

HOW TO START A NEW KIND OF CHURCH

*An Introduction
to the Fresh
Expressions
Movement*

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A FRESH EXPRESSIONS EBOOK



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So You've Heard About Fresh Expressions...

So you've just heard about Fresh Expressions. Maybe it was from a friend who's into church planting. Maybe a pastor or church leader has been talking about it. Or maybe someone shared a blog post from someone involved in the movement. With so many church planting models floating around out there, you may be wondering what's so special about Fresh Expressions.

What is a Fresh Expression?

A report by the Church of England set the official definition as “a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.” The report goes on to describe a fresh expression of church by saying,

- “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.”

FRESH EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTEXTUAL CHURCHES FORMED AMONG THOSE WHO AREN'T YET MEMBERS OF ANY CHURCH.

Fresh expressions are contextual Christian churches formed among those who are not yet members of any church. They are not steppingstones to church. They're not church lite. They are church.

Why Is the Fresh Expressions Movement Important?

According to Alan Hirsch, “around 60 percent of America's population is increasingly alienated from the prevailing forms of church.” This means that the Sunday morning worship service, no matter how amazing the music is, or how cool the preacher is, will only be able to reach 40 percent of the population. Yet, the American church pours the vast majority of its resources into these prevailing forms of church.

For over a decade, church planters like Hirsch have been pushing the American church to explore new forms of church that can relate to the 60 percent. There has been great success among some denominations and church planting networks. However, traditional mainline denominations had not caught on to the importance of exploration until Fresh Expressions came along.

What these traditional denominations were looking for is what Archbishop Rowan Williams calls the “mixed economy of church.” According to Michael Moynagh, author of *Being Church, Doing Life*, the mixed economy is the “vision of new and existing expressions of church working together in mutual encouragement and support.” Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Catholics, and countless others are now seeing new forms of church not as a threat, but as a movement that can come alongside the existing church, reach new people, and strengthen existing churches and denominations. Fresh Expressions brings together the movement of innovative church planters with the experience of traditional denominations, creating an exciting future for the American church.

FRESH EXPRESSIONS MARRIES INNOVATIVE CHURCH PLANTING WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF TRADITIONAL DENOMINATIONS.

The Foundations of a Fresh Expression

There are four main building blocks that make up a fresh expression. (In full disclosure, I have adapted each of these from Michael Moynagh’s excellent contributions to our understanding of the movement as a whole.)

Missional

A fresh expression works mainly with people who do not attend church

Fresh expressions are not Bible studies for church people in unique places. They are church for people who do not attend church. We recognize that people are no longer coming to us; we must go to them and create new forms of church in society.

Contextual

A fresh expression finds culturally appropriate ways of reaching people

Emerging fresh expressions want to know who is not connected to the church and how those persons might be comfortable in a gathering. With this kind of consideration, fresh expressions have started in pubs, skate parks, living rooms, and wherever people outside the church are. Fresh expressions often emerge among affinity groups.

Formational

A fresh expression aims to form disciples

As communities begin to form, fresh expressions begin exploring discipleship. Discipleship in fresh expressions varies from formal learning in discussions to social learning inside the close proximity of life lived together. In some cases this happens from the start, in some over time with the group, and in others an opt-in group forms alongside the existing group that begins to explore discipleship.

Ecclesial

A fresh expression intends to become church for the people it reaches in its context

Fresh expressions are not “ministries” of a church, they are church. While they might not have all of the marks of a mature church, they have the intention of eventually becoming a mature expression of church.

How to Start a Fresh Expression

When it comes to starting a fresh expression, there are several key stages to be aware of. Just as I borrowed from the wisdom of Michael Moynagh in the previous section, here I borrow from the wisdom of Fresh Expressions UK.



Listening

Fresh expressions of church begin by asking these questions:

- Who in my community is not connected to the church?
- How are they already gathering?
- To which group of people do I feel called?

As we begin to hear our community’s answers to these questions, ideas of a new fresh expression will emerge.

Loving/Serving

The next step focuses on building meaningful relationships with people who do not attend church. To start a fresh expression among our neighbors outside the church we must first get to know them. This can happen through attending community events, hosting potlucks, doing service projects, and other community-building activities.

Building Community

As relationships are being built, a group with a specific identity begins to form. The group begins to meet regularly. Many of these groups begin with a few Christians who are comfortable around non-Christians, and they grow by bringing in non-Christian Friends.

Exploring Discipleship

In this stage, the group begins to explore the Christian faith. This occurs, as stated earlier, through formal learning (intentional discussions) and social learning (life in close proximity).

Church Taking Shape

The Church of Scotland defined the core calling of the church as “[being] people with Jesus at the centre, travelling wherever Jesus takes us.” As a new fresh expression takes shape, the group will identify how it can participate in this calling. Marks of the church, such as proclamation or the sacraments, begin emerging, although they may look different in fresh expressions. The hope is that the group will eventually become a mature expression of the Church with all the marks of her.

Do It Again

Ideally, fresh expressions multiply. People who join the original group may be inspired to start another fresh expression. Some fresh expressions are connected through networks hosted by larger, established churches.

What’s Your Next Step?

As you can see, starting a fresh expression of church is a pretty natural thing, and Fresh Expressions NA was a perfect partner for us at King Street Church. The main thing to do now is just take the next step.

Fresh Expressions NA has numerous ways to help with that. Consider hosting a Local Church Workshop, jump into our free monthly Trail Marker Check-in, download the FXConnect App, or subscribe to our Podcast to join this season’s conversation. All of this and more resources are available at FreshExpressions.com.

Whatever it may be, may God bless your next step.



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