



**OxCEPT**  
Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology  
and Practical Theology

# **POVERTY AND FRESH EXPRESSIONS:**

**Emerging Forms of Church in Deprived Communities**

**BY HELEN CAMERON**

**OxCEPT (Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology)**

**ON BEHALF OF  
CHURCH URBAN FUND**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

A four-page summary of the full report is available as a free download from [www.cuf.org.uk/research](http://www.cuf.org.uk/research). For hard copies of the summary or for more information about this study, please contact Andy Turner at the Church Urban Fund ([andy.turner@cuf.org.uk](mailto:andy.turner@cuf.org.uk)).

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Church Urban Fund, Church House  
Great Smith Street, LONDON SW1P 3AZ  
T 020 7898 1647 F 0207898 1601  
E [enquiries@cuf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cuf.org.uk) W [www.cuf.org.uk](http://www.cuf.org.uk)

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# EMERGING FORMS OF CHURCH IN DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES

January 2012

## CONTENTS

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Foreword – by Richard Farnell</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Project aims and rationale</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Methodology</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. Summary stories of the participating groups</b>	<b>7</b>
- The Garden Café, Custom House, East London	
- The Lighthouse, Bristol	
- Oaks, Skelmersdale	
- Hull Youth for Christ	
- The Ark, Hull	
- Paul and Barney’s Place, Quinton	
<b>5. Themes emerging from the data</b>	<b>19</b>
- Faith in white working class culture	
- Indigenous versus incoming Christians	
- Mission as presence and empowerment	
- Relationships with parish and diocese	
- Supporting appropriate models of leadership	
- The reality of reflective practice	
<b>6. Implications and Interim recommendations</b>	<b>27</b>
- to Emerging Forms of Church in Deprived Communities	
- to CUF	
- to Training Institutions	
- to Fresh Expressions Team	
- to Dioceses	
- to Poverty Charities and Local Authorities	
<b>Appendix - Literature review</b>	<b>30</b>
- Urban Mission	
- Fresh Expressions of Church	
- Bibliography	

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report shares lessons from an action learning project with six groups in marginalised communities engaged in action for social justice and evangelism. The project had two aims:

1. To increase the groups' capacity for reflecting upon their practice.
2. To learn from their reflections about the challenges they faced and the good practice which they wished to share.

Previous writing on urban mission and fresh expressions of church was examined to provide a context for the project. In working with the groups, most elected to start by producing a written account of their story, as a starting point for reflection. Shortened versions of these stories are shared.

Six themes emerging from the data are developed with examples referring to the groups.

### ***Faith in white working class culture.***

To what extent are the groups supposed to accept the culture within which they work and show the gospel through it? Is there a role for challenging the culture or is that to impose values taken from a more prosperous lifestyle?

### ***Indigenous versus incoming Christians.***

How permeable are the boundaries of these communities? Can they accept incoming leaders or is it essential to develop local leadership?

### ***Mission as presence and empowerment.***

Long-term presence in these communities was essential to establish credibility but all these groups moved beyond presence to engage people in conversations about the meaning and value of their lives.

### ***Relationships with parish and diocese.***

The initiatives had varied relationships with local parishes, depending on the style and attitude of the local vicar and the expectations of local congregations.

### ***Supporting appropriate models of leadership.***

Leadership was often team based, with a much more blurred sense between lay and ordained. How can the traditional church leader model be integrated into a much more informal and complex scenario without damaging the local leadership team?

### ***The reality of reflective practice.***

All groups valued the catalyst of an outside facilitator. However many struggled to spend time on action/reflection due to work and time pressures. In stretched and stressful areas, how are people able to free up time to recharge, reflect and learn from their work?

## **FOREWORD –RICHARD FARNELL**

The Church Urban Fund takes risks. It does it every week as it commits its resources of expertise, advice, networking and finance to fight poverty and hopelessness in England. Since the late 1980's it has been investing these resources in communities where needs are felt most acutely and where the local church has responded in practical love and commitment alongside local people and community organisations.

The release of this report represents another risk for CUF. In 2008 resources were made available to work with six initiatives in some of the most deprived communities in England where Christian people were living out their faith, experiencing struggles stemming from the poverty of the context, the oppression of the situation and the uncertainties of hearing God's call. These initiatives are more than 'church based social action projects'. They are emerging forms of church in situations where churches historically have been weakest, but where the response to poverty is inseparable from the call to discipleship.

The approach was to work together so that there was significant engagement with their experience, enabling a profound listening to their reflections and a shared exploration of their issues. This report tells six stories. It identifies matters of culture, mission, relationships, leadership and reflective practice. It raises questions for CUF and the church, its training, strategies and structures. This is possible because those involved are prepared to share their lives, not just in their local communities but, with us who read this report. So, thank you to The Garden Café, Newham; The Lighthouse, Bristol; Oaks, Skelmersdale; Hull Youth for Christ; The Ark, Hull and Paul & Barney's Place, Quinton, Birmingham.

Helen Cameron, Hilary Ison and David Read from OxCEPT have undertaken this work for CUF. They have been able to bring to the stories and reflections a breadth of understanding of both the issues and the literature to provide another, more academic, setting for this report. Aspects of the literature on 'urban mission' and 'fresh expressions of church' provide vital referents for 'action learning' and theological reflection. Thanks are due to them and to the Steering Group that met at various points through the study.

At the end of the report there is an invitation to respond to CUF. Please do not miss this opportunity.

***Richard Farnell***  
***Emeritus Professor of Neighbourhood Regeneration, Coventry University***

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this interim report is to share the learning and reflection that has taken place during the project. Its audience is the Church Urban Fund, Fresh Expressions Team, Dioceses, Training Institutions, Urban Mission organizations and other agencies working in deprived communities. The report seeks feedback on the work done to date as a way of sharpening its recommendations. A shorter final report will focus on the recommendations.

## **2. PROJECT AIMS AND RATIONALE**

CUF has since 1985 supported and funded work in the most deprived communities in the service of social justice. Some but not all of this work had been attached to a parish church. Some work has become more independent of the parish as it has developed. CUF has not funded specifically evangelistic work but it has become aware that in the communities it supported, some work for social justice was emerging into new forms of church. It wanted to understand this better so as not to create an artificial divide between social justice and evangelism but embrace both as part of God's mission to the world.

In this project, CUF identified groups who were working in the most deprived communities and understood their work to be developing into 'church' or offering 'church' alongside action for social justice. Working with diocesan CUF Link Officers, it looked for communities that, despite efforts at regeneration, remained marginalized and had high levels of worklessness. It looked for groups who felt that what they were doing was 'more than a project' and who were intentional in offering spiritual as well as practical support. CUF staff visited projects to identify those that they felt would benefit from the project. It then passed these groups to the project contractor OxCEPT, the Oxford Centre for Ecclesiology and Practical Theology based at Ripon College Cuddesdon.

The project had two key aims in working with these groups. First, to increase their capacity for reflecting upon their practice. Second, to learn from their reflections about the challenges they faced and the good practice which they wished to share. The wider aim was that this learning would be disseminated to a more extended audience as part of the debate about urban mission and fresh expressions of church. This report is part of that dissemination process.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

In the previous section the two main areas of literature that underpin the project were examined. This section outlines the methodology used.

A significant criticism of research in deprived communities is that it is extractive, in other words, it extracts data from participants but returns no benefit to them or their communities. It is research 'into' rather than research 'with'. As this project was designed it was agreed that the research process should result in a recognisable benefit to the groups that took part, and that where their story was told to a wider audience, it would be in language they could own.

The methodology chosen therefore was that of action learning which is underpinned by the belief that adults generate new insights when they are given time to reflect upon their experience and learn from it. For those whose work is in ministry or mission there is an additional element of theological reflection where they are invited to make connections between their story and God's story.

The original plan was to build each group's capacity for structured action learning and theological reflection and then capture the themes that arose through quarterly telephone calls between a project worker and a key informant in the group. However, early contact with groups showed this to be impractical. All the groups were engaged in some form of reflection but it was mostly ad hoc or triggered by a particular event. The reflection was often 'reflection-in-action' where awareness of a wider theme was generated in the concrete and particular circumstances of people's lives. After consultation with the steering group, it was decided to use project workers to facilitate action learning sessions with groups on an agenda of their choosing and from that, reflect back what issues seemed to be emerging as significant. Groups were offered up to four sessions a year. A note of each session was prepared by the project worker and passed back to the group for their comment and the changing of any inaccuracies.

Most groups chose to start their involvement with the project by constructing their story or reviewing existing accounts of their story in order to note the significant turning points and the disclosures of God's purposes. Most groups found that this exercise then enabled them to focus on current issues and concerns.

In March 2010, all the groups came together in an event in which they were asked to draw together their thinking by reflecting on three themes: their urban context, mission and ecclesiology. Experts in those three areas came in to facilitate the reflections. The groups reported that they had benefited from the facilitated sessions which they had used both to reflect on their work but also as opportunities for team-building and planning.

Writing and reflection on Fresh Expressions of Church sits in a theologically contested territory and so it is worth saying something about the theological methodology deployed. The project team understood themselves to be working within practical theology, that branch of theology concerned with Christian practice. In inviting groups to reflect, they were engaging them in a process that uncovered tensions between what they said they were trying to do and what they actually did (Cameron and Bhatti et al 2010). The practice of the project team was to see those tensions as points of creative exploration, which might lead to both changed theology and changed practice. However, because this was a project designed to get participants to talk about their practice on their own terms and in their own language no

attempt was made to steer participants to 'appropriately theological' language. There is both internal secularisation and a measure of self-censorship in the ways in which Christians discuss their practice and some (but not all) are reticent in using God-language in case they are misunderstood or misrepresented<sup>1</sup>. We found that as the relationship with groups developed, they more readily offered the God-language they used as part of the reflective process.

It is important to note that not all groups taking part in this project self-identified as 'Fresh Expressions of Church'. A number had started well before the label had become available, others were wary of it. However, all the groups had found themselves being regarded as 'their church' by at least some of the people they were in touch with.

Having outlined the methodology the report will now present shortened versions of the stories of the groups. This will be followed by a discussion of five themes which emerged from the meetings with the groups and which were reiterated in the conference held with group representatives in March 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> Some groups were not reticent about discussing God but were wary of traditional Christian words and liturgy not being understood by those with little or no previous contact with church.



## 4. SUMMARY STORIES OF THE PARTICIPATING GROUPS

### The Garden Café, Newham, London

After searching for God and 'the meaning of life' in the hippie drug culture of the 1960s, in 1978 Bill Perry returned to his East End roots to become a fruit and veg trader, soon known for the high quality of his produce and of his listening ear.

At the end of the 1980s the population of the East End changed rapidly and the business, whilst still viable, began to decline. In 1992 Bill's marriage broke down. At this low point his search for God was complete, yet had only just begun: his struggle to find a relationship with the divine was to prove long and hard. For him 'born again is crap'<sup>2</sup> - not a once-and-for-all life-changing experience, but seeing life from a different perspective, the start of a journey. Central to this journey was a vision forming in the minds of Bill and of Eve, who was soon to become his wife: the shop could be transformed into a community café. Yet the transformation - in 1994 - was very hard for Bill. He grieved for his shop and wrestled with the vision of the café, not finally becoming one with it until 1999.

The area of Custom House has become a deprived area in a deprived Borough, with many single parent and single pensioner households, high unemployment, few amenities or opportunities for young people, a mobile and ethnically mixed population, and many people with mental health needs.

'In this harsh, unwelcoming environment the Café offers a vibrant, friendly, and safe place for people to meet and eat'<sup>3</sup>, a base for a community spirituality ministry. From the beginning, it has been a place of refuge 'a non-religious place, a place for all. A place of God and spirituality, a place of love... [a place] to welcome all not with a theology, nor a skilled academic help programme. No, we welcomed all, unjudgementally, "with a cup of tea and a hug".'<sup>4</sup>

Here in the café's fluid community people can be honest about relationships and things that are not 'right' in their lives. They can journey together, sharing insights and experience, question God and ask questions about God. Here they find value, perhaps by joining one of the many activities - calligraphy or guitar classes, homework clubs and fashion design classes, parent drop-ins, community crime surgeries, tenants' association meetings, informal education mentoring, social events, and community celebrations. Some join the band, which takes music into community centres, old people's homes, working men's clubs, hospitals, schools, and refugee centres. It also leads protests outside the bi-annual Arms Fair at the nearby ExCEL Centre. During the Fairs the café opens 24/7 as a base for campaigns. At first this was controversial, but now Bill liaises with the police to ensure peaceful demonstrations and make direct contact with the arms dealers.

Bill and Eve are the key indigenous leaders, supported by a Steering Group whose members value the unique contribution made by the Café.<sup>5</sup> As they reach retirement age, other - younger - people are becoming leaders, freeing them to be the café's spiritual resource.

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<sup>2</sup> Personal communication

<sup>3</sup> Peter Laing: *The Garden Café making a Difference in E16*

<sup>4</sup> Bill Perry *A Portrait of the East End*

<sup>5</sup> For further details of those who have supported, see theme 1 Relations with the Church, first paragraph

Visitors ask 'how can we set up a project like the Garden Café?' They can: this is one model and the practicalities will vary, but anyone can be inspired to set up a café with a Christian ethos.

A key theme emerging from this story is that of presence and engagement. 'We work in a desperate dark area with many lost and broken people. We have witnessed deaths and births, tragedies and miracles, pain and blessings.'<sup>6</sup> All this made possible because of the radical transformation from shop to café and from 'lives [of Bill and Eve] no different from the surrounding culture to a positive Christian witness.'<sup>7</sup>

Bill and Eve's search for peace and harmony in the '60s hippie drug scene has re-emerged in their being present and leading prayers at the Arms Fair protests.

Bill's caring for his mother during years of 'nervous breakdowns', and his later experience of hospitalisation have re-emerged in the café's commitment to people with mental health needs - a safe place in which to 'break the cycle of re-admittance onto wards from the community and to support re-integration into the community.'<sup>8</sup>

Is the café's purpose community care or Church? It is always caring for people in the community and thus it is always Church because Bill and Eve live by the values of the Kingdom. When people come into the café they come into Jesus' presence and life's hard questions can be explored. They have shared bread and wine in the café; they hold Big Sing events using Iona worship songs; they show 'movies with a message' followed by sharing thoughts, food, and wine. Thus it is in some sense Church.

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<sup>6</sup> Bill Perry *A Portrait of the East End*

<sup>7</sup> Tony Cant *The Rule of God that transforms*. I would question whether their lives were no different from the surrounding culture before Bill found Jesus. However, the point about a radical transformation stands.

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Bill and Eve Perry to Newham Primary Care Trust

## The Lighthouse, Hartcliffe and Withywood, Bristol

Heather and Rachel met at a community clean-up - "The Noise" - in 2002. Each had a vision for Hartcliffe and Withywood: Heather of the Spirit bringing cleansing, healing, and freedom; Rachel for a Christian community house to meet people where they are at. At "The Noise" in 2003 they met Jenny, the new Curate at St Andrew's, Hartcliffe. With eight people from local Churches, they met to pray, developing a vision of four Lighthouses to take Jesus to local people and bring them to faith.

As a start, Jenny opened her home, 'a roller-coaster ride'<sup>9</sup>, offering costly hospitality to lost and lonely people in a loving but not overtly religious context. This became a regular Friday night 'drop in' run by all three: people learned to trust them because of their commitment to being there every week offering food and accessible relevant Christian input.

In the area were many broken people: single parents, victims of abuse or domestic violence, people in slavery to many things; many believed in God, but knew little of Christian faith or Church-going. In the first four years 45 people came for five or more consecutive weeks, four were baptised, and most made some sort of Christian commitment. The Holy Spirit was 'at work in people's lives. We have seen lives significantly improve and even their physical appearance change as they let go of anger and pain and let Jesus into their lives. Others...have been healed and changed their life situation.'<sup>10</sup>

Early in Lighthouse's life it was felt 'important that the leaders were accountable to an outside Christian group or well-connected leader as this was a new venture with potentially quite high risks.'<sup>11</sup> In 2006 they went 'into a formal partnership with the George Muller Foundation being accountable through Tim Dobson.'<sup>12</sup>

In 2007 Jenny moved to a new Parish and some other leaders left. Heather and Rachel continued Friday nights. In January 2009 Liz and Andrew moved into the area and joined Heather and Rachel. During that year, Roni, Malcolm, and Mark began to share in the Leadership. Early in 2010 Rachel moved on to Christian service elsewhere. There is a core of committed people, others being welcomed in as they feel able. There is no membership list.

In February 2009 a new group was started on Thursdays for seven or eight more committed people who were seeking more than Fridays could offer - prayer, worship, and Bible study. It is led by Liz; Malcolm and Roni share in leading and have grown in faith and confidence. Topics include prayer, relationships, sexuality, skill development, purpose and destiny, happiness, and managing resources and money.

The Friday group continues, led Heather, Andrew, and Mark. It has become more stable and is recognised in the area. Whilst some people have moved to the Thursday group, the strength of existing relationships holds others in the Friday group. The leaders want to cater for their developing spiritual needs whilst keeping it open as a drop-in for new people. Activities

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<sup>9</sup> Jenny Low in The Lighthouse Project 2001-2007

<sup>10</sup> Heather, Rachel, and Jenny in the Lighthouse Project 2001-2007

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

include a quiz and curry night (aiming to attract new people), issues/scenarios, testimony, and visiting speakers.

Lighthouse holds a weekly prayer meeting and has held monthly evening services; the latter are presently in abeyance whilst Lighthouse consults with local Churches about setting up joint services.

Lighthouse has the faith, commitment, and energy to continue to serve the people of Hartcliffe and Withywood, seeking to maintain a balance between the spiritual life of regular attenders and drawing in new people. There is on-going struggle; there is excitement; Lighthouse continues to evolve.

A key emerging theme from this group has been their relationship with local churches. Whilst people from local Churches shared in developing the Lighthouse vision, the local Churches Together was not involved in its beginning. However, the local Anglican Church, to which Liz and Andrew belong, is now very supportive: Heather has been able to baptise members with an Anglican priest in attendance.

Lighthouse has learned much about how people become Christians and gradually the local Churches are understanding that Lighthouse has much to offer the people of the estates. Lighthouse aims to be a resource for the local Churches, providing a foundation from which people move on to them. Is Lighthouse itself a Church? It doesn't aim to be, though it has many of the marks of Church - discipleship, fellowship, Bible study, prayer, worship, sharing food, and mutual caring.

Asked 'How is what you are doing Church?', Heather replied: 'Does it really matter? It creates more conflict if we decide to call ourselves 'Church' - so we avoid it. We concentrate on the heart of the work and following Jesus.'<sup>13</sup> Malcolm added: 'The word 'Church' has connotations - it's a stumbling block to non-Christians and Christians alike. I prefer the word 'fellowship' [which is] a more inclusive relationship word.'<sup>14</sup>

However, Heather noted that people do 'experience [Lighthouse] as Church'<sup>15</sup>, but added that sacraments and [public] worship are missing, so it is not 'full Church', nor would she want it to be, for it is important to be acceptable - in some sense accountable - to the local Churches.

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<sup>13</sup> Report of Church Urban Fund Fresh Expressions conference, March 2010

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

## Oaks, Skelmersdale

Oaks is a vibrant and growing fresh expression of church working out of a base in a specially refurbished and remodelled council house on the Tanhouse Estate in Skelmersdale. This is used for worship by one of the 'Clusters' in the church, and is the hub for people on the estate and in the church to meet together and meet one another. Oaks house is managed by Janet, who, together with her husband Lester and their five children, moved onto the estate to take up this ministry. This fresh expression of church was started, at the request of the Bishop of Liverpool, by Duncan Petty, an ordained Anglican priest, his wife, Ann, plus three other 'founding' couples in 2003. Initially, the cell group met in each other's houses and in the local pub to pray about moving onto the estate. The heart of the vision was to embody an incarnational ministry by living on the estate and also acquiring a council house there as a base for mission and outreach - which came to fruition in 2005 as Oaks house after a protracted and testing process. Duncan and Ann now live on the estate and the house that they have vacated on the edge of the estate is occupied by a Church Army couple who have now (2009) joined the leadership and ministry team of Oaks.

Initial contacts were made through the pubs on the estate, and the main meeting points for worship and spiritual nurture were in the two cell groups, which came together once a month in Duncan and Ann's home. When the numbers became too large for this, they began to meet fortnightly in the local school where Ann was a Governor and Duncan was taking assemblies. This enabled the young church to build closer links with the school and community as a number of the teachers and support staff were Christians. Eventually, however, the Tanhouse Community Centre became unexpectedly available and so it became possible to move right into the centre of the estate for the fortnightly gathering of the cell groups. Ministry in and through the pubs on the estate, was key to the emerging church's mission, with a successful Christmas service hosted in a key local pub, the first of many such gatherings, and made possible by Duncan and others being known and accepted there. The profile of Oaks was also raised in the local community through its Garden parties, its successful participation in the week-long 'Merseyfest' on the estate in August and other such activities in and around the local community which were all instrumental in making contacts and bringing new people in.

Having started off with cell groups which met weekly for nurture, support and worship with a fortnightly larger worship gathering in the community centre, the church has now grown so that the main focus for worship and teaching is in the 'Clusters' which meet weekly on a Sunday then join together as the whole church for worship and teaching on a monthly basis. Clusters have become well established, with the development of a specifically family-oriented one including young children based at Oaks House, the development of a more specific 'youth cluster', and issues needing to be addressed as to how the Clusters multiply and whether it is a good way forward to develop Clusters tailored to specific age groups or needs. (The relationship between cells, clusters and whole church worship/meetings is still a work in progress!) It was initially surprising to the young church to discover the importance of the offices of baptism and confirmation for both the life of the church and its mission in the community. The first confirmations were held in the church in 2007, which was important for those being brought to confirmation, but also served to affirm the church's sense of 'self-respect' as a fully established church.

The values undergirding the work of Oaks are expressed in relational terms as, '*our values... change lives, not programmes*', and are quoted as below:

- **Jesus – centred**, which for us means a) *thinking big but starting small; b) living with a tension between planning and spontaneity; c) reaching out to people on the basis of Isaiah 61:1-3; d) being committed to transformation of lives and; e) dying to self through sacrificial ministry, taking risks we may not be comfortable with, being adventurous and doing the unexpected*
- **A blessing to those we meet**, through acts of *mindless kindness, being forgiving, being positive, being generous and endeavouring to bring a bit of heaven to earth in people's lives*
- **Relaxed**, creating an atmosphere of *fun and loving friendships, being warm and welcoming, being accessible to people, being informal and light-hearted when appropriate and putting focus on low maintenance and high value on all we do.*

As the church grows, so do issues to do with leadership; in particular the tensions between those in authorised ministry (Anglican priest) who are trying to push the boundaries and do new things and yet are required to stay within certain boundaries, and those emerging in leadership who are not sure that they want to stay within the confines of the parent church or 'jump through the hoops', as it appears, in order for emerging local ministry to be recognised, trained and authorised.

Other issues identified by Duncan include the **need for time and space for reflection** in relation to:

- emotional costs - so much happens in a short space of time, and also impacts on the rest of the family
- complex theological and leadership challenges in an 'out-of-the-box', new situation
- pastoral needs – can be extra strains and stresses among those in the small church/cells/clusters. Needs of those in ministry/leadership and conflicts/vulnerabilities between people. Needs of those being 'reached' often with complex emotional and social problems.

## Hull Youth for Christ

Should we move out of the area for the sake of our kids' schooling? Do we need to find a permanent base for the work of Hull YFC now and if so, do we stay with the local Anglican church where the Hull YFC office is based at the moment or go in with the Baptists who are keen to partner with us in their building, or the local Methodist church, or a separate base altogether unconnected with a traditional church? How far do we shape ourselves and our work in order to match the requirements of potential funding bodies or produce the 'results' they're looking to see?

These are the real kinds of questions facing Chris and Anna and the other team members making up Hull YFC. They sound like simply pragmatic issues but their answers to them flow out of what they manage to make of where God is in all of this and what it means to live out the kingdom life in this place at this time with the people they share life and circumstances with. Being able to reflect theologically, as it is more formally put, is crucial to discerning what they do next and why!

Chris Hembury as team leader, along with his wife, Anna, employed part-time by CMS to work in partnership with Hull YFC, live in the Boulevard area of Hull where the work (delete - of Hull YFC) is focused. They've had to grapple with the work emerging in ways that weren't originally envisaged as they acknowledge the reality of the impact of changes in local culture and society and the decline in local churches and their capacity to respond to or understand what Hull YFC have to offer. Originally the vision of Hull YFC, established there in the 1950's, was to support and resource local churches in the city through dedicated youth work and holding events and rallies. In the early '90's, the vision shifted after a review of the work of Hull YFC, to focus on a particularly resource-poor area of the city and to establish a community of 4 team members with a team leader, living together in the same house in order to establish an incarnational presence, committed to living with and listening to the local community. The experiment of community living was ground-breaking and a formative time for the work and team, but not without its problems. Whilst it was positively counter-cultural in the lifestyle of the community, to some degree it also had the effect of alienating the local community which didn't fully understand what they were trying to do. Since Chris came in 1997, a new team has grown, still based on the principles of committed, long-term, incarnational presence and sustainable living and focused in deprived areas of the city. There are now six team members living in three houses in the same road in the Boulevard area of Hull. Chris and Anna and the other team members are very aware of the costs of living in this struggling community, but are also deeply committed to the sharing of life and building of real relationships with those amongst whom they live; the problems that those in the community face are also their problems, such as schooling, access to resources, local community issues. This models a very different sort of engagement with people than that exercised by other statutory or voluntary bodies which operate on a short term, 'dipping in and out' basis.

One of the main issues to emerge from the development of their common life and work in the Boulevard area is the realisation that, although this was never the original intention, the Hull YFC team have found themselves growing or becoming 'church' for the children and families with whom they work. There has been a twofold push towards this direction; firstly, the work has been expanding with the success of the Breakfast Club and After School Club, plus related activities and this, together with the realisation that place matters in terms of what it comes to

represent to people, has prompted the team to consider the need to have a base which they can **shape with some ownership**. Until now, the team has had an office base in the local Anglican Church, plus the use of some facilities for the Breakfast Club **at the** local Baptist Church. The church has been slow to catch the vision for the work and approach which the Hull YFC team models. This, together with the fact that a majority of those (small numbers) attending the church have now moved away from the area but commute back in for services, means that they are not so engaged with or embedded in the local community and its issues and therefore are not in a position to respond with creative support in the work, or to see it as an aspect of shared mission. The potential for a mutually life-giving partnership has not been realised. However, the local Baptist church is moving towards allowing the Hull YFC team to help shape the future use of their building, which gives them a greater role as the congregation dwindles. This is an important development for the team, and effectively raises the stakes in terms of them becoming 'church' for the people with whom they work.

The need for rigorous theological reflection to earth and inform the pragmatic decisions is vital in this context and is something that Chris, Anna and the team recognise is necessary but find hard to make dedicated space for within the normal demands of life and ministry. Theological reflection does happen, but tends to be more 'on the hoof' and they try to live in the creative tension between being proactive and reactive.



## The Ark, Hull

The Ark, based in two adjoining council houses, on the Preston Road Estate is a welcome refuge and resource for young women and their families who have found the courage and encouragement to go there. Lindsay Sunderland, who lived on the edge of the estate with her family knew it well and felt a real compassion and concern for the women who struggled to make life work there and had a real vision for helping them to know the love of God through practical, down to earth help with no strings attached or hoops to jump through first. Initially, like most people, Lindsay had wanted to move away from the estate to a better area, but in May 2000 Lindsay, who was then working as a church lay-worker, was invited by the Bishop of Hull, to attend a Faith in the City conference on reaching Urban Priority Areas with the gospel. It was at this conference that she received a sense of passion for the Preston Road Estate and the confidence to believe that she could do something through hearing of other projects, which had been started from very small beginnings and were responding to needs in local communities. By 2000, the Preston Road Estate had been recognised as an area of 'extreme need' according to social indicators and designated as a 'New Deal for Communities' area, which attracted special funding and resources.

Initially, after the Faith in the City conference, Lindsay had thought of having a 'shop-van' which would go around the estate as a point of contact with women and offering good quality clothes and other items, but, at another weekend conference, Lindsay received a very clear picture of a house on the estate as a base from which to work with women in prostitution or drug addiction. On the basis of this vision, and the belief that a start had to be made, Lindsay, with one or two volunteers and the support of a local church, opened The Ark in November 2000 for one morning a week in the back of St Aidan's Church. Good quality second-hand clothes and goods had been donated by a local church and with these and a kettle and some biscuits The Ark was launched! By September 2001, the Ark was able to open for three mornings a week and a more formalised structure to oversee the project was beginning to emerge.

From this small beginning, The Ark is now based in two adjoining council houses, acquired after much persistent prayer and badgering of the City Council by Lindsay. The houses have been remodelled and refurbished to a high standard to provide a welcoming space for the young women and their children to come for the good quality second hand shop, for coffee, cookery lessons, and to use the smaller upstairs rooms for counselling or for family access; but particularly for the friendship and support offered by Lindsay and her team of volunteers and 2 or 3 paid staff.

From the early days of The Ark in St Aidan's church, the vision and aim of the work was clear and already well-formed. In promotional literature produced at the time the motivation for the work was expressed as '*Inspired by Christ to offer a place of love, hope and encouragement to local women*'. The outworking of this was the vision to provide a place of '*non-residential sanctuary – a place of hope, safety, encouragement and where there is the potential for change. A place where the love of Jesus is shared and nothing is expected in return*'.

This is a strong theological statement about offering God's unconditional love which, nonetheless, brings challenge as well as acceptance to people through the working of the

Holy Spirit in their lives, and through the generous, welcoming hospitality of The Ark. Lindsay's belief and experience was that people generally already feel dissatisfied with, or 'bad' about, their lives and aspire to change when they see other ways of being lived out before them. Thus, the attractiveness of the gospel lived out among them wins people and encourages them to change, rather than strings being attached to the help and love on offer. Importantly, the approach sought to avoid creating dependency among the women on those providing the help and support, and, instead, enabling them to move out of the apathy and fatalism of being a 'victim' into a greater sense of autonomy, self-determination and self-worth based on interdependence, friendship, and the grace of God. And what makes this live is that it is also incarnational love – lived alongside people, not administered from a safe distance. But this also makes it costly and raises huge questions about sustainability, support and resourcing for Lindsay, and the demands on her and her family life.

Some of the main issues for Lindsay and The Ark arise from the principle of **partnership working** which is crucial to the way things work. Lindsay has won the trust of both statutory and voluntary bodies as a result of which, The Ark is firmly woven into the multi-agency team that now meets on the estate. This includes the local regeneration company, the police, social services, the anti- social behaviour team, the Youth Offending team, schools, Health services, Community Wardens, Fire Services, Trading Standards, the Witness support service, other local women's community initiatives, and local churches working together towards a holistic approach to problem solving. During the life of The Ark on St John's Grove, they have seen their involvement in local life continuing to grow and relationships with residents have blossomed; Lindsay writes, *'we have a growing reputation for being able to deliver in the midst of crisis and of being able to develop long-term meaningful relationships that enable people to make significant life changes. We can work in partnership with a variety of agencies and make a bigger and better difference'*. The downside of this as Lindsay explains, is how far The Ark shapes itself to fit in with the legal requirements of many of these bodies and become tied up in their demands for 'outcomes'. How do you keep a healthy objectivity and true to your distinctive aims while also being a trusted partner? Working in partnership with local churches has also proved to more problematic than first expected; while Lindsay has developed a particularly good relationship with a local incumbent, which gives her a spiritual and mutually supportive base, practical involvement from local churches has not been forthcoming. The aim that The Ark would be a bridge for the young women into the local church has also not happened and so Lindsay has found that The Ark effectively becomes 'church' for them and where they feel at home. Prayer and bible study emerge out of conversations about the daily challenges these women face. The question is whether this puts too much weight on Lindsay and her team and how the work develops into the future.

## Paul and Barney's Place, Quinton, Birmingham

For several years Christ Church in Quinton had been thinking and praying about planting a new church in part of their huge parish. One third of the population lived across a major road from the church building and was in the Black Country rather than in Birmingham. In fact many had originally come from Smethwick, even further into the Black Country. The physical and social barriers left an older private estate and a large council "Outer Estate" in need of a mission church of their own. In summer, 1996, Stuart Carter was appointed to act as area vicar to a church-with-no-name in a yet-to-be-found building. As he announced to the Christ Church congregation on his first Sunday, "Christ Church, The Quinton, you are pregnant!

The new church acquired the name "St Paul and St Barnabas, Brandhall", which was immediately abbreviated to "Paul and Barney's". Paul and Barney's was "born" in the New Year, using the local Scout Hut for regular Sunday Morning Services. Over the next few years Mothering Sundays, Easters, Harvest Festivals and Summer Children's Clubs were imaginatively celebrated and the congregation slowly grew.

The setting up and packing away of the Scout Hut was time consuming and local residents still had trouble identifying them as a church so the next step was to see if they could acquire their own building. On the whole estate there was no spare land. Attempts to buy or use an old Doctor's Surgery and a pub came to nothing.

Suddenly things crystallised. The church could run a community café. Days later, the news broke that the florist's in the row of local shops was closing. It was right opposite the Post Office, so it was handy for pensioners collecting their pensions. The lease and change of use were agreed promptly and Christ Church Parish Council agreed to underwrite any loss the café might make. It was named Paul and Barney's Place.

Unusually for a café it only served drinks buying in sandwiches and hot food from the Bakers in the same parade of shops. This had the advantage of supporting a local trader and freeing up staff and volunteer time to build relationships. The story of the café is one of sustaining relationships with people who are isolated, had physical or mental health problems or who were in search of a sense of belonging. The policy of using only Christian volunteers has led to the shop being a focus for spiritual and prayer support.

The next major step was employing a worker to oversee the running of the shop and act as an anchor in the network of relationships with local people and agencies that grew up around the café. A number of local churches support the café with volunteers and so this has deepened ecumenical relationships in the area.

The flat above the shop became vacant. It was in a semi-derelict state and Stuart's energies were split between Paul and Barney's and overseeing Christ Church during a two-year interregnum. Nevertheless the group managing the shop decided they had the energy and skill to proceed and prayed for the necessary money which was forthcoming. Again, substantial work from church members and volunteers was necessary to make the flat usable but it now provides a church office, a meeting room and a craft room where children and adults can attend courses.

The meeting room is used widely for church and community groups. It has run a range of courses for Christian enquirers and new believers and so supported the expansion of the congregation.

The provision of craft sessions for children has now extended into local schools and so a wider network of families are becoming aware of Paul and Barney's as a place of welcome and hospitality. Income generated from this work is helping to support the café. Putting creativity alongside hospitality has been a powerful metaphor of God's regenerating love for the community.

The group that worked with the research project was the café management group which contained a number of leading figures in the church plant. They had alternate meetings on business and strategy and the project worker attended the strategy meetings and facilitated reflection.

One issue that emerged was that of listening. The café was a hub of relationships that enabled local people to be listened to. The café itself was a symbol that the church was listening to the community, aware of its difficulties, in touch with the agencies and other churches that worked on the estate. The management group discussed how they listened to God and the importance of the regular times set aside for prayer and discernment. Images that had endured from these sessions were recalled and used to reaffirm the mission of the café.

Another issue was that of governance. Time was spent reflecting on who made decisions and how. It was recognised that as the work of the café became more complex and multi-stranded so there was a need to ensure that the main congregation of Paul and Barney's understood and supported developments. There was a further need that the development of Paul and Barney's was understood by Christ Church parish. There was a need in all these settings to balance appropriate understanding of financial and other responsibilities with keeping fresh the vision of what was being done for the sake of the Kingdom.

## **5. THEMES EMERGING FROM THE PROJECT**

This section offers theological reflections on five themes emerging from the work with groups and gives examples from the groups.

### **Theme 1 – Faith in White Working Class Culture**

In participating in God's mission to the world, the church has to proclaim the gospel in a way in which the culture can hear. The case made by the Fresh Expressions movement is that parts of our culture need a fresh translation of the gospel in word and deed. Any talk of cultural translation raises the anxiety that something will be lost in translation. The cultural embeddedness of existing forms of church can be easy to overlook because of their familiarity to those who take part in them. The task of discernment in this work of cultural translation requires an ear both to what might be lost as well as to what might be received. It is possible for Christians of good will to disagree about whether current forms of church fail to communicate and whether a translation into a fresh form has lost something essential.

Most of our groups were working in white working class communities that had high and persistent levels of worklessness, often inter-generational. This resulted in many people leading chaotic lives with no set pattern to the day or week. There was also a wariness of public buildings as places that contained authority figures who would disapprove of their lifestyle on grounds of health, education and patterns of consumption. Life is lived almost entirely in the domestic sphere. Church life, by contrast, is patterned on the working week with a rhythm of work and rest and the ability to set aside money from wages to support the work of the church. Some parish churches were supported by former residents who drove in and out of the area on a Sunday morning creating a further sense of distance between church and residents.

An issue raised was whether the church should accept or challenge the culture that had grown up around worklessness. Should that depend upon how realistic the possibility of work was in the local economy? Some of the groups were in communities that had been physically regenerated but where economic regeneration had failed to bring jobs to the area. Some groups were offering a pattern of meaningful activity that alleviated the consequences of a chaotic lifestyle particularly as it affected the health and education of children. This dilemma of enculturation will become more acute as 'conditionality' is tightened for those living on benefits. Where should the church stand as the agencies of the state are required to put more pressure on those living in workless communities? Is it realistic to expect small groups in such communities to challenge the structures that sustain poverty in this community?

This theme resonates with the literature on urban mission which stresses the difficulty of developing models of church that are genuinely indigenous to these communities. A vision for urban living in areas that are post-industrial but which have yet to gain a new economic rationale raises challenging ethical questions about the place of paid work in human flourishing.

**Examples:**

- Oaks, Skelmersdale and Ark, Hull – having a house on the estate means people can enter a familiar building and make constructive relationships.
- Ark, Hull – the loss of an economic rationale for large parts of the city means that saying where you live gives you an identity of being economically inactive
- Garden Café, Newham – rather than mourning the loss of a predominant white working class culture, symbolised by the closing of the greengrocers 15 years ago, the Cafe has provided a safe space where a wide range of people can meet to find affirmation and explore issues of faith and life.
- Lighthouse, Bristol - people living on deprived estates are alienated from the rhythms of working life but seek affirmation, community, and a faith which is accessible. If the value of paid work is advocated for, will this alienate those the group seeks to reach?
- Paul and Barney's Place – after initial suspicion, the café is a place to build relationships. The opportunity to volunteer is welcomed by local residents who attend local churches.

**Theme 2 – Indigenous versus incoming Christians**

This was a topic upon which the groups didn't agree and where there was sometimes disagreement within groups.

On one side of the argument was an emphasis on the importance of long-term residence in the community. Experiencing all that other residents experienced by way of facilities (for example, schools), crime and isolation. Building trusting relationships was based upon sharing everyday life. There was criticism of those who drove in to work or worship in the community because they drove out to a world of wider opportunity and better facilities. Even ordained clergy who moved into a parish for five years or so were seen as transient and not belonging to the community. They felt that 'drive-in' Christians worshipping on a Sunday portrayed Christianity as something which helped you move up and so move out, leaving behind those for whom that hadn't happened.

On the other side of the argument were those who said that exposing your family to long-term residence in these neighbourhoods was too high a price to pay. Resilience could only be sustained if there was regular respite. Having relationships with people not resident in the area broadened social horizons and broke down the negative perceptions of the community. It was important to resist the results of spatial segregation which had the poor living in separate communities with no mixing between neighbourhoods.

This was a sensitive topic to discuss as it reflected decisions about vocation and family. It also uncovered ecclesiological tensions between a model of ministry which saw the minister linking the local to the wider church and so a transient outsider and a monastic model of ministry that valued stability in an unchosen place more highly.

### ***Examples***

- Oaks, Skelmersdale – families who moved intentionally onto the estate have been joined by indigenous families.
- YFC, Hull – primary school teacher urged the workers to leave the estate so their children did not have to attend a failing school.
- Ark, Hull – worker was already resident on the edge of the estate
- Lighthouse, Bristol – project run initially by people living on the estates, one of whom has lived there all her life. A key person was a curate who opened her house for four years before moving to another church in Bristol.
- Paul and Barney's Place – started by the incumbent and his wife moving onto the estate to start a church plant. Volunteers are a mix of residents and those from other parts of the parish.

This theme is prominent in the urban theology literature. The role of middle class or non-residential Christians ministers in stimulating church life in deprived communities is contested. It echoes a literature found more widely in writing on mission, namely, what does the missionary bring unconsciously into the community that blocks local comprehension of the gospel and ownership of the church as an institution (Donovan 2001).

### **Theme 3 – Mission as presence and empowerment**

A characteristic of all groups was that they sought to go beyond the acts of service typically associated with CUF-funded projects to give an account of the faith within them. They were interested in the spiritual as well as the material needs articulated by those they worked with.

There were two messages about how the groups understood mission. First, mission meant an incarnational presence in the everyday life of the community. Second, mission meant engaging with residents to restore their capacity to act, to articulate needs and to seek to have those needs met.

Hospitality was the main means by which this presence and engagement was offered. Two groups ran cafes and three others had a house in which people could gather. Hospitality created the sense of belonging together which made it possible to raise questions of belief. Historically in these communities the parish church would have been the threshold over which people were invited. However, these groups worked with the idea of a 'third place' somewhere, not home or work, where people can meet to pursue their own agenda at their own time and pace (Cameron 2010). A sense of welcome would lead to return visits and a sense of belonging from which relationships of trust would emerge that formed the context for conversation. These 'third places' could be places of belonging without believing where the careful work of restoring the capacity for self-belief preceded the evangelistic task.

### **Examples**

- Oaks, Skelmersdale – the using of the house to build relationships has led to evangelism and the discipling of new Christians. It can be difficult to deal with different levels of knowledge and commitment at the same session.
- Ark, Hull – the focus on empowering women leads to relationships that help women deal with the many agencies that shape their lives. The house is a constant presence that they can turn to in difficulty.
- Garden Café, Newham – seen by Bill and Eve as a place of unconditional love and a safe place for hospitality. The love and the hospitality have transformed many lives.
- Lighthouse, Bristol – the challenge of providing evangelism, discipleship and nurture alongside each other.

The missional approach of ‘presence and empowerment’ is articulated in both the urban mission and fresh expression literatures. It is seen as fitting with the ‘missio Deo’ approach to mission where God is encountered in the world as it is rather than the Church imposing a pre-existing model on the world. The urban mission literature expresses some scepticism about the ‘project’ as a route to incarnational presence depicting it as imposed by an external agenda and funding, instigated by ordained leaders who are not members of the community and who will in due course move on. This reflects the struggle to redeploy resources given by the wealthier parts of the church for mission in these communities – a struggle at the heart of CUF’s identity and work.

### **Theme 4 – Relationships with parish and diocese**

It is important to reiterate that not all these groups described themselves as Fresh Expressions of Church. Many predated the invention of this label within the Church of England. The authors of this report are concerned that the controversy about the relationships between Fresh Expression and parish will be seen to fall upon their shoulders. The points made in this section illustrate issues that can also occur when there is a mission initiative or social action project affiliated with a Church of England parish.

For most of these groups, their relationship with the parish was a live topic. For two of the groups it was a relatively uncontroversial relationship in that they were consciously planted by the parish church to reach an area of the parish which was recognised as under-served. In these cases the issues were around the ‘parent-child’ relationship, for example, the level of family resemblance expected and the way in which the growth of the ‘child’ affected the ‘parent’. There were issues about whether it would be appropriate for the group to seek to become a parish in its own right or whether the governance and administration required to run a parish would overwhelm the group.

For one group, which was intentionally ecumenical, the issue was how to relate to all the historic churches on the estate and deal with the expectation that new Christians would be found a home in their membership. When this didn’t happen it was because the new Christians failed to fit in and the churches did not want to amend their practice to accommodate new believers. This group met in a house owned by the parish and there had generally been cooperation from the parish in conducting baptisms in the garden of the house.



For a further two groups the relationship with the parish had gone through winter and summer seasons depending upon the outlook of the parish priest. Where the incumbent understood parish to mean controlling all activities with Anglican affiliations within the parish, the relationship faltered. Where the incumbent valued a diversity of ministries without feeling that their ministry was diminished, the relationship flourished. There was genuine skill in offering oversight in a way that promoted integration without quenching a diversity of gifts and approaches. Few incumbents had been prepared for this challenge and few received support in developing this skill other than in a crisis when the diocese would intervene. In one case, a parish lay worker had been particularly effective at building bridges and helping regularise funding and governance only for this to fray when the lay worker moved on.

That such tensions arise is entirely understandable. Incumbents in this type of community often feel burdened by buildings, governance and insufficient lay activism. To this can be added the expectations of non-resident attenders to keep things as they were and yet to engage with the realities of the parish. There can be some envy of workers who can seem to have fewer responsibilities and are free to innovate. Collaboration requires spiritual maturity and can be tested when both personal and professional life is lived in a challenging context.

The perception of the diocese was often as being remote, intervening at moments of crisis or when there was a change of incumbent. However, two groups belonged to diocesan networks and some groups had contact with a diocesan CUF Link worker. These networks and contacts were appreciated but seen as being more sources of support rather than opportunities for structured reflection. At the conference one participant offered the metaphor of the church as a dysfunctional family where it is tempting to walk away but the severing of family ties would send the wrong message to the neighbours.

***Examples:***

- Oaks, Skelmersdale – local parish supportive, the problems of the estate long recognised. Presence of a Pioneer Minister creates a profile for the parish in the diocese.
- Ark, Hull – a change in incumbent has improved the relationship with the parish. The parish church mainly serves area of newer housing rather than the estate on which the Ark is located.
- YFC, Hull – working for a para-church agency makes the relationship with the parish more straight forward – there is acceptance although not always support and understanding.
- Garden Café, Newham – at times a very supportive and positive relationship with practical help in seeking funding – now a cooler period in which the café is seen as possibly detracting from the parish church.
- Lighthouse, Bristol – questions about whether Lighthouse is a bridge to local church attendance but without local churches wanting to engage with the need for enculturation
- Paul and Barney's – local parish initiated the plant so they are supportive but a long interregnum drained the resources of the priest for a period.

The literature on urban mission focuses on church planting; the Fresh Expressions literature on emerging groups. Much less has been written about how the traditional church can positively support groups like those represented in this report. One of the groups used the metaphor of the dysfunctional family to describe the relationships between existing and new forms of church – more work is needed on how the family can remain on speaking terms and move to mutual respect.

### **Theme 5 – Supporting appropriate models of Leadership**

The Church of England has a clear model of local leadership, the incumbent, now supplemented by the pioneer minister. These models focus on one person who is usually trained and supported outside the community. The groups involved in this research offer a range of models including partnerships between residents and non-residents, married couples working together, lay workers and volunteer-led groups. These models fly below the radar of ecclesiology yet seem to gain acceptance as closer to the culture they serve. Groups vary hugely in the level of support and supervision leaders receive and all have welcomed participation in the project as a means of support as well as capacity building.

The relationship between form and content in groups is inescapable. Different types of groups usually have their own logic of leadership. Parishes are led by incumbents (assisted sometimes by other ordained and lay leaders) and with the responsibility to link the local and wider church. Third places (the characteristic form of a number of our groups) tend to have a more dispersed model of leadership including responsibility for the venue, setting the ethos of the venue and then running particular activities. People who access third places will form their own views as to who they wish to relate to irrespective of role. In these groups the distinction between ordained and lay was less significant than in parish life.

The advent of Ordained Pioneer Ministers ran the risk, in some settings, of overlaying simplicity and formality on a more complex and informal reality. Where oversight was interpreted as 'being in charge' the energies of other leaders could be quenched. Where oversight was seen as integrating a diversity of ministries, it seemed possible to live with the messiness.

More than one group had concerns about whether the model of leadership present in the local church was that of the educated professional and so seemed remote from local residents. There was a desire to draw out talent in everyone and build a sense of responsibility for the work of the group. Even an offer to wash up rather than waiting to be asked could be seen as taking responsibility in a context where residents were often treated as irresponsible.

**Examples:**

- Oaks, Skelmersdale – a complex mix of ordained, lay, resident, non-resident, paid and volunteer leaders. The pioneer minister and Church Army officers receive support from outside the estate.
- Ark, Hull – lay worker is regarded by volunteers and participants as ‘the boss’ even although she would prefer this was not the case. Support comes through a diocesan group which varies in its usefulness.
- Lighthouse, Bristol – is leadership a middle class concept. Have estate dwellers been schooled to think that leadership is ‘not for them’?
- Paul and Barney’s Place – a committee of stalwarts supported by an incumbent and a paid lay worker.
- Garden Café – Bill and Eve have had periods close to burn out – participation in the project has helped them stand back and reflect.
- YFC, Hull – Experience of growing into leadership as a corporate activity.

Leadership is a theme in both parts of Section 3. It looks both at how leadership can be developed within the community and how leaders coming in can learn about the context in which they will operate. However, the literature does not reflect what this research has found, a diversity of models of leadership, some of which do not fall neatly within Anglican ecclesiology.

**Theme 6 – The reality of reflective practice**

Each of the groups was well disposed to learning from experience but each faced challenges in building this into the way in which they worked. For some regular meetings were overtaken by the need to provide mutual support and to plan for immediate work and events. For others, there were no immediate colleagues with whom it was appropriate to meet for reflective work. There were logistical problems of finding shared time when group members were free of work or domestic responsibility. The facilitators had to negotiate a way of working, in terms of time, place and pace which suited the needs of each group. Inevitably this included sessions at evenings and weekends – something which it can be difficult for those with designated support roles to accommodate.

Only one group seemed to turn readily to the Christian tradition in their reflective conversation. For most, reflection led to discernment about what ‘God was doing’ and how they should respond. The groups valued a theologically trained outsider who could help them make connections with the Christian tradition. Valuing the reading being done by group members and encouraging them to draw on it were important for some groups.

The project team had expect to see an emerging model of conducting action learning sessions but concluded that they had to prioritise being responsive to the needs of the groups.

***Examples:***

- Oaks, Skelmersdale – felt that the ‘away day’ format worked best for them, allowing them to review a period of development, consolidate and think forward.
- Ark, Hull and YFC, Hull – the three leaders of these groups elected to work together in reflection sessions learning from each other’s experience.
- Lighthouse, Bristol – the discipline of regular scheduled meetings was already established and so what was valued was an outsider who could listen and ask questions that the group may not have considered without outside stimulus.
- Paul and Barney’s – the group had a pattern of meetings with space for prayer, strategising and reflection. The outside facilitator was used to focus attention on longer-term and more complex issues that could get lost when funding was stretched.

It is a common place of the literature on adult learning and that on theological reflection that for adults, experience is usually the trigger for reflection and fresh learning. There is a need for more research on the barriers to theological reflection for practitioners (Judith Thompson 2005). Practitioners in challenging contexts need the opportunity to offload and receive support, to be supervised and problem solve before they can move to more reflective work and engage with the Christian tradition in an unhurried way.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS AND INTERIM RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section draws together some of the implications of the research before making recommendations.

### **Implications**

The Church of England has struggled since the Industrial Revolution to inculturate itself into white working class communities. Its most conspicuous successes have come from Anglo-Catholicism and the Church Army both of whom have some presence in the communities represented in this report. It is unsurprising that the Church Army is energetically engaged with research and practice on Fresh Expressions.

The rapid changes to the benefit system and welfare to work programmes are intended to have an impact on the communities described in this report. This is likely to intensify the ethical challenges they face in deciding what importance they should attach to paid work and whether the absence of it is primarily an individual or economic failure.

This research raises issues of how permeable the boundaries of these communities are both culturally and physically. Are incoming Christians to be welcomed as breaking down barriers that represent economic stigma and enact the value of human neighbourliness? Or do outsiders inevitably bring more of their culture with them than they recognise, leading to an imposed Christianity rather than a shared discernment.

A further implication is how articulate mission should seek to be. Is the appropriate response to the feeling of abandonment in these communities a silent presence that builds credibility through acts of service? Or is there also a need to do what all these groups have done and find words in which to articulate the gospel.

The secular and church leadership literature is a weak guide to the forms of leadership that have emerged in these groups. Even using the language of leadership misses the subtlety of the ways in which some groups draw out and coordinate the talents of members. There is a danger that the advent of pioneer ministers carries with it the assumptions of how incumbents work and the emergence of new ways of working is lost.

## **Recommendations**

This section offers recommendations for consultation to the stakeholders listed below and to the wider church.

### *To Emerging Forms of Church in Deprived Communities*

- To commit to a pattern of reflection on practice that is theologically informed, where necessary seeking the help of a suitably trained facilitator.

### *To Church Urban Fund*

- To continue to offer a network for emerging forms of church in the most deprived communities
- To produce resources to help social action projects examine their potential for evangelism

### *To Fresh Expressions Team*

- To publish resources that show awareness of the distinctive issues faced by Fresh Expressions of Church in deprived communities
- To review the training of ordained pioneer ministers to recognise the more dispersed models of leadership evident in some groups

### *To Dioceses*

- To ensure effective communication between those officers responsible for Fresh Expressions of Church and those responsible for social justice work in deprived communities
- To facilitate networks of practitioners for mutual support
- To train volunteer facilitators who will work with groups to facilitate theological reflection
- To offer opportunities in CMD provision for incumbents to review the ecclesiological and missiological issues raised by the mixed economy, including the relationship between social justice and evangelism.

### *To Training Institutions*

- To review the training of ordained pioneer ministers to ensure the adequacy of training in listening to a range of stakeholders, reading a context theologically, facilitating the practice of others, facilitating theological reflection in groups.
- To review the experience of OLM training so as to find ways of supporting groups rather than a single leader OPM during the training process.
- To ensure the training of all ordinands includes the ecclesiological and missiological issues raised by the mixed economy.
- To ensure all ordinands have a one week placement in a deprived community.

### *To Poverty Charities and Local Government*

- To be aware of the importance of the search for meaning and belonging in deprived communities and allow projects scope to explore these dimensions.
- To value projects that restore the capacity and confidence to act in those they work with.

## **Afterword - Invitation to respond**

The Church Urban Fund is keen to hear your response to this report so that it can formulate a final set of recommendations to go to the stakeholders. You are invited to respond as an individual or to meet with colleagues and send a joint response. You can respond to any aspect of the report you wish to but in particular we would value answers to the following questions:

1. Are the recommendations comprehensive and appropriate?
2. Are there other examples of good practice you would wish to bring to the attention of CUF?

Please send your response by e-mail to: [andy.turner@cuf.org.uk](mailto:andy.turner@cuf.org.uk)

Or by post to: Andy Turner, Church Urban Fund, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3AZ

Please give your name and the basis from which you reply.

## APPENDIX – LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the report introduces previous writing on urban mission and fresh expressions of church. This provides a context within which the stories of the groups the project worked with can be understood.

### Literature Review on Urban Mission

‘See: I am creating new heavens and a new earth!’ wrote the prophet Isaiah<sup>16</sup>, ‘for I am creating Jerusalem as a delight and her people as a joy... No child will ever again die in infancy, no old man fail to live out his span of life... My people will build houses and live in them.’<sup>17</sup> Michael Northcott, editor of ‘Urban Theology, a Reader’, comments:

‘The Isaiah vision establishes the importance of mission and ministry in every area of the city and especially in those parts of the city where people continue to live in exile, to inhabit houses designed for machines and not people, who have no...secure employment or income to feed their children, who have poor diet and poor air quality, unsafe streets and diminished chances of health and long life.’<sup>18</sup>

This review looks through the lens of urban mission at how city and estate dwellers have often been deprived of the resources for flourishing; the successes and failures of planners and service-providers; and the many ways in which the Churches have responded to the despairing and encouraged the resourceful.

For the slum-dwellers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the first priority was a home warm, dry, and providing space for a family. Hanley<sup>19</sup> traces the story of the response to this need by the replacement of horrific slums with new estates from the work of the mid-nineteenth century philanthropists through the first LCC estate and the Garden Cities to Aneurin Bevan’s ideal of ‘well-built housing “where the doctor, the grocer, the butcher, and the farm labourer all lived in the same street.”’<sup>20</sup> The 1951 Conservative government replaced Bevanite idealism with “Conservative pragmatism - which held that renting a home was a means to an end rather than an end in itself [thus sowing] the seeds of council housing’s eventual infamy.”<sup>21</sup> Council house building escalated, ‘but at the expense of treating houses as boxes that could somehow be stacked up willy-nilly.’<sup>22</sup> Spurred on by the vision of Le Corbusier and by big builders in search of profits, tower blocks were built - the higher the block the greater the subsidy. At first system-built blocks seemed a splendid way rapidly to replace decaying housing stock, but following the disastrous collapse of Ronan Point in 1968<sup>23</sup> it was rapidly realised that everything was wrong with living in them: ‘they leaked, they condensed, they blew up, the lifts did not work, the children vandalised them, the old ladies lived in fear.’<sup>24</sup> Worst of all, in Hanley’s view, was ‘the moral squalor of stigma,’<sup>25</sup> compounded in the 1980s by problem families being concentrated together, leading to ‘further

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<sup>16</sup> Isa 65:17, quoted in *Urban Theology*, p.59

<sup>17</sup> Isa 65:20f, quoted in *Urban Theology*, p.59

<sup>18</sup> *Urban Theology*, p.62

<sup>19</sup> *Estates, an Intimate History*, chapter 2

<sup>20</sup> *ibid* p.79 (quote from Bevan not referenced)

<sup>21</sup> *ibid* p.89

<sup>22</sup> *ibid* p.91

<sup>23</sup> Colin Marchant, *Signs in the City* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985) quoted in *Urban Theology*, pp.63ff

<sup>24</sup> Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988) quoted in *Urban Theology*, p.66

<sup>25</sup> *Estates, an Intimate History*, p.123



alienation..., nihilism, and a creeping sense of lawlessness,<sup>26</sup> till today, 'in the eyes of many people, council estates are little more than holding cages for the feral and the lazy.'<sup>27</sup>

Growing up 'on the edge of the Wood - an estate on the periphery of Birmingham'<sup>28</sup>, Hanley makes no mention of the Church. But it was there, as project team member David Read knows from having been a member of its ecumenical team ministry in the 1970s. As the estate was built, a small number of Anglicans and Methodists gathered, first in a school, then in a large and imposing Church planted near the shopping centre courtesy of the Bishop of Birmingham's Church extension fund. Looking through Hanley's lens, I realise that we failed to listen to the - albeit muffled - cries of the people, failed to realise how limited were their lives, hardly touched by the Church. Hanley could hardly have missed the Church building, yet it is clear that it made no contribution to her life. Instead, she tells how she escaped the 'wall in her head' - a wall which 'is about *not* knowing what is there [beyond the estate], or believing that what is out there is either entirely irrelevant to your life, or so complicated that it would go right over your head if you made an attempt to understand it.'<sup>29</sup> It's the wall behind which most estate-dwellers spend their lives unless, as in Hanley's case, they are bright enough and determined enough to move on to Further Education.

This raises the issue of what kind of Church can relate to the white working people of the estates. Hasler<sup>30</sup> wrestles with the question of how a properly indigenous Church can be planted there when every Church apparently has to conform to a suburban model. Noting a number of cultural contexts, he focuses on the white working-class. He defines a 'Church' as having within its own 'resources sufficient gifts to carry out its mission in the world.'<sup>31</sup> **'Any Christian community that does not...is not a Church but a mission-field'**<sup>32</sup> to which church-shaping missionaries should be sent: they should have a grasp of the local culture, gather people in homes, identify local leaders (who should be ordained), encourage indigenous models of organisation, and help 'the locally emerging Church ... to participate in the wider Church in a way that promotes honest exchange'<sup>33</sup> He claims that this will enable working-class Churches to break out of dependency models. The polycentric Church of his title would then move from being suburbo-centric to being indigenous to a variety of cultures relating to each other. Although Hasler adopts the principle of 'enculturation', his Church-planting aim is relatively limited: his proposed missionaries would be 'looking to find faith in the social structures of working class communities'<sup>34</sup> in order to develop estate Churches which can play an appropriate role in the whole Church.

Having made her escape from 'the Wood' via the FE College at the middle-class end of the Borough, we find Hanley in Tower Hamlets, one of the five poorest Boroughs in England. She writes vividly of the noise and human chaos around her 'attractive orderly home' in a small tower block. She becomes involved in a campaign to redevelop the whole estate, meeting, with other local people, the master planners and the proposed social land-lord until, 'as a result of the steering-group's tenacity and the fact that *we were in charge of directing the*

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid* p.124

<sup>27</sup> *ibid* p.146

<sup>28</sup> *ibid* p.1

<sup>29</sup> *ibid* p.153

<sup>30</sup> Crying out for a Polycentric Church

<sup>31</sup> *ibid* p.43

<sup>32</sup> *ibid* p 43 (his bold)

<sup>33</sup> *ibid* p.48

<sup>34</sup> *ibid* p.48

*process rather than having it directed at us*, [it had] grown into an extensive and far-reaching development that would cost more than £20 million to carry out.<sup>35</sup> 'The scariest thought was,' she says, that only a very small number of tenants were involved, despite determined efforts to get others on board. However, a combination of political will, optimism, and money had won the day.<sup>36</sup> Add to this children's centres, free nurseries, subsidised local shops, and cheap and regular public transport and there is the making of a place where people can enjoy living. This raises the issue of the importance of the involvement of local people in developing local plans but also the issue of whether any but those with middle-class aspirations will actually get involved in change - Hanley describes herself as 'now fully embourgeoised'<sup>37</sup>

Hanley, writing from a non-faith perspective has, she says, the housing-estate experience in her soul. Gary Bishop<sup>38</sup> writes from a faith perspective and out of a middle-class up-bringing. He writes vividly of his experience as a member of a Salvation Army and Message Trust EDEN project in Openshaw, an inner-city housing estate in east Manchester. He paints a picture of drugs, poverty, loan-sharks, violence, addiction, joy-riders, and much more. He is in Openshaw to plant a Church or, as he puts it, 'to continue the ministry which Jesus started by announcing the good news of the Kingdom.'<sup>39</sup> The core of the Church is the team; others have clearly gathered around but, though he lets us know that they have a Church building, he gives no facts about the numbers attending worship, nor if indigenous leadership has emerged, nor how the services are conducted. To ask for such information is not the point. 'God's first question is: what is your response to the poor and oppressed?'<sup>40</sup> His immediate 'example of the kind of worship God enjoys'<sup>41</sup> follows: Chris befriended the 'thief' who burgled his home, helping him keep off alcohol and drugs, through a long illness, eventually sharing with him the good news about Jesus, now believable because he had experienced love and forgiveness. For Bishop, the Kingdom is found in 'the dream of what this place can be with a little encouragement, some positive action, and a greater awareness of the Kingdom of God which is all around.'<sup>42</sup> It means building a community where those seeking a spiritual experience may meet one of the Church or a team member at work or even walk into a Sunday morning meeting: there they find a 'real, gritty, life-transforming spirituality... demonstrated in real ordinary lives touched by God.'<sup>43</sup> They are committed, he says, to 'holistic transformative mission, which includes evangelism but is not defined by it.'<sup>44</sup> Bishop is able to write from within the culture of his adopted home: the Church (team and others) 'are all local residents who understand the needs of the community.'<sup>45</sup> However, the issue is that it is not clear from his account whether what is being developed is a genuinely indigenous Church.

Murray<sup>46</sup> identifies three core constituents of an authentic Church: mission, community, and worship, any one of which 'can be the starting-point for a new Church.'<sup>47</sup> Church planting, he believes, is still vital, so long as it is contextual rather than imperialistic. Whilst not hiding his

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<sup>35</sup> Hanley p.204. My italics

<sup>36</sup> *ibid* p.210

<sup>37</sup> The Guardian 20.8.09

<sup>38</sup> Darkest England and the Way Back In

<sup>39</sup> *ibid* p.68

<sup>40</sup> *ibid* p.47

<sup>41</sup> *ibid* p.47

<sup>42</sup> *ibid* p.126

<sup>43</sup> *ibid* p.87

<sup>44</sup> *ibid* p.88

<sup>45</sup> *ibid* p.67

<sup>46</sup> Planting Churches

<sup>47</sup> *ibid* p.128

strong beliefs, he lists 16 motives for seeking to meet the needs of, for example, new or un-Churched areas; emerging post-modern culture; or specific sub-cultures such as Goths or travellers. Included in this list is fresh expressions of Church, which he says are usually connected with inherited Churches, as opposed to emerging Churches, which have looser or no links with inherited Churches.<sup>48</sup> Oddly, he doesn't include specifically urban or inner-city planting, though he often mentions cross-cultural planting, implying middle-class Church planters planting in a culture different from their own. He does refer<sup>49</sup> to the desperate need for indigenous leaders in Church plants 'especially in urban areas.' He is very clear that the assumption of 1990s Church planting that 'a new worshipping community would be the base for mission activities...is a legacy of the Christendom era, in which mission and community were often marginalized. Church planting,' he adds in a trenchant comment, 'should not be warped by this inherited bias.'<sup>50</sup> It begins, he says, 'with discovering what God is doing in a community and joining in,'<sup>51</sup> a comment which, despite the even-handed approach of this book, probably sums up his core belief. This raises the issue of the importance of listening for long enough to find out what God is doing.

In co-operation with Kilpin, Murray has written up the work of Urban Expression,<sup>52</sup> an organisation similar to EDEN, committed to Church planting in the inner city. They argue that this is crucial because the inner city is largely un-Churched yet the Gospel is good news for the poor and there, on the margins, God is to be found. Basic to this work are values - 'resisting purpose-driven, goal-orientated, or model-led initiatives'<sup>53</sup> - grouped under the heads of relationship, believing that the Gospel works that way; creativity, especially the importance of taking risks, being willing to fail, and developing indigenous leadership; and humility, depending on God and working alongside and learning from others.

Through all the above discussion runs the issue of convictions versus context. Murray says they 'should be held in creative tension.'<sup>54</sup> Some aspects of the context will tune in with the Gospel and can be celebrated whilst others may be hostile to Gospel values and be challenged, offering a counter cultural alternative. Care has to be taken: middle-class Church planters who believe in the sanctity of marriage have to be wary of importing their belief into a culture where there are many single parents and cohabiting couples. However, Murray adds that both convictions and context are resources for prayerful discernment of God's direction,<sup>55</sup> the ultimate authority for what kind of Church God wants planted.

We move now to the issue of the balance between the Church/Christians simply 'being there' or of actively seeking to empower a community. The long-term presence of parish Churches may offer what Rowan Williams calls 'patient attention'<sup>56</sup> - an idea expressed by Jacques Ellul, who sees the city as a closed artificial anti-redemptive world in which those who are caught

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid* p.37

<sup>49</sup> *ibid* p.216

<sup>50</sup> *ibid* p.129

<sup>51</sup> *ibid* p.14

<sup>52</sup> Referred to on p.150 of *Planting Churches; the Urban Expression* story is written up in [Church Planting in the Inner City](#)

<sup>53</sup> *ibid* p.5

<sup>54</sup> *Planting Churches* p.146

<sup>55</sup> *ibid* p.147

<sup>56</sup> Used in his presidential address to General Synod, 11.7.09 and quoted in *Faithful Cities* p.80

are 'captives of the spiritual power which has embodied itself in the city.'<sup>57</sup> those who wait will bring ruin to this spiritual power.<sup>58</sup> Faithful Cities cites the example of three Catholic Sisters taking up residence in an impoverished housing estate in Wolverhampton: there they lived, prayed, and listened. Their presence catalysed many changes - Church services locally planned and led, computer courses, literacy training, and holiday events.<sup>59</sup>

Elaine Williams<sup>60</sup> writes of an incarnational ministry: a priest with a congregation facing serious trauma. Some expected she might leave, but she was clear that she belonged to the community, that her faithfulness and commitment reflected the presence of Jesus. Her presence allowed a theology to arise from the people as a bereaved family developed the use of a butterfly symbol to convey an unarticulated deep message of hope.

Others articulate a more deliberate empowerment. Barney Pityana expresses this: 'We need to identify with people whom we serve and so empower them that they may more fully take control of their lives.'<sup>61</sup> Yet this is a narrow line to tread. Barbara Harrison recalls a 'woman of the Manor' - a local activist, afraid of nothing - saying to two local Ministers: 'There's one thing I'm afraid of....You pretend to be with us, but you're only biding your time till you can take over.'<sup>62</sup> Likewise the Church may 'risk its integrity...if it is channelling more and more energy into maintaining...government sponsored projects.'<sup>63</sup> Congregations may better 'seek and create change...not [with] public money, but [by] the development of independent networks of trust and co-operation worked on patiently at the local level by neighbouring institutions.'<sup>64</sup> Hackwood and Shiner insist that 'urban theology is contextual theology - a theology that is a way of doing things in relation to context, enabling the agenda of particular Churches [to] arise from local people.'<sup>65</sup> The issue is: can this be done? From a number of examples available in the literature under review two are offered:

I. The Graigmillar Festival Society, a 'pioneer grass-roots movement in favour of urban renewal'<sup>66</sup> - community workers supported the community in workshops with officials and planners, but only a few were involved until the creation of an annual festival - 'a colourful, hilarious, and indigenous week of activities',<sup>67</sup> which unlocked people's creative talent and thus gave them the confidence to seek change in their community. The Church's role is mentioned only in the last paragraph: the Church building doubled as community theatre, one of the team ministry acted as musical director, and the Church became a 'listening place',

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<sup>57</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Meaning of the City* trans Dennis Pardee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970) quoted in Urban Theology, p.98

<sup>58</sup> *ibid* p.100

<sup>59</sup> Faithful Cities, p.82

<sup>60</sup> Practical Theology pp.313-321

<sup>61</sup> Barney Pityana 'Towards a black theology for Britain' in Anthony Harvey (ed.) *Theology in the City* (London: SPCK, 1989) quoted in Urban Theology, p.340

<sup>62</sup> Barbara A Harrison, 'Women of the Manor - ministry on an Urban Priority-Area council estate' in Elaine Graham and Margaret Haldey (eds), *Life Cycles: Women and Pastoral Care* (London: SPCK, 1993) quoted in Urban Theology, p.185

<sup>63</sup> Faithful Cities p.72

<sup>64</sup> *ibid* p.51

<sup>65</sup> Paul Hackwood and Phil Shiner, 'New role for the Church in urban policy?', *Crucible* 1994, quoted in Urban Theology, p.74

<sup>66</sup> 'A people's astonishing vitality' in Douglas Galbraith, *Music in the Listening Place* (Unpublished), quoted in Urban Theology, p.37

<sup>67</sup> *ibid* p.38

encouraged 'to respond not only in new words but in the structure and quality of its life.'<sup>68</sup> A case of the community empowering the Church!

2. The Harlesden People's Community Forum set up by four young men who had come through a life of crime to become evangelical Christians. Although no mention is made of any Church involved or supporting them, they were inspired by their faith to work through the very complex process of setting up a major community facility, negotiating with the Council, and facing many crises. Ermal Williams, one of the four, said that, looking back with a natural eye, 'I feel I've had enough. [But] when I look at it from God's perspective...I see the fulfilment of a dream we once had...people being educated, trained, feeling fulfilled....'<sup>69</sup> One senses that the seeds of their faith may have been sown in an up-bringing in Caribbean British Churches.

Two further examples show the Churches working in the community, but taking a much stronger lead.

1. St James' with St Clement's, Moss Side, Manchester. The Vicar, Gerald Wheale, writes of a 'style of ministry [which] evolved in relation to a particular situation.'<sup>70</sup> What we have defined as contextual. Faith, he says, must be worked out 'in the realities of a disadvantaged and poor community.'<sup>71</sup> So the Gospel is proclaimed, the sacraments celebrated, and the power of Christian love expressed, all with the aim of enabling 'man [sic] to discover his humanity.'<sup>72</sup> The Churches sponsor a Housing Association with a 'tenant-intensive' style of management and the Council of Churches manages the Church's Pastoral (Community) Centre, a base from which the Church shows its commitment to the community and for the Moss Side Community Project with community worker. This is clearly an enabling ministry, but the parish priest and other professionals are at the core of it.

2. The Bromley by Bow Centre. The Minister, Andrew Mawson, aimed to create an 'arena in which real human integration could take place'<sup>73</sup> - open to people of all races [sic] and creeds. The middle classes have been essential to the development because, he says, the poor live under too much pressure to bring about change. It has become 'a unique venture at the cross-roads of community, the arts, education, health, the environment, and liturgy,'<sup>74</sup> used by 600 people a week, staff of forty, budget of £700,000 (in 1995) - workshops, Bengali language project, nursery, toy library, crèche, café, art gallery, Church, health project, offices, community garden. The aim is to celebrate richness rather than concentrate on problems. The symbols of the eucharist are at the centre of its life - 'cosmic drama in the midst of mundane human activity.'<sup>75</sup> This extract shows Mawson as key to the enterprise, indeed he notes that when he departs someone else will appear 'and possibly build something different.'<sup>76</sup> The community

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid* p.40

<sup>69</sup> 'London: new life in the inner city' in Mary Lean, *Bread, Bricks, and Belief: Communities in Charge of their Future* (West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, 1995) quoted in *Urban Theology*, p.216

<sup>70</sup> Gerald Wheale, 'The parish and politics' in George Moyser (ed.), *Church and Politics Today: Essays on the Role of the Church of England in Contemporary Politics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark), quoted in *Urban Theology*, p.146

<sup>71</sup> *ibid* p.146

<sup>72</sup> *ibid* p.146

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Mawson, 'Community Regeneration' in Eric Blake borough (ed.), *Church for the City* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995), quoted in *Urban Theology*, p.44

<sup>74</sup> *ibid* p.45

<sup>75</sup> *ibid* p.49

<sup>76</sup> *ibid* p.49

enjoys what is offered, but is empowered only temporarily; the Church remains small (25 members) despite the claimed centrality of the liturgy.

The answer to the question raised above which emerges from the four examples would seem to be that when the Church gets involved it is not really indigenous, but either on the sidelines, or at the centre led by the clergy and other professionals.

## **Summary of Key Issues**

### Issue One: What kind of cities to build which enable people to flourish

Cities have traditionally divided rich from poor, offering the rich a life of variety in work and leisure, whilst the poor were forced to live in slums, continuing to be stigmatised when removed to what became the ghettos of peripheral estates and inner city tower blocks. The houses of the poor were reduced to being machines for living in, seen by government either as stepping-stones to the private sector or as 'holding cages for the feral and lazy.' (Hanley p.146)

### Issue Two: What style of Mission for the city

The choice is either to be a presence alongside people or actively to set up projects to improve their welfare. In the first case clergy or religious offer themselves to be with people, listening, praying, and responding as they work through daily trauma or explore new possibilities. In the second, Churches are more proactive setting up projects to improve the welfare of people living under stress or with little colour in their lives. These are usually clergy-led and employ additional paid workers. A third way is represented by the industrial mission model, in which trained and committed clergy immersed themselves in the moral (and therefore theological) issues of the world of work, and at times also in its politics. (See, for example, the story of the Sheffield Industrial Mission, Urban Theology pp.268ff)

### Issue Three: The appropriate context for urban mission

Hasler emphasises the importance of indigenous Churches for working-class housing estates because the suburban Church provides the wrong model. Murray and Kilpin argue passionately that the Gospel is good news for the poor and therefore it is in the inner city that churches should be planted. For Bishop this means announcing the good news of the kingdom in practical response to the needs of the poor and the oppressed. The emphasis in the literature reviewed suggests that the middle classes don't need urban mission, though the thinking and action are often led by middle class Christians who have developed an appropriate set of values.

### Issue Four: What kind of Church to plant in the city

Church planters are inspired and driven by the strong convictions they bring to their mission, but this may lead to planting an expression of Church alien to the context. Convictions and context should be held in creative tension (Murray p.146). The literature reviewed suggests that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there has been a move away from planting Churches in 'easy' middle class areas to harder places where there is greater need (see three). However, there is no blueprint for an indigenous Church, perhaps because it has proved hard to develop indigenous leadership. Brewin offers the belief that the Church has to be 'born again at the edge of chaos' (p.63), but one senses that Vaux has developed out of a group of people sharing a vision, rather than out of inner city indigenous people.

Issue Five: Who shapes urban mission - local people or imported professionals?

This key issue is found in all the above. Hanley found that it was people with middle class aspirations who wanted to be involved in planning the future of her estate in Tower Hamlets. Murray refers frequently to the need for cross-cultural planting - middle class planters going into working-class areas should seek to plant Churches appropriate to the context. He wants to see indigenous leadership, but I have found little evidence of this.

Almost all the material in the literature tells stories of middle-class professionals leading projects or setting up Churches in working-class areas. They may believe in indigenous leadership, but it is not clear that it has emerged.

## **Fresh Expressions of Church**

In a survey of some of the recent literature since 2004 on Fresh Expressions of Church, there is a remarkable degree of agreement on certain key issues regarding the development of Emerging churches and Fresh Expressions of Church, even though differences may subsequently emerge in the consideration or outworking of these. The aim of this literature review will be to identify the areas of general agreement evident from the literature and to map the main questions and debates, which seem to be emerging.

As Ian Mobsby (2007:23) notes, the development of alternative worship services, emerging churches and, subsequently, fresh expressions of church has been very much a 'bottom-up development' with 'no central diocesan planning'. The literature, in a sense, reflects this process in that the focus initially is on documenting and researching the stories of these groups in order to understand what was emerging, the significance of them and the themes they had in common (Gibbs and Bolger 2006, Edson 2006). This very much reflected the narrative approach to faith – with the emphasis on people sharing their stories and finding out where God was in them. Likewise, the recounting of stories by the emerging churches and the identifying of certain common characteristics was seen as a way of hearing what God might be saying to the churches and in the hope of inspiring others to live the gospel in their own culture or context and 'see what happened'. It was not intended to be offered as a 'blueprint' or an overarching model for how things should be done. 'Mission-shaped Church' (2004), a report of the General Synod of the Church of England, was a seminal document in this respect, acknowledging the rediscovery of contextual mission as exemplified by twelve types of what it termed 'fresh expressions of church' (Ch.4). The report acknowledged that these fresh expressions of church had emerged because 'some pioneers have yearned for a more authentic way of living, being and doing church', (which) had led to fresh thinking about what church can or should be', and affirmed that this was 'a sign of the work of God and of the kingdom' (2004:80). Whereas the pioneers and missiologists resisted using the language of 'methodology' or 'framework', the authors of the '*Mission-shaped Church*' report, however, seem less reticent in this respect (2004:40) and thus, perhaps, confirming the very thing that those in emerging churches are seeking to avoid, namely that a methodology can be identified and replicated rather than catching the wind of the Spirit and seeing where it takes you (authentic and costly engagement).

While the telling of stories of fresh expressions in different contexts continues to be an important strand in this literature (Sally Gaze 2006, Sue Hope 2006, Jon Oliver 2009, Croft and Mobsby 2009), attention has shifted more towards evaluating fresh expressions of church, confronting the theological and ecclesiological challenges they pose and grappling with the disagreements and debates which have emerged (Nelstrop and Percy 2008, Croft 2008, Croft and Mobsby 2009, Davison and Milbank 2010).

## **Consensus and Challenge**

### A rapidly changing context

All of the literature takes as a starting point the huge changes that have taken place in society over the last sixty years as described, for instance, by Steven Croft, (in Nelstrop & Percy 2008:40). These shifts in culture and context are well documented and there is general agreement that this presents a major challenge to the traditional churches which, some would say, are a cultural expression of modernity in their institutional authoritarianism, ritual, and 'one-size-fits-all' approach (e.g. Mobsby 2007). David Male (Nelstrop & Percy 2008:148ff), a pioneer in fresh expressions of church and theological educator, presents the statistics



resulting from research projects which demonstrate the large percentages of the population in Britain now considered to be what the *'Mission-shaped Church'* report terms 'dechurched' or 'unchurched', and that, as the Report states, 'for most people across England the Church as it is, is peripheral, obscure, confusing or irrelevant' (2004:39-40). Furthermore, Male, quoting further research (Alan Jamieson 2002), also observes that there is 'a large pool of people with previous or even present church experience who are looking for a reworking of church, or even faith, that is more appealing or satisfying to them' (Nelstrop & Percy 2008:150). The gap in the research that Male identifies, however, is whether fresh expressions are really reaching 'unchurched people' as is intended or are, rather, providing 'safety nets' for those seeking new experiences of church (2008:151), a question echoed by Martin Percy (2008:31).

While it is acknowledged that there may be the few who resist or deny the need for the traditional churches to engage with the changing cultural context, the overwhelming consensus is that the church does need to engage with the changing context and the sub-cultures within it, in creative and critical ways for the well-being and growth of both. The caveat to this consensus, however, is where to draw the line between creative, prophetic engagement and collusion (Savage, in Nelstrop & Percy 2008:58). This challenge comes into focus, for instance, in the claim by Peter Ward (quoted in Nelstrop & Percy 2008:194ff) that rather than demonising consumer society, we should take it seriously and see in it the potential for spiritual growth by 'commodifying spiritual products' which flow through networks of Christians and churches as in the pattern of 'perichoresis' in the Trinity. As Nelstrop indicates (2008:194), there are those who object to a 'consumer-driven Christianity' and would adopt a more counter-consumerist approach.

A further area of on-going debate relates to fresh expressions of church as 'culture-specific social expressions of the gospel' (*Mission-shaped Church* 2004:108-109) which has echoes of the Homogenous Unit Principle as developed by Donald McGavran (1955, 1970). This is a criticism taken up by Martin Percy (Nelstrop & Percy 2008:38), who sees fresh expressions of church as contemporary versions of this, which, he states, has been widely discredited by theologians and missiologists and needs to be treated with 'a healthy dose of suspicion'. The question would seem to be not whether fresh expressions should relate to specific cultural groups within society, but whether these groups can be seen as full expressions of church.

#### 'Missio Dei'

Tim Dearborn's pithy statement, 'It is not the Church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a Church in the world' (1998), is often quoted in the literature (e.g. *Mission-shaped Church* 2004:85, Gaze, 2006:3) as aptly expressing the fundamental shift in the orientation and self-understanding of the Church within the changed context as described above. There is a wide consensus in the literature reviewed on the turn to mission which is seen no longer as an 'add-on activity' for the enthusiastic few, but as 'the very reason the church exists' (Gaze 2006:14) and that 'the mission of God is a higher calling than the maintenance of the church' (2006:3). The literature documents a new willingness and enthusiasm to engage in mission, both through fresh expressions and traditional forms of church, along with the growing acceptance that 'instead of existing forms of church providing the limits and the shape that Christian mission can take, we need to discover the part of God's mission to which each Christian community is called and let God's mission limit and shape our churches' (Gaze 2006:3). Thus, Steven Croft can confidently state, 'the Church of England is no longer messing about when it comes to God's mission' (2008:ix). The transformative and energising effect that also occurs within individuals and communities as they go out in

mission is explored in '*Mission-shaped Spirituality*' (Hope 2006). Stephen Cottrell, writing in the introduction (2006: ix) commends this 'apostolic spirituality', as Hope calls it, as 'the intuitive knowledge that we need to live and share what we have received'.

Missiology features widely in the literature with many authors and practitioners drawing on the writings of missionaries such as Roland Allen (1868-1947), Vincent Donovan (1978) and Lesslie Newbiggin (1989) to explore mission as the inculturation of the gospel espoused by emerging church and fresh expressions and characterised by 'going out' to others, being alongside, listening and serving, transforming lives and community, and allowing the response to the gospel to be shaped by the culture in which it takes root. Inevitably there is debate about the dangers of uncritical collusion and losing the prophetic challenge of the gospel to all expressions of human culture, but this is seen as an impetus to engage with the hard questions rather than a reason to retreat from engagement in mission (e.g. Wilkinson Ch 9 in Croft 2008). Opinions begin to diverge, however, as to whether the inherited mode of church can, by its very nature, engage in such inculturation of the gospel (Mobsby 2007, Ward 2002).

The next three sections on the ecclesiological challenges posed by fresh expressions of church; the mixed economy; and issues of power, authority, and leadership, represent areas which provoke the most heated debate and the need for ongoing research and study.

#### Fresh Expressions of Church

Steven Croft (2008:3) notes that the term 'fresh expressions of church' was first used in *Mission-shaped Church* (2004) to refer to:

- existing churches that are seeking to renew or redirect what they already have
- others intentionally sending out planting groups to discover what will emerge when the gospel is immersed in the mission context.

Croft notes that the Report deliberately incorporated an element of ambiguity into its definition of a fresh expression of church in order to give breadth to the emerging forms of church and to incorporate both the establishing of new communities as well as 'existing congregations shaping things differently for the sake of mission' (2008:8). Once fresh expressions of church began to 'catch on' in the mainstream church as well as on the peripheries, those tasked with charting the development of fresh expressions through the Fresh Expressions Initiative, established between the Anglican and Methodist Churches in England in 2006, found that all kinds of ventures were being registered which may have been fresh expressions of '*mission or evangelism or service* to the wider community', but 'were not necessarily fresh expressions of *church*' (2008:9). Hence, a more concise definition of a fresh expression of church was developed in 2006 which emphasised that it will be primarily for the unchurched; it will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples; and it will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the Church and for its cultural context (2008:9).

It is interesting to note that the list on the Fresh Expressions web-site of what may constitute a fresh expression of church (Nelstrop and Percy 2008:192) comes under fire from radical practitioners such as Ian Mobsby (quoted in Nelstrop and Percy 2008:193), who considers eleven out of the fourteen examples not to be worthy of the designation as they are still linked to the inherited mode of church and not sufficiently culture specific or immersed in the post-modern culture; while others, such as Martyn Percy (2008:Ch3), would also contend that

a majority of the examples could not constitute 'church' in its full sense, but for the converse reason of their being too culture specific and running the risk of being uncritically and 'deeply collusive' with consumerism and post-institutionalism (2008:37). Both would probably agree, therefore, that most of the examples are about the traditional churches finding renewed ways to engage with mission and culture, but where they might part company again would be on whether 'inherited' church could be renewed. Ian Mobsby, along with Peter Ward, maintain that, as society moves into a 'more fully post-modern phase' in which communities will be formed around relationships and networks rather than location or geography, 'imperialist' models of church shaped in response to a different culture, will not be able to adapt or survive in the long term (2008:193). On the contrary, a vast majority of those writing on fresh expressions acknowledge the hugely beneficial impact they have had on traditional churches in reawakening them to what lies at the heart of their life together in God and inspiring imaginative ways of being church and living mission in their specific context.

While mission has been extensively researched and studied in the literature on fresh expressions, it is the question of ecclesiology which poses the biggest challenge for both fresh expressions, and inherited modes, of church. Some of the more recent literature, such as *Mission-shaped Questions* (2008) edited by Steven Croft, *Evaluating Fresh Expressions* 2008, edited by Martyn Percy and Louise Nelstrop, and *Fresh Expressions in the Sacramental Tradition* (2009), edited by Steven Croft and Ian Mobsby, takes the form of collections of essays by academics and practitioners and reflects the desire to engage seriously with the difficult questions concerning the nature and essence of church and questions of Anglican identity in the light of fresh expressions. As acknowledged by Steven Croft (2008), it is more often than not a case of defining what the issues and questions might be rather than arriving at definitive answers. These essays represent, with varying success, a more robust theological engagement with and recognition of the importance of 'mining the tradition', as well as listening to experience.

One of the main questions which has provoked some of the strongest debate is whether fresh expressions of church are another passing fashion on the way to somewhere else, or whether they will prove to be a place to settle – perhaps only time will tell. The word 'fragile' is often used in the literature in connection with fresh expressions of church and Martyn Percy sees them as 'ephemeral by nature' (Nelstrop and Percy 2008:37). Thus, whether they can bear the weight or demonstrate the robustness, depth, and capacity for critical reflection of self or society, inherent in being a full expression of church is strongly debated, as in chapters by Martyn Percy and Mark Mason (in Nelstrop and Percy 2008). Likewise, Peter Ward's assumption that society is inevitably moving towards associational communities and fluid networks must be questionable in the light of recent economic and ecological upheavals which, as the 'Guardian' newspaper columnist, Madeleine Bunting writes (5.10.09), will mean a reassertion of the need to identify with geographical locations and commit to local relationships in order to care for the environment and survive. In this respect, as Sally Gaze (2006:8) maintains, the local parish church, and fresh expressions connected with it, will be uniquely placed to be a focus and servant of local community.

### The Mixed Economy

The prevailing view in the literature is that the mixed economy of fresh expressions of church together with renewed, re-invigorated traditional church is a good and necessary thing for the health and well-being of both and, therefore, of God's mission in the world. Steven Croft

(2008:1), Paul Bayes and Tim Sledge (2006), and Sally Gaze (2006), are strong advocates of the view, which is also espoused by Rowan Williams in his Foreword to *Mission-shaped Church* in which he speaks of the need for varieties of ways of doing church existing alongside one another (2004:vii). Sara Savage, writing in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions* (2008:60), advocates 'real engagement' between fresh expressions and traditional forms of church so that both change, learn and are resourced. Writing from a psychological perspective, she sees one of the key gains that fresh expressions provide is 'the space to try out new ways for the social container, the shared life of the faith community, to become a credible hermeneutic of the gospel', thus '*laundering outside church structures what is too difficult to launder within it*' (my italics). Through this dynamic there is the possibility that both can be changed (2008:67).

The passing of a Measure to allow Bishop's Mission Orders in 2008 means that fresh expressions of church can now exist legally in their own right outside of parish and diocesan structures, which, as Louise Nelstrop notes, have always given the Church of England its ecclesiological identity and consequently poses a significant challenge to this very structure and identity (2008:187). Sally Gaze sees this as a positive move in enabling fresh expressions connected with local churches to grow to maturity and to be autonomous while still being integrated into the life of the wider church (2006:27). Others, however, are concerned to avoid a wedge being driven between the two if fresh expressions of church appear as a threat to the existence of traditional church, or traditional churches resist or deny the challenges and changes provoked by fresh expressions (Robin Gamble in Nelstrop and Percy 2008, Sue Hope 2006:2). Several of the essays in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions* (2008), such as those by Michael Moynagh, Robin Gamble, Martyn Percy, Louise Nelstrop raise questions about the concept and viability of the mixed economy on the grounds of whether most fresh expressions really are church and whether the parish system will become one among other valid ways of being church or will remain an integrating principle for the whole? The view taken by many of the fresh expressions of church, however, whose stories are told in the literature reviewed, affirm their appreciation of the acceptance, support and freedom to experiment given to them by the institutional church and recognise the need to remain anchored in, and able to draw on the resources of, the rich heritage and accumulated experience which they represent.

A particularly interesting essay in this collection by Pete Rollins in *Evaluating Fresh Expressions* (2008:71ff) takes a much more radical view in challenging the prevailing consensus on the mixed economy. Taking the example of Francis of Assisi he indicates how the institutional church of the time effectively silenced the radical challenge his message posed to the church by 'giving him a seat at the table' - 'a space carefully defined and demarcated by the institution' (2008:72). Rollins argues that fundamental and essentially unbridgeable antagonisms exist between some of the more radical fresh expressions ('alternative worship', 'emergent' or 'transformance art') and inherited church in structure and approach and that 'no liberal ideal of finding consensus between these positions is possible'. His evaluation of a majority of what passes for fresh expressions is that they are 'merely offering different ways of expressing the same ecclesiological structure affirmed within the Anglican and Methodist Churches'. Rollins concludes, therefore, that those which do offer a radical and critical voice need to avoid being drawn into the very institution which they critique so that the important message which they bear, not only for those outside the church but for the church itself, is not silenced or neutralised (2008:76-77).

### Leadership, Power and Authority

This is an area in which fresh expressions have the potential to pose a significant challenge to the hierarchical and authoritarian structures of the institutional church, in the manner described by Rollins as above. The approach inherent in fresh expressions of church is for flatter and more fluid structures, and for inclusive and empowering team-working such as expressed by Ant Newman working in Southampton, who describes leadership as 'drawing out what's already there in others rather than imposing things on them'(Oliver 2009:39). It is characterised as leadership which is about ideas, inspiration and vision rather than setting out clear strategies and objectives, whereas Paul Bayes and Tim Sledge (2006) writing about incarnational and relational mission through traditional churches stress the need for 'good strategy and planning based on values', which they term 'strategy with a human face'(2006:4).

A complex set of issues seem to be emerging in relation to the exercise of leadership and accountability in either contexts of permanence (traditional church) or impermanence (fresh expressions), and would appear to be one of the least researched and resourced. The designation of the category of 'Ordained Pioneer Minister' represents an attempt by national church structures to facilitate the development of leadership for fresh expressions, but this is not well-developed as yet and does not carry through to good ongoing supervision and support on the ground. The stories and experiences of leadership recounted in the literature reviewed all indicate that a lot is being required of lay and ordained leaders, whether in starting up fresh expressions with the sense of 'making it up as you go along' (Oliver (2009), or for those in traditional churches trying to grow into new approaches to leadership themselves while also trying to facilitate growth and change within parish structures (Bayes and Sledge 2006). The ability to engage in and facilitate practical theology and reflection on experience is crucial for leadership in these circumstances, especially, as emphasised by George Lings when pioneer ministers have to face failure, make mistakes, close a project, or move on (Lings (2007). Apart from a chapter by Steven Croft on formation for ministry (Nelstrop and Percy 2008), however, in which he advocates a different approach to formational training, this area of leadership receives little sustained attention in the literature. I would suggest that this is also an area, as Rollins, Ward and Mobsby argue, which presents the most critical challenge to the institutional and heirarchical leadership of the inherited church.

## **Conclusion**

There is much evidence from the literature that the emergence of fresh expressions of church has breathed new life, understanding of, and enthusiasm for mission into the traditional church. Many from both traditional and fresh expressions of church affirm a desire and commitment to a mixed economy for the church of the future (Bayes and Sledge 2006: v), but there would still seem to be important theological and ecclesiological challenges to be addressed if the mixed economy is not to become simply a pragmatic accommodation which draws the sting from that which has the potential to be the stimulus for real transformation in the church, of any expression. .

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