Summit, with the President of Conference, General Secretary, practitioners, Connexional Officers and members of the Fresh Expressions Team, was held in December 2009.

39. At this event, the President's reflections were concluded by summarising and reflecting a number of key questions being asked across the Connexion: How does a fresh expression relate to the denominational structures? What makes a project identifiably Methodist, Anglican or URC? Does it matter? How is mutual accountability achieved? Have we reached a stage where we can say what to retain and what to release, particularly relating to ordained ministry and administering communion? The aim should be to encourage everyone into fresh expressions, without alienating or discouraging, at the same time promoting authenticity and value.

40. After comments from the General Secretary, a challenging question was posed as to how in the next four years to learn from the tentacles of fresh expressions and strands of leadership and knit together ministry, training and stationing. 'Mapping a Way Forward - Regrouping for Mission' is producing plans for renewal of mission, which will create huge opportunities for fresh expressions. Conversations will be taking place with interested parties to produce synergy.

41. Whole life discipleship must be rooted in the community and be world transforming. Bishop Graham Cray (Fresh Expressions Team Leader) responded to the above points, making comments which included that the issues raised were very familiar to those within the Anglican Church. Some projects are no longer effective and are flowering into new things, and a certain amount of messiness is to be expected and we should not put labels on what God is doing.

42. As regards what makes something Methodist or Anglican or URC, Rowan Williams was quoted by Graham as saying "Let's wait and see". Regarding accountability, we should rejoice in what is achieved and encourage and support it. Too much emphasis on fresh expressions can have a disabling effect on traditional ministry. Culture takes time to evolve. Fresh expressions need to be more, better and owned. The norm is a mixed economy, and we should equip local leaders to become facilitators. Judgement needs to be made as to which projects are long-term, seasonal and self-sustaining, owned locally or regionally. New permissions need to be granted if not already in place and new resources made available. We have a long-term incarnational call, with which a light touch ecumenism was the best option for working together, without detailed legislation.

43. The sharing from the practitioners was both encouraging hearing of transformed lives and yet challenging as some of the narratives included pain and frustration, as new wine was being forced into an institutional old wineskin, and tearing at the edges.

Summary comments

44. Effective change does not happen quickly. The first task is to change the mind set. However in the interim practitioners of Fresh Expressions should be given sufficient space and freedom to flourish and to learn from their mistakes, while the much slower process of change is proceeding.

Resolutions

The Conference receives the Report.

The Conference encourages Districts, Circuits and Churches to engage with the resource 'Visions of Fresh Expressions in Methodism'