

# **mission-shaped church**

Church House Publishing  
Church House  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3NZ

ISBN 0 7151 4013 2

Published 2004 by Church House Publishing

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*Index copyright © Meg Davies 2004*

GS 1523

Cover design by Church House Publishing  
Typeset in 10/12 Franklin Gothic

Printed in England by The Cromwell Press Ltd  
Trowbridge, Wiltshire

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*This report has only the authority of the Council that approved it.*

# **mission-shaped church**

**church planting and fresh expressions of  
church in a changing context**



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# foreword

In the short – but not exactly uneventful – time during which I have been Archbishop, I have regularly been surprised and deeply heartened by the widespread sense that the Church of England, for all the problems that beset it, is poised for serious growth and renewal. Many feel that, as various streams of development over the past decade or so begin to flow together, we are at a real watershed.

The essence of this is in the fact that we have begun to recognize that there are many ways in which the reality of ‘church’ can exist. ‘Church’ as a map of territorial divisions (parishes and dioceses) is one – one that still has a remarkable vigour in all sorts of contexts and which relates to a central conviction about the vocation of Anglicanism. But there are more and more others, of the kind this report describes and examines. The challenge is not to force everything into the familiar mould; but neither is it to tear up the rulebook and start from scratch (as if that were ever possible or realistic). What makes the situation interesting is that we are going to have to live with variety; the challenge is how to work with that variety so that everyone grows together in faith and in eagerness to learn about and spread the Good News.

If ‘church’ is what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other, there is plenty of theological room for diversity of rhythm and style, so long as we have ways of identifying the same living Christ at the heart of every expression of Christian life in common. This immediately raises large questions about how different churches keep in contact and learn from each other, and about the kinds of leadership we need for this to happen.

All this is explored in these pages with a wealth of local detail and theological stimulus. This will be a wonderful contribution to thinking about how we respond creatively to the really significant opportunities and new visions that are around, and the Church of England owes a great debt to Bishop Graham and his working group for giving so penetrating and exciting an introduction to the possible shape of our mission in the next generation.

✠ **Rowan Cantuar:**





# **the *Mission-shaped Church* working group**

*Mission-shaped Church* is a report from a working group of the Church of England's Mission and Public Affairs Council and is commended by the Council for study.

## **membership of the working group**

**Rt Revd Graham Cray (Chair)**, Bishop of Maidstone.

**Revd Moira Astin**, Team Vicar of Thatcham, Diocese of Oxford, and member of Board of Mission to 2002.

**John Clark**, Director, Mission and Public Affairs, Archbishops' Council.

**Ven. Lyle Dennen**, Archdeacon of Hackney, Diocese of London.

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**Canon Robert Freeman (Secretary)**, National Evangelism Adviser, Archbishops' Council, Archdeacon of Halifax from September 2003.

**Revd Sally Gaze**, Team Rector of Tas Valley Team Ministry, Diocese of Norwich.

**Revd Graham Horsley**, Secretary for Evangelism and Church Planting, Methodist Church.

**Revd George Lings**, Director, Church Army Sheffield Centre.

**Canon Chris Neal**, Formerly Director of Evangelization and Rector of Thame, Diocese of Oxford. International Director for Mission Movement, Church Mission Society from May 2003.

**Gill Poole**, Church Mission Society Area Team Leader.

# a note on the discussion questions

It is hoped that *Mission-shaped Church* will be studied and discussed at diocesan, deanery and parish level. As such, *Mission-shaped Church* will necessarily have a number of different audiences. However, the questions that follow each chapter are intended for use by local leadership groups and can also be used by other parish or local fellowship groups. Groups do not have to use all the questions and may choose whichever seem most appropriate for their group make-up and context.

The first question in each group of five is of a general, philosophical nature and is intended to aid discussion or brainstorming surrounding the underlying principles of mission-shaped church. A suggestion for a passage of Scripture is included so that groups can focus the discussion down into Bible study if they so wish.

The second question also deals with the general principles underlying the chapters, but invites groups to take these principles and apply them to their local context.

The third question in each group is designed for people who like to make lists, draw diagrams or compose tables in order to think about issues or to think strategically about mission.

The last two questions in each group invite people to focus on the text itself. Groups are invited to engage directly with assertions or arguments in each chapter and to decide how these apply to their local situation. By this means, groups are further invited to explore what missionary strategy, church planting or fresh expressions of church might be most appropriate in their own situation.

Further information and resources may be obtained from Anne Richards, Mission and Public Affairs Division, Church House.

# introduction

by the Chair of the Working Group

*Breaking New Ground: church planting in the Church of England* was published in 1994.<sup>1</sup> It set out to recommend good practice for church planting, and to address difficulties raised by a small number of unauthorized plants. It was of particular importance as the first formal document in which the Church of England owned ‘planting’ as a missionary strategy.

In 2002 the (then) Board of Mission set up a new working group to review the original report, to assess progress and to consider new developments. In particular it was recognized that a variety of new forms of church in mission were emerging or being put into practice within the Church of England. The new working group was to review these ‘fresh expressions of church’.

*Breaking New Ground* saw church planting as ‘a supplementary strategy that enhances the essential thrust of the parish principle’.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most significant recommendation of this current report is that this is no longer adequate. The nature of community has so changed (and was changing long before 1994) that no one strategy will be adequate to fulfil the Anglican incarnational principle in Britain today.<sup>3</sup> Communities are now multi-layered, comprising neighbourhoods, usually with permeable boundaries, and a wide variety of networks, ranging from the relatively local to the global. Increased mobility and electronic communications technology have changed the nature of community.

It is clear to us that the parochial system remains an essential and central part of the national Church’s strategy to deliver incarnational mission. But the existing parochial system alone is no longer able fully to deliver its underlying mission purpose. We need to recognize that a variety of integrated missionary approaches is required. A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary, in an active partnership across a wider area, perhaps a deanery.

In addition, our diverse consumer culture will never be reached by one standard form of church. The working group has evaluated a wide variety of ‘fresh expressions of church’. All have strengths and weaknesses, and none are appropriate for all circumstances. In particular the dominance of consumerism presents a major challenge to Christian faithfulness. What is

acceptable and what is unacceptable about consumer culture? In what ways can we be 'in' a consumer culture but not be bound by its underlying values? What forms of church does this require?

We offer our findings to help dioceses, deaneries and parishes discern appropriate forms of mission for their varying contexts.

We have entitled this report *Mission-shaped Church*. This echoes two themes within this report: that the Church is the fruit of God's mission, and that as such it exists to serve and to participate in the ongoing mission of God.<sup>4</sup> The report is subtitled 'church planting and fresh expressions of church in a changing context', reflecting our ongoing and shared calling to embody and inculturate the gospel in the evolving contexts and cultures of our society.

We understand 'church planting' to refer to the discipline of 'creating new communities of Christian faith as part of the mission of God to express God's kingdom in every geographic and cultural context'.<sup>5</sup> 'Fresh expressions of church' are manifestations of this, but they also give evidence of many parishes' attempts to make a transition into a more missionary form of church.

The report begins with an analysis of the current cultural context of the Church of England's mission. It then outlines the history of church planting in England, with special emphasis on developments since the publication of *Breaking New Ground* in 1994. After addressing issues of definition, the report offers description and analysis of a number of 'fresh expressions of church' that have emerged in response to the changing missionary context. Following the description of the current situation, Chapter 5 offers a theological framework for the Church of England in mission. The remainder of the report proposes a missionary methodology for church planting and for the Church in mission, and makes practical recommendations for the future.

One of the central features of this report is the recognition that the changing nature of our missionary context requires a new inculturation of the gospel within our society. The theology and practice of inculturation or contextualization is well established in the world Church, but has received little attention for mission in the West. We have drawn on this tradition as a major resource for the Church of England.

Inculturation is central to this report because it provides a principled basis for the costly crossing of cultural barriers and the planting of the church into a changed social context. Church has to be planted, not cloned. At the same time, any principle based on Christ's incarnation is inherently

counter-cultural, in that it aims at faithful Christian discipleship within the new context, rather than cultural conformity.

The gospel has to be heard within the culture of the day, but it always has to be heard as a call to appropriate repentance. It is the incarnation of the gospel, within a dominantly consumer society, that provides the Church of England with its major missionary challenge.

This report has had to balance conciseness and focus with the need to give a good overview of changes in society and of all that is developing in areas of planting and fresh expressions of church. There is much more that could be written, and additional material is available from [www.encountersontheedge.org.uk](http://www.encountersontheedge.org.uk). A selection of useful books and other resources is listed in the Appendix to this report.

This report has been both challenging and exciting in its research and production. The working group has greatly valued the opportunity to reflect on where and how God is at work in and through the Church, and how the Church can be encouraged and shaped best to proclaim and live the gospel afresh.

Help, guidance and encouragement have been received from many people during the development of this report. In particular we would like to express our thanks to staff at Church House, the Church Commissioners and across the dioceses, and to various consultants who have contributed to our thinking, including Bob and Mary Hopkins, Stuart Murray Williams, Michael Moynagh and Mal Caladine. We are also grateful to those who have shared stories with us and which form the illustrative material and our thanks go to Ian Dewar, Karen Hamblin, Mark Meardon and to Virginia Lockett. We would also like to thank the Church Army, which very generously released George Lings for three weeks to prepare a first draft of this report. We have also been helped by the active support of a variety of denominations and church streams from across the United Kingdom, who have freely shared their own thinking and insights.

We believe the Church of England is facing a great moment of missionary opportunity, and recommend our report for the consideration of our Church.

**✠ Graham Maidstone**  
**September 2003**



# changing contexts

This chapter outlines some aspects of the cultural, social and spiritual environment in which the Church of England ministers in the new millennium. It explores how we are called to be and to do church, and the benefits and disadvantages of existing Anglican expressions of church.

We face a significant moment of opportunity. Western society has undergone a massive transition in recent decades. We all live in a fast-changing world. As the Church of England aims to be a Church for everyone in the country, being truly among them as Jesus was with the people of his day (the 'incarnational principle'), the Church needs to respond to the changes in our culture. Thus it is important for us to see what our culture now looks like, so we can see the possible shape, or shapes, of church to which God is calling us. This look at culture now will also help connect church and gospel with the variety of people across England, and identify where, under Christ's lordship, we should live counter-culturally.

## social trends in the last 30 years

Each year the Government publishes *Social Trends*. *Social Trends* brings together the conclusions from a variety of statistical surveys.<sup>1</sup> Some headlines from the 2003 version are outlined here.

### housing changes

- While the population of the UK has risen by 5 per cent since 1970,<sup>2</sup> the number of households has increased by 31 per cent.<sup>3</sup> There are now more households, but they are smaller in size. The average size of a household is now 2.4 people, in 1971 it was 2.9.<sup>4</sup> This is mainly due to divorce, and delay in marrying. The implications of this for the housing market are dramatic, particularly in some parts of the country. For example, the number of owner-occupied dwellings increased by 38 per cent between 1981 and 2002.<sup>5</sup>
- People are paying more in real terms for their houses. The rise in owner occupation means that repairs and improvements are the responsibility of the occupier, rather than a landlord. This has led to the rise of DIY in the last three decades, which is often a Sunday activity.

## **employment changes, including the increase of women's employment**

- Most people in their middle years work outside the home. In 2002, 91.8 per cent of men aged 35 to 49 were in work, and 78.1<sup>6</sup> per cent of women in the same age group. There has been a significant increase in the number of lone parent women working outside the home. In 1992, 18 per cent of lone women with dependent children were working full-time, but in 2002 it was 23 per cent. The change for lone women with children under the age of five is most dramatic: in 1992, 21 per cent worked; in 2002, 34 per cent were working either full- or part-time.<sup>7</sup>
- The hours worked have also changed. In 2002 most men worked about 40 hours a week, and most women in full-time work worked about 38 hours a week.<sup>8</sup> However, about 25 per cent of working men and 11 per cent of working women worked more than 50 hours a week. Fourteen per cent of those aged 35 to 49 would like to work fewer hours for less pay each week.<sup>9</sup>
- This means that many people have less 'free time' than in 1970. Weekends, especially Sundays, are now seen as family time. This is a big tension for Christian partners of non-Christians.

## **mobility**

- Today people are vastly more mobile than they were even 30 years ago. Since 1971 the distance travelled each year on roads in cars or vans has almost doubled from 313 billion to 624 billion kilometres.<sup>10</sup> The average length of trips varies significantly by household income – 15.3 km for the richest 20 per cent and 6.7 km for the poorest.<sup>11</sup> We are all more mobile, but a number of factors – where we live, where we work and how well off we are – influence how far and how often we travel.
- These statistics are matched by the number of vehicles on the road. In 1971 there were just under 12 million vehicles on the roads; in 2001 it was just under 26.5 million.<sup>12</sup>
- Most families, apart from the poorest, have access to a car, and are ready to use it. This means that people are able to work further from home, at the expense of having a longer commuter journey. It also means that at weekends people are able to do things at a distance from where they live. In churches this can be seen in the phenomenon of 'church shopping'. Someone who moves to an area will check out several churches, not just the nearest.



- Another aspect of mobility is the way in which some people move in connection with their jobs. Increased mobility means that people are less likely to live in the same area throughout their lifetime, and now tend to live further from their relatives than previously.<sup>13</sup>
- However, more than half of adults see their mother at least once a week,<sup>14</sup> and 61 per cent of grandparents see their grandchildren weekly.<sup>15</sup> Visits to relatives are most likely at weekends, due to school and work commitments in the week.
- The distance from relatives varies with social class. People in the professional social class were least likely to have a satisfactory network of relatives.<sup>16</sup>

## **divorce and changes in family life**<sup>17</sup>

- The divorce rate has gone up significantly in the last 30 years (62,857 divorces in 1970, 154,628 in 2001).<sup>18</sup> The proportion of separated and divorced people now stands at 10.6 per cent of the population of England and Wales.<sup>19</sup> In 1971, 1 per cent of men and 1 per cent of women were divorced, but by 2000 it was 8 per cent men and 9 per cent women.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, about 8 per cent of families were stepfamilies with dependent children<sup>21</sup> – the parents no longer appeared in statistics as ‘divorced’ because they had married again. Combined with the rise of cohabitation and the birth of children to never-married mothers, in 2001 the Census showed that 22 per cent of children in England and Wales live in lone-parent families, usually looked after by their mother. More than 1 in 10 other children live in stepfamilies, mainly with their mother.<sup>22</sup> The average age of women at the birth of their first child has increased by 1½ years since 1990 to 27 years in 2000.<sup>23</sup>
- The number of single people has risen dramatically – because of not marrying, or marrying later. In 1971, 24 per cent of the male population were single, in 2000 it was 34 per cent.<sup>24</sup> Some of this change can be accounted for by cohabitation but, even taking cohabitation into account, there is a real rise in the number of single people. In particular, the number of single men has risen from 3 per cent of households in 1971 to 10 per cent in 2000.<sup>25</sup> This is due to the later age of marriage, and the rise in separation and divorce.
- The implications of these changes in family life are that very many families will be involved in visiting absent parents, usually fathers, often at the weekend. This will inevitably make Sunday church attendance problematic.

- The rise in the number of single people, and the delay in having children,<sup>26</sup> means that there is a significant group of people in their twenties who do not have children, and so child-friendly activities (and, indeed, morning activities at the weekend) may not be something they can relate to.

## **free time and television**

- Taking part in sporting activities, whether alone or as a member of a team or a club, is a popular way of spending leisure time.<sup>27</sup> Walking and swimming are the most popular, with 20 per cent and 15 per cent of the population participating.<sup>28</sup> These are often Sunday activities, and in particular children's sport often occurs on Sundays as well as Saturdays and midweek.
- The biggest change in leisure time in the past 50 years has been in the hours spent watching television. In the year 2000, adults spent an average of nearly 20 hours a week, just under 3 hours a day.<sup>29</sup>

## **a fragmented society**

One key conclusion from these snapshots of British society is that we are living increasingly fragmented lives. People who have had a longer education are more likely to live away from their parents, and are more likely to be civically engaged (i.e. involved in community groups or local politics).<sup>30</sup> People from the manual sections of the community are more likely to live near family and less likely to join local groups. Young adults may not join local groups, but will have an active friendship network. In any particular town there are many people who will never meet, even though they live nearby. They get in the car to travel to see the people they know and so do not meet the people who live close to them.

When they do have time, those who live away from their relatives, or who have children who live with ex-spouses, will visit them. People no longer view Sunday as special, or as 'church time'. Children are much more likely to be playing sport than being in Sunday school or church.

## **the power of networks**<sup>31</sup>

The Western world, at the start of the third millennium, is best described as a 'network society'. This is a fundamental change: 'the emergence of a new social structure'.<sup>32</sup> In a network society the importance of place is

secondary to the importance of 'flows'.<sup>33</sup> It is the flows of information, images and capital that increasingly shape society.<sup>34</sup> It combines the spread of information technology with increased possibilities for personal mobility. It both enables and is driven by the global economy. Globalization implies a networked world: 'Globalization promotes much more physical mobility than ever before, but the key to its cultural impact is in the transformation of localities themselves.'<sup>35</sup>

One consequence is a comparative loss of local and national power. For example, jobs can disappear from a community as a direct consequence of decisions made on the other side of the world, in response to a downturn in the global market. This does not mean that the 'local' is no longer important, but it does mean that it is subject to considerable change and is less free to shape its own future.

The Internet is both an example of network society and a metaphor for understanding it. From one perspective the Internet has no centre. There is no one 'place' where choices are controlled. Everywhere is linked to everywhere else. Each person chooses his or her own route, with a search engine as the only pilot. Networks of relationships are formed in chat rooms around mutual interests. Friendships are maintained electronically. But it would be untrue to say that the Internet has no centres of power. There are powerful financial networks that have significant control, and particular places (including London) that are physical hubs for the global network. Economic interests and the divide between the technological rich and the technological poor create their own forms of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>36</sup>

Networks have not replaced neighbourhoods, but they change them. Community and a sense of community are often disconnected from locality and geography. A typical town will have an array of networks. Each school will have a network of the parents whose children attend it, as well as networks of the children themselves. Each workplace will have its own networks, according to who works with whom, and these networks may spread to key suppliers or clients of the firm. Some of the networks may be based around a locality, particularly among poorer people who are less mobile. For example, the residents of a social housing scheme may still have a network based on where they live, as well as reaching out to their local relatives. The neighbouring private housing estate may have no such local network, and a person moving there may find it hard to meet people until they go to a group that is the heart of a network, such as a Baby and Toddler group in the town. Another network in the town may revolve around the nightclub, or the Working Men's Club. Of course, any one person may

be in several networks, but some people will now be in none – due to the collapse of the neighbourhood as a friendship base.

Ulrich Beck has observed:

To live in one place no longer means to live together, and living together no longer means living in the same place.<sup>37</sup>

And Martin Albow comments:

The communities of the global age generally have no local centre. People living in the same street will have fleeting relationships with each other, having widely differing lifestyles and household arrangements.<sup>38</sup>

Information and knowledge have speeded-up, shrinking the world, but these have not conferred a sense of community. In 1996 the Henley Centre commissioned research to discover with whom people thought they had most in common. Top of the list were those with the same hobbies, then family, then work colleagues. Bottom of the list were those in the same area and neighbours. Geography no longer seems to be the primary basis of community. People define their communities through leisure, work and friendships.

It is not that locality, place and territory have no significance. It is simply that they are now just one layer of the complex shape of society. It has been said that 'All boundaries are tenuous, frail and porous'.<sup>39</sup>

We live in a society that is both fragmenting and connecting at the same time. It is not healthy or possible to escape all sense of place. Few people belong to 'no place' – many now belong to a variety of 'places' simultaneously. The social and personal significance of the place where they live has diminished.

Greater mobility, freedom of choice, and the creation of identity and community around shared interests is the way of life of large proportions of the population, and is no longer the privilege of the very affluent. Part of the deprivation experienced by the poor is their exclusion from a mobile lifestyle.

Mobility has become a major marker of inclusion or exclusion. Those who cannot move increasingly identify their deprivation in these terms. They are 'stuck' where they live, and feel they cannot enjoy life or express themselves fully or get a good job without the ability to maximize the opportunities that are available to mobile people.

The gospel has to meet people where they are, before it can enter and affect their lives. The planting of churches among the mobile and among

the poor is integral to the Church of England's mission. The scriptural command 'that we remember the poor'<sup>40</sup> is given to all Christians, and so it is incumbent on all churches exploring church planting or fresh expressions of church to consider God's call to the poor.

For the comfortable majority the current degree of mobility is a mixed blessing. It offers freedom at a price. The consequences of fragmentation are seen most clearly in the drastic decline in 'social capital'.<sup>41</sup> 'Without at first noticing, we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of the [twentieth] century.'<sup>42, 43</sup>

There are two distinct social processes at work here. Community is increasingly being re-formed around networks, and people are less inclined to make lasting commitments. While the two are not unrelated, the first is a change in the structure of community, with which the Church must engage. The second is a corrosive force that the Church must resist, because it undermines all forms of community. Contemporary initiatives to plant the church, or to express it appropriately within Western culture, will need to establish social capital: ties of loyalty and faithfulness through Christ.<sup>44</sup> Both the establishing of bonds within networks and the bridging between networks will be crucial.

## **fresh expressions of church**

*Breaking New Ground* recognized that 'it is possible to see that it is networks which are now the communities to which we feel a predominant loyalty' and that 'human life is lived in a complex array of networks and that the neighbourhoods where people reside may hold only a very minor loyalty'.<sup>45</sup>

The implication was that churches needed to be planted into networks. In *Breaking New Ground* this was seen as an addition to the normal territorial parochial system. However, it is now clear that the relationship between neighbourhood and network is more complex. It is not sufficient to think of neighbourhoods being supplemented by networks, or of network churches as a supplement to geographical parishes. Not only are networks more dominant for many people, but parishes are not what they used to be.

The perception of the working group producing this report is that many of the fresh expressions of church, explained in Chapter 4, are connecting with people through the networks in which they live, rather than through the place where they live.

Both community and locality are multi-layered. Geographical parishes need to recognize that their boundaries are permeable, and welcome a partnership with other parishes, and with network churches. Only a mixed economy of neighbourhood and network, collaborating together over a wider area (perhaps a deanery), can both adequately fulfil the incarnational principle and demonstrate the universality of Christ's lordship in all expressions of society.

### **A story**

*In the town of Huddersfield and its two deaneries an expression of church has been planted called The Net – a church without walls. It was created as a partnership between a then curate, Revd David Male, and the diocese to which he is accountable.*

*The name reflects the intention to work only with networks of people. It has denied itself any neighbourhood clientele base or working of a patch. The networks include business colleagues, personal friendships, a joint love of a sport, or common leisure interest. From a team of 28 people from varying existing churches in the town, a witnessing and worshipping community of more than 60 adults and their children has grown up.*

*Various locations round the town are used as meeting places dependent on their function. Its members may come from up to 30 miles away, but this is not a form of church eclecticism. It reflects the distance people normally travel to Huddersfield to work, how they form relationships and find their leisure. It is an example of church being expressed around how people live, rather than around where they sleep.*

Churches may already be responding to the network society, without being fully conscious that that is what they are doing. For example, the acknowledgement that Church schools are 'at the heart of the church's mission' is a recognition that the network based around the school (both its children and parents) is a key grouping that may be receptive to the gospel. For the network associated with a school, it may be best to offer and encourage the sharing of the gospel through services after school, or acts of worship within school, rather than hope that people will come to church on a Sunday.<sup>46</sup>

# consumer culture

Western culture is not only a network society, but it is also a consumer culture. Where previous generations found their identity in what they produced, we now find our identity in what we consume. We have moved from a society that shaped its members primarily as producers – those who believed in progress and in producing something that contributed to the better life that was certain to come through education and hard work – to a society that shapes its members first and foremost by the need to play the role of consumer.<sup>47</sup>

Where once Westerners might have found their identity, their social togetherness and the ongoing life of their society in the area of production, these are today increasingly found through consumption. It's not that companies are producing less, or that people no longer work. Rather the meaning of these activities has altered. We are what we buy. We relate to others who consume the same way that we do. And the overarching system of capitalism is fuelled by consumption, and geared to stimulating consumption.<sup>48</sup>

The core value of society has moved from 'progress' to 'choice' – the absolute right of freedom to choose. 'Choice lies at the centre of consumerism, both as its emblem and as its core value.'<sup>49</sup> In this society everyone becomes a consumer.

The amount of money available to individuals for consumption varies enormously, but virtually everyone today is a consumer to some degree. The poor have fewer resources than the rich, most ethnic and racial minority groups have much less to spend than members of the majority, children have fewer means than adults, and so on, but all are enmeshed in the consumer culture. Even those who live on the streets survive off the discards and charity of that wildly affluent culture.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, everything becomes a consumer choice. Central to the future is the idea of 'personalized scale' – 'it must fit me exactly'.<sup>51</sup> The world will be organized around giving people the sense, or perhaps the illusion, that they can have whatever they want. In the future, this approach to life will not just apply to consumer goods – it will be applied to all aspects of life. It is predicted that by 2020 personalized scale will also apply to health care, educational provision, patterns of work, of association and relationships, and of course to religion.

The sweeping changes in society . . . mean that we are more mobile, more urban, more individualistic and more critical than previous

generations. So religion is less likely to be a matter of culture and more one of choice.<sup>52</sup>

Consumerism will also affect the ways in which people evaluate truth claims. The way people think about shopping also becomes the way people think about 'truth'.

When many voices can be heard, who can say that one should be heeded more than another? . . . When the only criteria left for choosing between them are learned in the marketplace, then truth appears as a commodity. We hear the people 'buy into' a belief or, rather than rejecting a dogma as false, they say they 'cannot buy' this or that viewpoint.<sup>53</sup>

It is important to distinguish between 'consumer society' (a term that describes the current shape of Western capitalist societies) and the ideology of 'consumerism' (which can be seen as the dominant idolatry of those societies). In one sense there is no alternative to a consumer society. That is what we are, that is where we are and that is where we must be church and embody the gospel. To fulfil our Lord's prayer for the Church (John 17.15-18) we are called to be church 'in' consumer society, but we dare not let ourselves be 'of' consumerism.

At its worst, consumerism creates a self-indulgent society.

Pleasure lies at the heart of consumerism. It finds in consumerism a unique champion who promises to liberate it both from its bondage to sin, duty and morality as well as its ties to faith, spirituality and redemption. Consumerism proclaims pleasure not merely as the right of every individual but also as every individual's obligation to him or her self. . . . The pursuit of pleasure, untarnished by guilt or shame, becomes the new image of the good life.<sup>54</sup>

In this, the poor are those who cannot buy things. A consumer society excludes the poor.

Postmodern society produces its members first and foremost as consumers – and the poor are singularly unfit for that role. For the first time in history the poor are un-functional and useless, and as such they are, for all practical intents and purposes, 'outside society'.<sup>55</sup>

A network and consumer society presents a particular challenge to Christian mission in general, and to questions of the missionary shape of the Church in particular. A network society can both connect and fragment. It can include and exclude at local, national and global levels. Mobility can



provide freedom and opportunity, but it is also a force that destabilizes society by undermining long-term commitments.<sup>56</sup>

## **post-Christendom**

The emergence of a network and consumer society coincides with the demise of Christendom.

What is taking place is not merely the continued decline of organized Christianity, but the death of the culture that formerly conferred Christian identity upon the British people as a whole. If a core identity survives for Britons, it is certainly no longer Christian. The culture of Christianity has gone in the Britain of the new millennium.<sup>57</sup>

Much of Britain's self-understanding comes from centuries of Christian faith, but many in Britain now have minimal knowledge of the Christian faith. The Christian story is no longer at the heart of the nation. Although people may identify themselves as 'Christian' in the national census, for the majority that does not involve belonging to a worshipping community, or any inclination that it should. Many people have no identifiable religious interest or expression. Among some young people there is little evidence of any belief in a transcendent dimension. During the twentieth century Sunday school attendance dropped from 55 per cent to 4 per cent of children,<sup>58</sup> meaning that even the rudiments of the Christian story and of Christian experience are lacking in most young people. Our multicultural and multi-faith society reinforces a consumerist view that faiths and their differences are simply issues of personal choice, to be decided on the basis of what 'works' or makes you happy.

The consequences for a national church, used to operating among people and institutions on the assumptions of Christendom, are acute. The Church of England bases a significant part of its identity on its physical presence in every community, and on a 'come to us' strategy. But as community becomes more complex, mere geographical presence is no longer a guarantee that we can connect. The reality is that mainstream culture no longer brings people to the church door. We can no longer assume that we can automatically reproduce ourselves, because the pool of people who regard church as relevant or important is decreasing with every generation.

The Church has got to realize its missionary responsibilities. We live in a society, whether that be urban or rural, which is now basically second or even third generation pagan once again; and we cannot simply work on the premise that all we have to do to bring people to Christ is to ask

them to remember their long-held, but dormant faith. Very many people have no residue of Christian faith at all; it's not just dormant, it's non-existent; in so many instances we have to go back to basics; we are in a critical missionary situation.<sup>59</sup>

This report believes that the beginnings, in the last 20 years, of church plants and fresh expressions of church represent the emergence of a diametrically different approach that is both theologically appropriate and strategically significant. Instead of 'come to us', this new approach is to 'go to them'. We need to find expressions of church that communicate with post-Christian people, and which enable them to become committed communities of followers of Jesus Christ. Then they, in turn, can continue to engage in mission with and beyond their own culture.

## **from 'where?' to 'how?'**

So how can the Church of England rethink its mission?

Anglicans aim to follow the pattern of the incarnation – to be with people where they are, how they are. The word 'where' in that sentence suggests geography and territory – being in a particular place and location. In Britain today, it might help to say that we must be with people *how* they are. 'How' is a word that suggests connection beyond geography and locality – connecting with people's culture, values, lifestyle and networks, as well as with their location.

A geographical approach alone is not sufficient. Parish, by itself, is no longer adequate as the Church of England's missionary strategy. 'One size fits all' will not do. A mutual partnership of parochial and network churches, using traditional and fresh approaches, and sharing ministry in larger areas is necessary.

The diversity of fresh expressions of church in this report ranges in style of worship from the reinvention of the traditional to the highly innovative. The size of these expressions ranges from the tiny cell to the enormous gathering. Furthermore, the starting point in mission sweeps from relational evangelism to many forms of social engagement. Venues and meeting days are getting more diverse. This is a response to the sense that Sunday is no longer a 'church' day for our society, but rather a family day, or DIY day, or sports club day or whatever people choose to do. Some people may be keen to meet with other Christians regularly, but it is no longer feasible for them to do that regularly on a Sunday.

All these variables can be mixed and matched by local churches with the resources to do so, or they can be expressed across a diocese or deanery – by a policy of encouraging variety and recognizing gifting and divine opportunity. No one kind of worship can attract, much less hold, a major proportion of the varied population of this country. The Church will be able to reconnect with both society and individuals through a pattern of diversity and unity, rooted in the triune, endlessly creative, life of God. It is a pattern that looks ahead to the diversity, brought from all corners of the earth, that will be celebrated in God's eschatological reality.

The new is not necessarily better or more lasting. For neighbourhood and network we need 'forms of Christian community that are homes of generous hospitality, places of challenging reconciliation, and centres of attentiveness to the living God'.<sup>60</sup> The challenge is to form communities that facilitate encounter with God and God's people, in such a way that convinces, converts and transforms those who respond to them.

## **a moment of opportunity and the gift of repentance**

Although Western culture will continue to evolve (particularly through technological change) it has taken a shape that it is likely to hold for the foreseeable future. The shape of the mission field has become clear. The missionary task remains the same:

A changing culture constitutes a call from God. Many people today live in a variety of worlds such as family, job, leisure, politics and education. These worlds represent different social structures.<sup>61</sup>

The gospel must be proclaimed afresh within these different structures. They present a moment of opportunity, a challenge to confidence in the gospel, and a call to imaginative mission.

So far from foreclosing the possibilities for appropriate Christian living, these conditions actually open the door to new variations, new combinations of authentic and responsible action. The demise of Christendom reduces radically the temptations of power, clearing space for the old story to be retold.<sup>62</sup>

But this is also a moment for repentance. We have allowed our culture and the Church to drift apart, without our noticing. We need the grace of the Spirit for repentance if we are to receive a fresh baptism of the Spirit for witness.

If the decline of the Church is ultimately caused neither by the irrelevance of Jesus, nor by the indifference of the community, but by the Church's failure to respond fast enough to an evolving culture, to a changing spiritual climate, and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, then that decline can be addressed by the repentance of the Church. For true repentance involves turning around and living in a new way in the future. A diocese or parish, which, out of repentance, grows a new relevance to the contemporary world, may also grow in numbers and strength, because the Spirit of Jesus has been released to do his work.<sup>63</sup>

## some questions for discussion

- Is it important for a church to meet on Sunday? What factors influence church attendance in your area and how might your church respond to them? (Bible suggestion: Exodus 20.8-11.)
- Over the past 20 or 30 years, what have been the major changes in way of life for people in the community where you live? What effects have any such changes had on the life of the Church in your area? In what ways has your church responded and what more could be done?
- Make a list of the different geographical groups, people groups and networks operating in your community. Compare this against a list of networks with which your local church is involved. Are there people groups, networks or areas where the church is not involved, but *should* be? What might be done about this?
- This chapter asserts: 'In the future, this approach to life [giving people the sense that they can have whatever they want] will not just apply to consumer goods – it will be applied to all aspects of life.'

In your local church, what experiences do you have of people being 'consumers' of faith and religion only taking the parts that suit them or that they want? How do you feel about such people?

What can the church do to challenge a consumerist approach to life and faith, while also following the good missionary principle of meeting people where they are?

- This chapter ends by saying: 'this is also a moment for repentance. We have allowed our culture and the Church to drift apart, without our noticing'.

On reflection, can you give any examples of church and the contemporary culture drifting apart in your area?

What practical things can be done to reconnect the church and society in your area?

What forms of repentance by the Church might be helpful or appropriate in reaching out to those outside the Church?