

New Worshipping Communities



...YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU; AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES IN JERUSALEM, IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.

ACTS 1.8

Although 'Reaching New People', and new worshipping communities (often called 'Fresh Expressions of Church') are key initiatives in the Diocese of St Albans, they are not a new idea. When Christ instructed his disciples to be witnesses in 'Jerusalem, Judea and to the ends of the earth' he was asking them to be messengers of the Gospel at home (Jerusalem), to familiar faces and places (Judea), to 'outsiders' (Samaria), and to those who they had never met and didn't yet know (the ends of the earth). Truly, as well as those they knew and were familiar with, the disciples were to 'reach new people'. Furthermore, in order to reach new people, they would have to find new ways to communicate the eternal Gospel of Jesus Christ, and this would invariably lead to new worshipping communities. For example, the Christian community in Antioch looked very different from the Christian community in Jerusalem. It is perhaps worth noting that every church community at some point began as a church plant and was a 'new worshipping community.'

To reach new people it is necessary to do new things – it might literally or metaphorically mean going to a place we have never been before; it might mean encountering new and unusual culture; it might even mean learning a new language (this could be a cultural language such as that of youth or 'TikTok' culture, etc.) As a Church we are therefore called to be a 'mixed ecology Church': to do both the familiar – patterns of worship and ministry that we are accustomed to – but also seek to develop 'new worshipping communities' that look, feel, and are different and are therefore able to reach new people; especially people for whom the familiar and established church is inaccessible or alien.

What does 'mixed ecology church' mean?

A mixed ecology church is a church that has a both/and approach to established, received forms of church and new ways of being church. For example, a church that has a weekly Holy Communion service based on Common Worship and a weekly service aimed at young adults on a Sunday evening that reaches out and ministers to those who don't attend on a Sunday morning is a 'mixed ecology church'. Archbishop Stephen Cottrell said of mixed ecology church, 'when we speak about mixed ecology, we are speaking about the whole ecosystem of the Church, not one way of being church replacing another', and, 'It is about parishes revitalised for mission ... we will develop pathways around where people are – home, work, school, leisure. We want more church, not less – the ministry of the whole people of God - we need to look like the communities we serve.'

A new worshipping community might be, for example, a Messy Church, a church that meets in a café or community center, an outdoor church, or church that uses contemporary styles of music in worship. It might take place on a Wednesday afternoon in a school hall as soon as the school day is over, it might be on a Sunday evening to make it attractive to a demographic who do not get up early on a Sunday morning or who are at work/sporting endeavours, it might be late on a Saturday morning after and connected to a food bank session: whatever, whenever and wherever it is, it is church to reach people who may know little of church or for whom the established church is alien.



The church is a people with many faces, and expresses [its] truth in countless different ways, according to each culture.

POPE FRANCIS

Often New Worshipping Communities emerge within a parish church setting because there are people who have connected with the church family through community or social events, but who find Sunday worship too alien or difficult (sometimes for purely practical reasons). It is imperative to listen to the context and ask the question, 'what might work?' rather than to assume people should be both able and willing to conform to established patterns of worship. Or as Michael Moynagh puts it 'the starting point for a new church is not a worshipping congregation, preceded by preparation, but loving and serving others, preceded by listening'. A Church for Every Context.

For example, a small group gathering together in the evening to share a meal and learn about the Christian faith might become a new worshipping community that meets midweek in the evening and is based around sharing food together because Sunday morning worship is too early and/or doesn't involve enough food! A monthly social event of afternoon teas designed to help the lonely and isolated in a community might lead to an invitation to a monthly spoken service on a Thursday morning followed by coffee and cake, etc.

Our society is changing rapidly: so much so that someone once said, 'change is changing'. We increasingly live in a post-Christendom society where the percentage of 'nones' - those who identify as 'none of the above' when asked

what their religion is - is on the increase. We don't need to panic about this fact - the early Church grew in a not dissimilar, pre-Christendom culture. Nonetheless, perhaps many more of our parishes will need to be a 'mixed ecology church'; and perhaps we will need to see new worshipping communities take root all around us even in, or perhaps especially in, established parish settings.

One area of society that this is particularly true for is that of children and youth. There are lots of examples of new worshipping communities that are focused on children, the most obvious example being Messy Church. All of the fruit of the Mission Tree are important and connected, but it is particularly recommended that you pray and reflect about new worshipping communities and mixed ecology church in relation to children, youth and young adults. Reading or re-reading about youth and children's ministry will be useful as you consider new worshipping communities. Above all starting a New Worshipping Community begins with careful listening; to one another, to community and of course to God:

'The journey starts with listening to God and to the people the founding community feels called to serve, which is an act of love in itself. The community begins to build loving relationships and engage in acts of service, as Jesus did' - Michael Moynagh 'Church for every context'

PRACTICALLY - WHAT DOES STARTING A NEW WORSHIPPING COMMUNITY LOOK LIKE?

As you think and pray about starting a New Worshipping Community you may find the developmental cycle helpful - ask yourselves; Where are you? What's the next step that will help us move on? Do we need support with this? The cycle is broken down into 7 key sections:

1 At the Beginning

Opportunities and potential have yet to be considered. Gearing up to begin through prayer and discernment.

2 Listening

Listening to God and the people you are called to serve.

3 Loving & Serving

Finding a way to love and serve the people around you.

4 Building Community

Building community with those you serve.

5 Evangelism & Discipleship

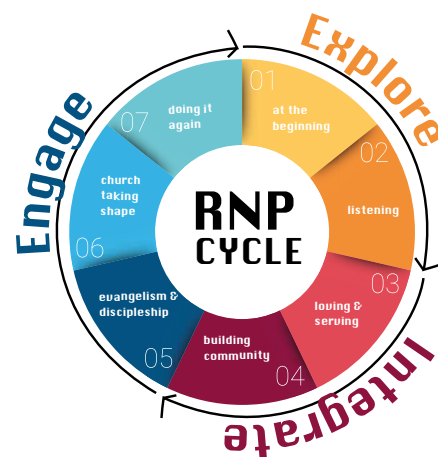
Sharing the gospel of Christ and offering opportunities for individuals to explore becoming his disciples.

6 Church Taking Shape

Enabling a fresh expression, mission focused congregation or new form of church, to take shape round those growing in faith through worship, prayer and celebration of the sacraments.

7 Doing It Again

Encouraging members to lead others on a journey of faith and to plant new congregations, churches and FXs.



Four key values underpin the Diocesan vision of Living God's Love

- Imagination
- Joy
- Generosity
- Courage



As we face the challenges of post-Christendom, we will need all of these values if the church is to reach new people. Key to the words of Christ at the beginning of this document was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit bringing power, but also imagination, joy, generosity and courage.

AN EXERCISE FOR PCCS AND LEADERSHIP TEAMS

There follows a 'tick-box exercise'. A church that desires to reach new people has achieved that desire through more than a tick box exercise, but this tool is designed to be something of a conversation starter.

You can use this exercise in a PCC meeting. If you spend 15-30 minutes going through this list you will likely be able to identify some first steps in your church. Why not take the pressing needs first, and create a 'working group' to tackle them one at a time?

Don't forget to be in touch with the RNP team – we may have some advice and resources available that will make your mission and ministry a bit easier.

AN URGENT
NEED

REQUIRES
IMPROVEMENT

GOOD

EXCELLENT

'JERUSALEM' - OUR SUNDAY SERVICES

Our main worship service is as inclusive of as broad a section of the demographic of our parish as is possible (for example, our worship planning considers the largest age range of your parish).				
If you have more than one Sunday service in the parish or benefice, there is a good variety of worship on offer.				
Because of time constraints, we are not able to offer more than one act of Sunday worship, however, the type of service we offer is aimed at different groups of people and that is clearly advertised so people know the type of service they are coming to.				

JUDEA - COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL OUTREACH

There are means by which we can hear from the different groups in our parish or benefice and they can contribute to the discussion and leadership around expressions of our church. For example, we have both young people and parents on our Messy Church team.				
Our church offers many different 'doorways' into the church. These are not just worship based. (This is not about the physical building, although that helps, but about coming into contact with the people of the church).				
We have a range of activities throughout the week taking place in the life of the church.				
It is clear to those who access different aspects of the church what else is happening and when. All people are warmly and clearly invited to all parts and expressions of the life of our church.				

SAMARIA - CHURCH FOR THOSE WHO 'DON'T DO CHURCH'.

There is a demographic in our parish or benefice that are not currently coming to any of the current expressions and activities of the church. We need to think of ways to overcome this.				
As far as it is possible, we know and understand the different cultures in our parish or benefice. This might be different ethnic groups, different age groups, different socio-economic groups or different types of people – for example, lone-parent households, etc.				
As far as it is possible, our governance groups (PCC, working groups, etc.), ministry team, and those who volunteer represent a good cross section of the demographic of our parish or benefice.				
There are means by which we can hear from the different groups in our parish or benefice and they can contribute to the discussion and leadership around expressions of our church. For example, we have both young people and parents on our Messy Church team.				

THE ENDS OF THE EARTH - THOSE WHO HAVE NO FAITH OR UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIANITY

We recognize and are realistic about how difficult it is for someone with no faith or understanding of Christianity to access Sunday worship.				
Given the above, we have other ways and places of reaching 'the nones' – those who identify as 'none of the above' when asked in the census what their religion is.				
As we reach out to 'the nones' we recognize that they will need a time and place to call 'church' and this may look different from formal and established services of the church.				