

Learning from the research in *The Day of Small Things*¹

Two key elements

Always work within the framework that fresh expressions of Church [fxC] are made of two elements. Water is hydrogen and oxygen, and fxC are mission *and* church. Neither element replaces the other; both work with the other; developing both elements is essential.

1 False assumptions to avoid

- *Buying an fxC off the shelf really works.* It can be done, but is usually a mistake. Don't slavishly copy what others have done. This ignores context and discernment.
- *Only big urban congregations can do this.* Untrue; we know of fxC which went well, started by small rural churches.
- *It takes a team of 50 to do it properly.* Not so; the most common team size is 3-12 people (see section 6.8). Growth in size and maturity does not mainly depend on a large team.
- *Only evangelicals can do this.* Again this is not true; all traditions can do this (see sections 5.3 and 6.19). But consider what type of fxC each tradition can work with, in integrity.
- *Laying on an act of worship is the best starting point.* Experience says it is better to follow a longer process; listening and loving, serving people and making relationships, then naturally including spiritual conversations. Only after that evolving public worship.
- *All fxC do the same job.* The evidence in Chapter 6 denies this. The types are like a large family - related with diverse, differing members. All the types have their own strengths and weaknesses; they take different resources and have different natural unit sizes.
- *The point is to get new people to the main church.* It can be a by-product, but not the aim. The call is to add to the diversity and number of interdependent churches to further the mission and kingdom of God.

2 Mission lessons to learn

- *Discern and discover what God is calling for* in your context and mission to it. There is wide variety of fxC type to choose from (see Chapter 6).
- *Be clear about reaching outsiders.* Ensure the leader and team are focused on those beyond the church and connecting with them. Disaffected Christians joining causes problems.
- *Think culturally not just territorially* (see section 6.5). What social or cultural groups are missing from your church and which of those groups do you have relational links with?
- *Most fxC can start in any kind of geographical or social context* (see Chapter 7), but realise that progress takes longer where resources are slim.
- *Think about whether the calling is to reach a neighbourhood or a network* (see section 6.6 and 7.5); if the calling is to networks, ensure it is not a wide range of different ones.
- *Discern how often you will meet* (see Chapter 8). Fortnightly is the most risky (section 8.10). Weekly or monthly work better. Changing to meeting more frequently later can be difficult.
- *Choose the venue by what suits the context* and its people, not by the habits or the preference of existing Christians (see section 7.12). The same is true for day of meeting.

¹ To download the 233 page full report go to www.churcharmy.org/fxCresearch

3 Church lessons to learn

- *Consider what size of community your fxC should grow to.* Small, healthy and vigorous is fine. Most fxC are fewer than 50 adults and children. (Sections 6.1 and 6.2). Many fxC have a natural unit size; beyond that point the best question to ask is how to start yet another fxC.
- *Start with the end in mind.* The goal is a community mature in Christ. As soon as it is appropriate encourage the young church to take responsibility for its finances and local leadership. Look for gifts and ministries in the team and newcomers.
- *Start with discipleship in mind,* not just attendance (see sections 6.17, and 8.9). Being apprentices of Jesus can happen in many ways, but it should be intentional and relational.
- *Discern when and how to introduce Communion and Baptism,* but explore how they are practiced in culturally suitable ways (see sections 6.16, 8.6 and 8.7).
- *The pace or progress will differ most by the type of fxC and then by frequency of meeting rather than by its size;* (sections 6.14 to 6.17, 7.11 and 8.4 to 8.9)
- *Leadership matters, and is best within a team.* It can be exercised by women or men, by lay or ordained, and by full time to spare time. All of these have been shown to work (sections 6.13, 7.10, 8.8, and Chapters 10 and 11).
- *FxC are part of the wider Church,* in which there is identity, further support and wisdom. National or diocesan training can help (Chapter 9). In particular, explore whether someone could be an ongoing consultant.

4 Traps to avoid

About starting

- *Do not choose the type of fxC by its popularity,* but pray and think through what fits with where you are, and what resources exist among your people.
- *Don't think short term.* Do not start something with and for young children without any thought about what will be needed when they become 11 and change schools.
- *I'm lay so I can't do this.* About half the fxC are lay-led. 36% of leaders have no formal badge and few have any specific training (see Chapter 11).
- *I'm too busy as a Vicar.* Don't dismiss putting down some responsibilities and being renewed in ministry by being part of starting something new. 26% of fxC are vicar led.

About keeping going

- *Is it wrong to be a young, small church, and still maturing?* No, it's a normal stage.
- *Do not get cut off from the wider Church;* let them know your progress and struggles.
- *Do not go it alone;* having a critical friend, or consultant, is very helpful
- *Do not think because you have started that you have arrived.* Continued growth in size and depth depends on the young church staying outward-looking, promoting discipleship, taking responsibility for its decisions, and seeking fruitfulness (see sections 6.2, 7.4, 8.3, 9.4 and 11.7). Failure to plan for maturity makes church mortality more likely.
- *Finding ways to develop discipleship can take time* and may involve trying a number of approaches. The test is the fruit of lives more like Jesus.
- *Resist the life of the fxC getting complicated;* keep it simple, especially if you are leading spare time; share out the tasks and make it a working boat, not a passenger ship.

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