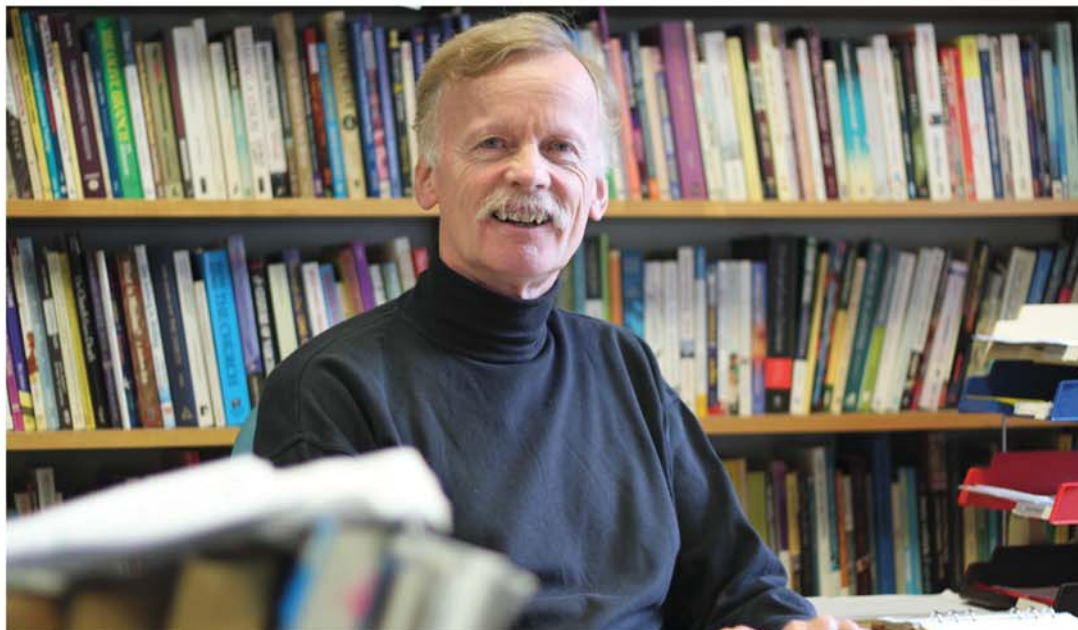


Q&A

with Research Director



In November 2016, our Research Unit published their findings into fresh expressions of Church (fxC). The findings are a culmination of four years of work, which has seen the team examine more than 1,100 fxC in 21 dioceses across the country. We chat to Director of Research, **George Lings**, to find out more about this relatively recent phenomenon that has taken the Church by storm:

What exactly does the term “fresh expression of Church” mean?

The Church has always kept reimagining itself: it began as a Jewish sect, then spread across the Roman Empire and was imagined a bit differently by the Celts. During the Reformation, the Church was reimagined again, and so on. fxC is essentially a journey outwards, aimed at building relationships and helping people who are not currently church attenders to discover faith. Simply put, an fxC reimagines what it is to be a community around Christ, and how to stay faithful to traditional church, while at the same time being more creative.

Why is Church Army taking the lead in fxC research?

Previously, our unit unearthed stories on fxC around the country to share good practices with others. I then sensed a nudge from God to shift the focus from sharing stories to gathering statistics. Our charity sees itself as entirely belonging to the Church of England but not controlled by it – which gives Church Army a unique role, making it ideal for conducting objective research.

What surprised you most about the findings?

I think the biggest surprise is the existence of a whole category of people who are leading fxC, who we have nicknamed the "lay-lay". **Elsbeth McGann** in our team invented this term to describe people who are not ordained, haven't necessarily been officially authorised or undergone any form of official training. We have discovered that they make up the leadership of 36 percent of all fxC. The challenge for the Church is: how do you encourage the lay-lay, without "domesticating" them and making them just like all the other existing leaders?

What is the most encouraging aspect of fxC that you've discovered during your research?

Forty years ago, around three new churches a year were being set up – nowadays this number has shot up to 300! Most people are unaware that the Church of England is experiencing this level of growth in the creation of new Christian communities who see themselves as Anglican yet are entirely relevant in today's society.

What, in your opinion, is the biggest challenge to the future of fxC?

I think it has been proved beyond a shadow of doubt that they can be started. What remains to be seen is whether these young churches can thrive and stand the test of time.



Church Army's Research Unit holding their newly published reports

Between January 2012 and May 2016, The Research Unit examined fxC across the north, south and central England, with the backing of the Church Commissioners. All the fxC examined were established between 1992 and 2014. Here are some interesting facts that have emerged from the findings:

FxC's impact on community and church life:

- Over **50,600** people are attending fxC across the 21 dioceses surveyed.
- There are **four times** as many fxC starting up now compared to a decade ago.



Who are the leaders?

- The so-called lay-lay leaders make up more than **36%** of the existing fxC leadership.
- The fxC are as likely to be led by women (**49.5%**) as men (**50.5%**).



Who attends fxC?



- The leaders of the fxC reported that their attenders are made up of **40%** Christians, **27%** de-churched and **33%** non-churched.
- They attract double the number of under-16s (**38%**) compared to parish churches (**19%**).
- Most types of fxC get-togethers are relatively small, with 35-55 members.
- FxC have a strong presence on some of the poorer housing estates.

Food for thought:

- Over **80%** of fxC are taking some steps to grow disciples, not just attract attenders.
- They are vulnerable because only **10.8%** of fxC have any legal status within the Church of England.
- Half of the fxC surveyed have remained the same size, **28%** continue to grow, **17%** of them experienced growth but are now shrinking, while **11%** have died all together.



To read the full report, a summary of the main findings and to watch a video on this topic, visit www.churcharmy.org/fxCresearch

Glossary:

Lay-lay: individuals that are not ordained and haven't undertaken formal church training.

De-churched: people who attended church at some point in their lives, then stopped attending.

Non-churched: people who have never attended church before.