

Report by Ross Neville of Fresh Expressions Tour 2010

Telford Mark Berry

Safe Space www.safespace.me.uk

A monastic type of community

Core leader: Mark Berry a former theatre designer and youth Minister

Formed the community in 2005 Is currently undergoing financial funding difficulties from the CMS and the Diocese (50/50 funding)

What is the Telford area like?

How did you begin?

Telford is a new town 1960's in the midst of small older industrial villages.

It is a contemporary culture with:

- ✦ a high number of 20 & 30 year olds
- ✦ the 2nd lowest church attendance in UK
- ✦ no visible church buildings in the new town
- ✦ new residents are not connecting to the existing churches

Mark had to ask himself these questions.

Job description;

What does a Christian community look like in a post Christian culture?

What would it look like if mission was its shaping value?

What do we need to do to sustain ourselves in this?

It would not be: a bunch of disillusioned church goers.

Being a 'Mission shaped church' challenged churches to consider what to do.

Telford became a focus for developing a mission shaped church.

A Commissioning service was held in the park at Telford shops rather than in a church. 'Your dreams for Telford' were written on rice paper, then made into paper aeroplanes and flown across the lake in the park.

Questions that were asked included - What are the needs of the town? Passages from the Bible that provided guidance were Luke 10 *Jesus sent out the 72*.

Knocking on people's doors was not appropriate as houses are private places. So How do we go out?

Where is the community and how can we offer peace? 1 Thessalonians 2 We loved you so much that we not only shared the gospel with you but we shared our lives.

What will this look like in Telford.

- The football club was the first port of call. He went to talk to the manager and said what does peace look like for Telford FC? The manager spent 30 minutes responding to the question. They became a pastoral listening presence at the

club. After about 18 months he was invited onto the board of the football club. Seeking to be peace makers.

- They support a literacy/numeracy program in Ghana
- Women's walks 9-10 times a year
- A safe place chillout venue for the local clubbers on Saturday nights. They use the nearby Methodist hall. Provide flip flops, coffee/tea and time out after party relax environment.
- They became Involved in 'Mind, body, spirit fair' by hiring a stall. There seems to have been a movement away from 'I'm spiritual but not religious' to 'I haven't got time to be religious or I'm not good enough'.
- Meeting Point House – no peace found for youth project here so a matter of moving on from there.
- A community began to form. The community meet weekly for communion meditation. No one is ordained to administer the sacraments. The group is a regular 10-15 with other drop-ins meeting at someone's home for a meal.
- The theory is growth happens when the group becomes too big for one home.
- The group is ecumenical and people attend their own church worship on Sunday

What training was there before you began?

A Mission Shaped Ministry course – this is more of an introduction to this way of thinking.

What level of training can the church provide?

How effective is the 6 week course?

Pioneer ministry is thinking about church in a totally new way.

Pioneer ministry – cannot train entrepreneurs?

They should be recognised and then given freedom.

There can be no posts available for pioneer ministry positions because they are invented by the pioneers.

What can the church do?

The church can do a number of things by asking the questions.

- The church has to give recognition for what people are actually doing, then decide how we are going to resource the work and how do we give you some accountability?
- How do we gift to you what you need to actually pursue this?
- How do we create the environment and the conversation which you need for you to reflect on your mission,
- How can we help you be inclusive in terms of your learning?

Bill Bolton, a Christian businessman has done a lot of work to do with recognising entrepreneurs.

The leadership needs to listen to people who are on the ground.

- Re examine the funding of ministry

Why does the pioneering ministry have to be 'tent making' while we pay a minister to look after a group of parishioners?

Why not say the traditional churches should be self supporting and we support the pioneering people that birth the new church?

The resources should be put into the risky things. The stipend system needs re-thinking and perhaps be more flexible for ministers and congregations. Mission and pioneering should not be an add on but be part of the life of the church.

- Re examine the role of the sacraments for pioneers

Ordained and lay persons – the role of the sacraments?

Where does that fit into pioneer ministry? It is an issue that needs to be addressed.

In England baptisms and funerals can be taken by lay people. Weddings require a registrar to be present. In communion everything can be done by laity except for the consecrating the elements.

What is membership of a Fresh Expression of church like?

The DNA of the community would be:

Like a community on a pilgrimage and mission :

- Seeking to be real life and living community
- People who walks with God in God's world – done on the road and lived in daily life
- Committed to go with mission as it arises

There is no particular right of passage to belong to the group but an informal acknowledgement of belonging, at a certain point in time, of a St Brendan cross.

We meet at a Communion table weekly and this is referred to as a 'refectory' an intentional place for the community with a hospitality aspect.

The hospitality of God – is an important theme.

Hospitality in today's environment is seen as evangelism.

Hospitality is Creating a space for people.

To understand what hospitality might mean in your context you have to Listen to what shapes a people before you can engage with them.

You have to be Relational rather than Attractional.

Is there a time frame for individual Fresh Expressions of church? Absolutely!

Some will have emerged and others will be transitional.

It will be a mixed economy.

It is so important to incorporate the DNA of the community into the church group so that they are not just getting a church community that is reliant on it's leader for it's existence. Charisma is necessary but alternate 'co-leaders' will emerge. It should not be a personality cult.

The DNA of Safe Space community was established from a pilgrimage to Ireland, by a couple of members. Ireland is where St Brendan began his ministry. The Values and vision of the community grew from this trip.

The DNA has not changed but the Amputation and grafting that happens with growth and time are painful. The community has remained as a core of 10-12 people who meet around the table and others who ebb and flow.

A closer relationship with the diocese would be appreciated for collegiate sharing.

What is the vision of this DNA?

Our vision is to see love and peace shown in this community.

We love our town and would like to see it recreated with:

- a love for itself;
- with a love for it's history
- a love for God in the midst of that.

Shalom, wholeness, wellbeing, hospitality and humanity. Walter Bruegerman – Living towards a vision - Becoming a people of Shalom. The important voice of the table.

One of the prophecies for our community was that we would have a global impact. This is being fulfilled.

What advice could you give to someone starting a Fresh Expression?

- One recommendation to someone starting a Fresh Expressions work –
- Maintain and be seen to have integrity and honesty.
- Listen to people and community

For those trying to start a new thing in an established church – start by eating a meal together to help build community. Listen to each other and listen to the community.

- Do not set yourself a time limit.

What training could help?

Training – how do we understand training?

How do you recognise the gifts of the learner and see how to release these – facilitating and mentoring rather than teaching.

A facilitator can help to create a local context as well as creating a global context (within the diocese). An important dialogue is how to evaluate this.

The Fresh Expressions movement seems to be coming from above in the church leadership rather than organically from the grass roots. It then creates a culture of commission. The church needs to know others who are doing a similar thing (Fresh Expressions database?)

The warehouse churches (larger churches) have not really moved on because they cannot release their leaders. They were protest movements.
(Kester Bruin and Jonny Baker argument – Christianity Today?)

How would you see the church in 10 years?

Subcultural movements die as soon as they have been given a name. The creatives just move on.

At present, attractional and power evangelism strategies rather than relational ministries tend to get the resources. This needs to change. Recognition of relationships rather than structures would be more positive. There is no El Delrado.