



New Housing Areas Research Day Write-up

Wednesday 26th May 2010

This research day is a collaboration between The Sheffield Centre (www.churcharmy.org.uk/sheffieldcentre) and Share (www.sharetheguide.org), which is part of the Fresh Expressions initiative.

Participants: Steve Kelly (Community vicar in 3 urban extensions, Telford), Nick Devenish (Vicar of Hampton, newly formed parish in Ely Diocese), Peter Wood (Minster of multid denominational Cambourne Church, Cambridgeshire), Richard Priestley (Ordained Pioneer Minister working in Mawdsley Village, Northamptonshire), Simon & Ann Baker (living in Witham St Hughs, Lincolnshire, and planting a church with Threshold), Jim Currin (Group for Evangelisation), Chris Griffiths (Researcher for Church Commissioners), George Lings (The Sheffield Centre), Claire Dalpra (The Sheffield Centre) & Beth Keith (Fresh Expressions).

Outline of the day

10.30 Welcome and coffee

11.00 Discussion 1 – starting and sustaining church in new housing areas

Opening presentation – Peter Wood

12.30 Lunch

1.30 Discussion 2 – developing fresh expressions of church in new housing areas

Opening presentation – Richard Priestley

3.00 Wrapping up: where do we go from here?

3.30 End

The day started with information about the day from Beth Keith followed by introductions.

Peter Wood opened up the first discussion with a short presentation in which he raised the following points:

- 1) Balancing the micro and macro (organic and strategic)

In Cambourne they found that working at the macro level, getting in early with planners meant that the church was able to be a voice for the

community through the planning stages. The church became part of the planning scheme from the early days and so they were able to add value to the community practically.

2) Church as Service Provider

Peter and the church have been able work with the GP in schools to provide support and train teachers to help children cope with transition issues – e.g. loss, moving, grief.

The offering of community space and other partnership work built trust in the community. When a second school was needed, the option of a church school was offered and accepted without suspicion.

3) Latent spirituality in everyone

Spirituality is not marginalised in Cambourne, rather it is widely expressed and connected to aspirations and lifestyle desires for their children.

4) Church as God's 'Project'

Viewing church as a project fits well in the context of new housing –it's dynamic not institutional with goals and schemes.

5) Multidenominational Church

Being multidenominational helps to engage with the big picture of church and community life. Denominations are respected but can't dictate how church is expressed.

6) Church Seed

Peter arrived with his family and the church has grown from who arrives in Cambourne. It's inclusive, including children at communion and with different expressions of baptism. This inclusivity is challenging to the denominations involved.

Peter also talked about the seeds sown before he arrived, including Christians on planning committees preparing a place for the church in the community planning.

Cambourne Church now 9 years old is becoming self sufficient (next year there is only £7k external funding the rest sustainable). The initial expectation of being self sufficient in 5 years was unrealistic.

They have a new building (£1.2 million) in a good position on the high street and are working out how to use the space.

They are developing work with Romsey Mill a secular charity working with young people.

Other participants were encouraged to join the discussion by picking up on Peter's points.

Steve Kelly raised the issue of balancing macro and micro, organic and strategic dimensions of ministry. In Telford he has worked on the 'seed falls to the ground and dies' image and is developing church organically. "Do we trust God to die and grow something new? What if God doesn't grow something? He had been there 18 months and started by discouraging Christians to join and instead 'planting seeds' in the community. He is now moving towards a vision and strategic questions about where to work. He expressed something of an uneasy tension found in his work and in the church metaphors – many are agricultural, but also being God's building. Phase 1: sow seeds, serve, try anything. Phase 2: give away responsibility, grow leaders.

Jim Currin questioned whether the Bishop who sent Steve was working at a macro level and Steve on the micro?

Peter talked about the transitions they had experienced in Cambourne. Some of the early members moved on when it wasn't new anymore, 'an addiction to the new'. This was painful, especially when it was members from the leadership team. The issues of transition are particularly significant in new housing areas where everyone is continually living within transition – moving on to the estate, then experiencing others moving on as the development grows. The school have found reduced development rates as children work through their own issues of transition followed by continual change as new class members join and the school grows.

Jim Currin referred to David Price's experience in which all the members of the seed team changed with a couple of years. Also evident with Charlie Knob's, whose church looked totally different after two years.

In Cambourne, Peter gives all volunteers a sabbatical (e.g. music group, administration) without the expectation that they will come back the same and resume the previous role.

Richard Priestley talked about the church in Mawdsley beginning as a gathering of Christians who then struggled with denominational differences. They didn't move to the village as missionaries and wanted a 'normal' church. Part way through the development social housing was built which created tensions in the community including for church members who were unsure of the influx of new residents into the social housing.

Peter Wood also noted his disappointment with Christians' expectation of what church could be. He had hoped for more of a sense of community and shared living (Acts 2) but church members weren't interested in that type of community living.

Richard Priestley ran a survey in Mawdsley and got ten responses. Three people responded saying they did want a church in the village, but all three of

these did not believe in God or a higher power. One Christian responded by saying they didn't want a church in the village as it might affect the attendance at the neighbouring village's church.

Simon talked about the importance of sharing and encouraging a vision for mission. It is hard to know what to do with Christians who don't share your vision. They have found it especially difficult when there is no church building or intention to build one.

Nick Devenish talked about the need for fluidity. Planning for new housing areas is changing due to the current financial situation. More areas will now be including or adding on social housing. This can have a severe affect on education within the community. Also people feel like the community has changed from the one they bought into. Creates a shift from specifically wanting to live in a certain area to not wanting to live there anymore. Leaders are needed who can work within a sense of fluidity. Growing a congregation in an area of ongoing change is difficult, as is moving from an individual ministry to growing a team of leaders when the community is changing and growing. Nick also mentioned how crucial it was to start on the macro process of planning early on. This did not happen in Hampton and they have struggled to develop good will with planners. Nick also found communication with the community difficult. The church was seen as a cult because there was no building, meeting for services in a school. How do we communicate who we are as church, when there is no building?

At this point we took a moment and gave everyone the opportunity one by one to respond to themes that had been raised during the morning.

George Lings contrasted the previous modernist managerial style with its pre-specified goals, with the post-specified goals managerial style, which is now taught. The latter fits more within this context. In this model strategic planning is about intentions rather than details, and open to what develops. This is related to the biblical image in 1 Cor 15 that what is sown is related to but different from what grows.

George noted the discussion about the inadequacy of the word church plant; is this perhaps right unease with 'transplant'. He suggested interpersonal analogies are better and have something to give, balancing the agricultural analogies and offering patterns of non identical reproduction, and thus a welcome for intention and surprise, aspiration and discovery.

George called church in new housing areas an 'ecclesiological laboratory'. The nature of the transitional community necessitated the constant need to adapt. Are some of the lessons for fresh expressions learnt faster in this intense, transitional environment? Perhaps new housing areas produce a sharper end than other social contexts.

Claire Dalpra picked up on the tension between missionaries and members, wondering whether this was a sharper issue in this context as church leaders perhaps have the responsibility to look after Christians and plant church with them alongside mission engagement in the community. Claire hoped to discuss this more.

Richard Priestley raised the issue of ongoing funding and sustainability.

Chris Griffiths noted the need for fluidity and flexibility as the shifts occur within the community. He also wondered about measures of success. Should practitioners and enablers be looking for evaluations of what works and doesn't, and how that links to long-term numerical growth?

Nick was struck by how complex the relationships are of people on new housing areas. Often people look for new housing after family splits, looking for a new life. In an area with a high rate of divorcees, new relationship can include some complex mixes and family issues. This on top of the transition issues leads to complex social needs. Often the playground is the place these issues come out.

Simon added that listening underpins everything, whether at parish councils, or village facebook groups. You hear the aspirations, needs and annoyances felt by the community at these places. Whether its at a macro planning level or with your neighbours, you're dealing with individuals with their own attitudes. Listening well is crucial.

Steve Kelly noted four things from the discussion. 1) The switch from needs to goals and aspirations, wondering how to relate that to the gospel. 2) Fluidity and community cohesion being a major issue for new housing areas for service providers also who are struggling to know how to tackle them. He thought the church had a prophetic role challenging and confronting people relating in ways that damage community cohesion. However this maybe costly. 3) Missionaries or members. In ten years will we have the same problems as traditional churches? He referred to John Wright (Nottingham Vineyard) 'put the number on the bus' – mark from the start the direction the church is travelling in, or the DNA of the church. 4) To grow a church that is well balanced in worship, mission and community does the leader need to be off the scale on mission and evangelism?

Peter Wood shared some questions he was asking of his own congregation through the morning. Have they lost their radical edge as the church has become more established? How has having a building effected how they understand themselves to be church? How do you balance fluidity and the need for permanence, mission and pastoral demands?

Jim Currin raised a question about fresh expressions or traditional church planting. Are church in new housing areas predominantly for non Christians or for Christians? Do non Christians have expectations about church which are more traditional and which we should be open to? There was some

discussion on a definition of fresh expressions and taken simply as church started for non Christians/those outside the church.

The afternoon discussion on fresh expressions versus church planting was started by Richard Priestly. Richard is leading a church plant started by someone else in a new housing rural village. When he arrived there was some tension between traditional church activities and alternative one such as messy church. Members of the church had moved to this rural village setting and wanted a traditional church, they hadn't come with a missionary mindset. Richard wonders whether the village actually needs both; a traditional church gathering of Christians and a fresh expression of church developed over a long time through incarnational mission. The expectation from Christians of an instant service clashes with the methods of incarnational mission, and requires the leader to have gifts in both areas – is this realistic?

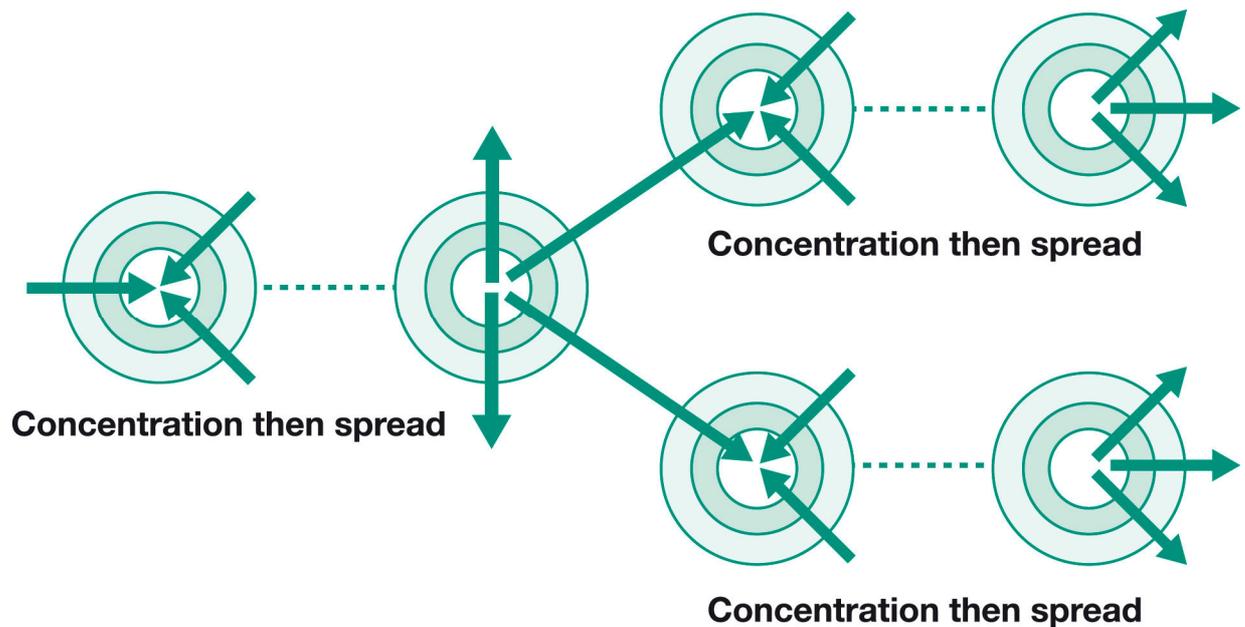
Simon agreed suggesting that our biggest challenge is to infect people with the real gospel, a missionary spirit. We have to find ways to transmit our call to others. If you start with a bait for non Christians you'll end up with a mix. If you start with bait for Christians you'll only get Christians.

Steve Kelly talked about the movement from a gathered to a dispersed community in the early church caused by persecution and asked what the key moments are for us that could act as catalysts towards dispersion. Crisis or pressure points often bring change. Good leaders know what to do in these key moments.

Richard Priestley talked more about the tensions in balancing support for Christians and doing mission. Simon Baker emphasised the limited resources available mean we have to make decisions about where to spend our time, and to be clear and focused on that.

Chris Griffiths referred to the Anglican 5 marks of mission; church must be outward facing to be church.

George Lings whilst agreeing with this wondered whether that meant all members were required to be outward facing. Returning to the gathered and dispersed early church, George talked about times of concentration and spread – see image below.



George talked about the seasonality of concentration and then spread. Not all members are sent, some stay with the community from which others are sent out. So there is a difference seen between those who engage and serve in their community and missionary movers.

Simon Baker added that when they had sent out missional members, the sending process had enabled the community remaining to become more outward focused. Praying and supporting sent mission had an influence on their community life.

Peter Wood shared that the 'forming community' time needed to be inward looking for a season but that each season required a different set of skills.

Steve Kelly talked of seasons of community, vision, task, and that they can link quite well to the physical seasons, especially task in summer.

Peter had found that outdoor events in public spaces enabled connection to the wider community and breaking up the outward/inward divide— e.g. pilgrimage, carols, BBQ's. The wider community is able to physically see the church community.

George Lings compared this to the tabernacle which embodied movement, visibility and also continuity with God's people.

Steve used the image of the sheep who go out into the pasture to be fed. These images take on new meaning when read from an outside perspective, rather than an established church mindset. And sheep feed themselves... Non Christians do get this and can be more creative than existing church members.

The discussion stopped for a while whilst we prayed. During this time a couple of verses were mentioned;

From John 10.16. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

Jesus said he needed to move on to other villages and yet there was a sense of unity in mission.

After the time of prayer people offered practical suggestions of things that had helped them to connect to the community

1) Christmas and Easter cards with information about services. Some people do intend to go to the church, and with a gentle reminders come along after the cards were posted.

2) Join the village facebook group to stay connected to the community.

3) Outdoor events (see note earlier). BBQ's, pilgrimages, carols.

4) Investing in personal relationships when planning community events.

5) Incarnational mission on Halloween. No building so no opportunity to run an alternative event so ran a hot chocolate and cake marquee from the garage of the vicarage. Gave out white glo sticks to children. It worked really well however some church members who didn't want their children to participate in Halloween were confused as to why the church would be doing something like this.

6) Hosting firework events, providing insurance and volunteers.

7) Welcome brochures for the new housing area to give to new residents including bus timetable, take-aways etc and church information. Practical help for new residents.

8) Jim mentioned that Charlie Knobs whose vicarage was near the GP's opened the house for tea and coffee when the health visitor clinic was on, so new mums could get to know each other, have a cup of tea etc. Through this he was able to meet all the new mums and babies.

9) Chris mentioned a gated community in which the only meeting point on the estate was at the bus top. The church there was thinking through whether to put something up at the bus top to help connect with people.

10) Paul (in the New Testament) looked for gathering points where people who were open could be found. What are our gathering points: bus stop, pub, playground?

Issues and challenges in connecting with the community

1) Read the culture and context – where are other service providers managing to connect and where are they failing to connect, e.g. on one estate it was almost impossible to get people out to meetings in the evening. Other service providers were struggling with that as well.

2) Many people in the UK don't know their neighbours.

3) Lack of community space of buildings creates a real problem – related to 106 building requirements. Current economic climate is being used as an argument to lose the 106 agreement. The Church of England may have a role to play in influencing this at national level.

4) New residents often don't move far so have their existing network of work, friends and hobbies outside the new community. Should we also be thinking in network church terms as people are more networked than neighbourhood focused?

5) High population of young families can lead to thriving children's activities but only if there are community buildings. Even then it can be difficult to connect with parents beyond the focus on children's activities.

6) There is quite a high turnover in new housing areas with people moving off. Partly because houses are small, cheap and commutable so good as first homes for families who then up size. They are also good after family splits, but new partners and bigger families then leads to a need for more space. However some areas such as Cambourne have houses of different sizes so families can up size without leaving the area. There can also be a sense that the dream area they moved into is no longer the dream if the estate gets too big, or it didn't live up to its marketed ideal, or the introduction of social housing. Some research from South Cams suggested people can be expected to stay on average for 3 years.

7) People have little time so church needs to be light weight. Steve mentioned a book called 'rabbits and elephants' making the point that the makeup of something will affect reproduction rate. If we want of start churches that can readily reproduce within a short time frame they'll need a makeup that will enable this.

It was also noted that working agreements between church planters or pioneers and the local parish need to be clear for good working relationship.

Jim Currin mentioned some research from Kent which suggested the size of community necessary to sustain different sizes of church. Jim agreed to find out the details and share with the group at a later date.

Jim Currin is involved with an ecumenical network of people working in new housing areas, see www.cinha.net . He is hosting a day on June 22nd, invites will follow.

The notes will be written up and distributed to participants. Once agreed they will be put on www.sharetheguide.org .