

Workshop 3: New Worshipping Communities

Does establishing New Worshipping Communities (NWC) deliver growth more quickly than other approaches? Why might this be? what might the emerging Mixed or Blended Economy look like?

Insights from Tim Thorlby Development Director, Centre for Theology and Community

Evangelical Church Planting & Anglican Catholic Parish Growth: Evidence from London.

Report 1: Love, Sweat and Tears

A study of traditional evangelical Church planting in East London, through the HTB network.

Impact across 5 churches

Congregational increase of 72 to 735. 20% are de/un-churched (often local). Diverse socio-economic mix. Little local church transfer, compete with HTB. Diocese Common Fund income +£300k pa. High degree of volunteering (68%). All actively serving local communities

Lessons

- 1. Traditional church planting still works well:** delivers 20% un/dechurched members
- 2. Financially sustainable:** parishes were preserved & Common Fund contributions restored
- 3. Nothing new or clever:** methods for church & growth were (mostly!) not innovative
- 4. Both/And:** maybe a link between church growth & social action - more than Alpha?
- 5. Members moving from City to Local:** increase impact

Report 2: A time to sow

A study of Anglo Catholic Church growth in London of 7 parishes in deprived areas

Stories of Growth

Meaningful growth on a Sunday, typical Sunday attendance: 275 > 515 = +240

'Steady' annual growth of 5-10% pa. In addition, new midweek & Sunday services: additional +100-110 per week. Not just transfers: includes de-churched & un-churched. Example: St John's Sunday congregational survey: 34% de/unchurched (cf 38% Fresh Expressions), BUT nearly all = de-churched/'returners'. Midweek outreach is reaching more un-churched – e.g. Messy Church, Choir Church, ...but few come on Sundays

Lessons

- 1. Anglican Catholic parishes can grow 5-10% pa**
- 2. Growth can happen even in deprived areas**
- 3. A great challenge:** these are **not typical** of Anglican Catholic churches
- 4. Many priests need to change mindset** to become more missionary

Take out: Old forms of church do work if in the right hands, the form of church is less important than the quality of leadership. Churches of different traditions have the same 'habits of growth': Attractive and welcoming Sunday services (including families)/Building a team (staff & lay) to expand capacity to act/Serving their local community/Having face to face encounters with non-members during the week, doing what they want to do.

Insights from Alan Hulme, Dir. of Parish Development Evangelism, Guildford Diocese

Playing Catch up: New Worshipping Communities in Guildford Diocese

Question: Why enable a culture of NWC's? What might a diocesan leadership might do?

1. Create dissatisfaction: ask 'How should we change this?' rather than 'Why should we change this?'. Promote a greater awareness of a 'Demographic time bomb'; there will be a significant level of decline by 2057. Enable people to walk the tightrope between complacency and fear holding onto faith and hope.

2.Guidford Diocese set the vision “together to increase the number of new Christians of all ages through persistent prayer, confident faith sharing, life-giving worship, and the development of a hundred NWC’s by 2027” This is not so much a target but a change in culture. Doing Inherited church well won’t redress the levels of decline.

3.Attendance 16% of diocesan attendance is from Fresh Expressions of Church. Church Army Research Unit concluded that of those attending the Fresh Expressions in the diocese 41.7% were Christian, 37.2% were de-churched and 31.1% were non churched.

4.See church growth as 3 strands: Inherited (gathered) church, Church planting, Fresh Expressions. These strands should be seen as making up a spectrum of discipleship making communities not individual approaches.

5.Strategy for change: a) Show and tell stories through seminars and workshops. b) ‘new opportunities project’ providing *Growth Expertise* (mentors, Fresh Expression leaders, appointment of Diocesan Fresh Expressions Adviser/ 4 Major Church Plants on new housing estates including a church planter, a pioneer and 2 hybrid projects/ *Seed Funding* for parish led New Worshipping Communities funding kit, people and staff.

6.Is it working? Yes: Year 1. 60 NWC’s starting/Signs of culture change/ Four main plants progressing well

Not yet: NWC still a minority interest/Too many still want ideas off the shelf/More diversity needed

Summary: We need a wide range of worshipping communities (The New & Different need special care now), ‘Messages’ from senior staff can change culture, Don’t skimp on creating dissatisfaction with the present, Focus on making disciples, not building churches

Insights from Ric Thorpe, Bishop of Islington

Prayer is key: We need to be true to a biblical mandate that growth is normal rather than buying into a theology of decline. The great commission asks us to make disciples and start new churches.

Permission: We need to be permission givers and say yes more than we say no.

Investment: We need to change our budget shapes to reflect a changing emphasis.

Leadership: We need to create a pipeline that flows people & leaders into unpopular places.

NWC are better at: reaching younger generations (18-29s) /they renew the body of Christ bringing new ideas into the body/they are one of the best ways of growing new leaders especially lay leaders/they can challenge other churches to self-examine/

Every tradition has planted before in their ecclesial history, it’s for everyone to reach everyone.

Insights from the discussion

1.What would *radical* look like? Co-creating, unchurched people part of this discussion, increased stipendiary budgets to double and double again number of OPM’s, more funding, respond to a vision rather than fill a post, start pioneer vocational journey outside of the church rather than always recruiting from within.

2.Value of mentors and coaching for pioneers, need for insight into how to find and train them.

3.Experience of seeing church growth is key in inspiring this to happen. Larger churches have more examples so more likely to plant. Smaller churches often don’t have them so won’t.

4.Change the focus from building churches to making disciples; growing disciples vs ‘putting on a service’.

5.More emphasis on leaders building teams with the laity to grow new Christian Communities.

6. Q: What was the trigger for missional growth relating to leadership (ref to Centre for Theology and Community)? A: In all our case studies, the change in trajectory of growth was secured by changing leadership in the church – i.e. a new priest - not by changing the mindset of the existing leader. That is not to say that it can’t happen, but that was not the observation in any of our case studies whether Evangelical or Anglo Catholic. (Tim Thorlby)