

Fishing Nets or Safety Nets

Dave Male visited Canberra, Newcastle and the Centre of Ministry at Parramatta at the end of June 2010. It was great to hear how some of the UK churches have begun to reconnect with communities. He spoke to over 250 people in NSW so we can assume that many congregations are really concerned about the way the church is disconnecting with our society. Dave quoted Sally Morgenthaler who said “*As culture has become incessantly more spiritual and adamantly less religious we are convinced that the primary meeting place with our unchurched friends is now outside the church building. Worship must finally become more life than event.*”

Fresh Expressions is creating a great deal of momentum and optimism that God is doing a fresh work across the church, not only in the UK but in the USA and Canada. ‘*Fresh Expressions*’ of church in the UK and ‘*Emerging Church*’ in the USA provide resource ideas and experience that may be of value in our Australian context. A few of us are visiting the UK to learn more from their experience as a follow on from other groups who have visited over the last three years.

Dave Male stated 7 principles for remodelling church in our times. They can easily be misunderstood as summary points but I believe they are worthwhile repeating to stimulate thought and discussion:

- 1. Public worship is not the best starting point.** Our worship services do not attract non-church goers.
- 2. There is no return address.** Once change occurs we cannot then keep returning to the old ways of worship or church operation.
- 3. Mission, not models, shape the church.** The nature of the people we are in mission to change the church. The church to the gentiles was different to the church of Jerusalem.
- 4. This might change us.** We will become different by our association and relationship with non-believers. Our understanding of how love and grace translates for these people changes us.
- 5. The church must welcome the 3 eccentrics.** The *Phillip* will act on impulse and go out on the road; the *Cornelius* (the non-believer) has expertise and authority in the world and can be a significant influence in that world; and the *Paul* will want to work with and relate to groups with whom we feel uncomfortable.
- 6. The challenge of discipleship.** It is one thing to build relationships, but the transition to discipleship training must be simple, relational and transformational.
- 7. The pattern of Jesus life.** The pattern of Jesus life – Incarnation, cross, resurrection. We have to be Christians in the world; we have to be willing to sacrifice ourselves for others; we can expect to see resurrection happen in peoples lives.

South Australia are further ahead than NSW in any intentional adaption of some of the learnings from the UK. They have had a *Fresh Expressions* committee in place for over twelve months and have now nominated a position in their Mission and Resourcing network for a *Fresh Expressions* evangelism and new congregations consultant. NSW and SA are already working together and discussing how to cooperate.