



TOWARDS PIONEER MISSIONAL (For Mission Shaped Church)

PART II

This builds on the case made in Part I where we established the key role of leadership for mission-shaped church and the need for quite different processes to select, train and support such missional leaders.

1. Age Profile of the Non-Churched

Gone but not forgotten and Mission Shaped Church have highlighted the fact that the largest part of our population in England are the non-churched 40% (the smaller mission sectors being, church 10%, fringe 10%, open 20% and closed 20% de-churched. The non-churched, being those who have never had any significant experience of church, or the Christian story, worldview and values. What is even more challenging is the fact that these figures are based on adults and with the catastrophic decline in church connection with children, youth and young adults in the last 2 decades, the age-adjusted figure for non-churched is reckoned to be some 65%!

Whatever the exact figure, there is absolutely no doubt that the overwhelming mission challenge for the church is among the emerging generations – children, youth and young adults.

2. Gospel Receptiveness of Emerging Generations

Some have interpreted the decline in church attendance amongst the emerging generations as a culture resistant to the gospel. However, this could not be further from the picture created by examination of other evidence. Firstly the emerging generations show much greater spiritual openness than their parents. Secondly, when the church is ready to engage with them in their culture and language and to allow creation of fresh expressions of church rather than expect them to submit to traditional inherited church forms, results are dramatic. All the evidence is in fact pointing to the fact that this is the most open mission field.

3. Emerging Generation Church and the Age of Leadership

Kidz church, youth church and young adult church look very different from inherited Anglican mode. However, where they are released and encouraged by permission givers in previous generations, the outcome is impressive.

An absolutely key understanding is the leadership that is most appropriate (and successful) in these emerging generation churches. It is a combination of overall leaders just a few years older than the focus age, mentoring and supporting peer leadership. The importance of grasping this principle cannot be over-emphasised. Such is the rate of cultural change and the pattern of relational affinity amongst the emerging generations that leaders best able to pioneer church for children, youth and young adults are in the age range 16 to 30 (35 max).

4. Implications for Selection, Training, Deployment and Recognition

The factors outlined above lead to exactly the same conclusions as in our first paper. Hence these cultural and age related factors reinforce exactly the same principals for a different process of selection and training for pioneer missional leaders and make the case both overwhelming and urgent.

Existing processes after identifying potential leaders locally, involve 1 to 2 years DDO, 3 years Theological College (for under 30's) and 3-4 years curacy. This 7 to 9 years process takes young leaders out of mission to their peers and younger at precisely their most effective phase of life for this ripe mission context. This absolutely cannot be the model for reaching the largest national mission field. Such leaders must be selected while continuing to develop in ministry to their generation; given a combination of apprenticeship to a more experienced missional leader; provided with local mission training and selected distance/mixed mode theological modules over a 6 year period during which ordination may be judged appropriate.

The excellent national CYM network has pioneered part of the picture for this range of needs. Their focus is youth workers and they select and train whilst workers stay in youth mission and ministry. They also have a type of apprenticeship with field supervisors and gain a degree level certificate, which is currently the best qualification for youth work.

However, as such youth workers grow on to 25-30 age many may well feel called to pioneer Young Adult Church and to take further steps in a mission and ministry career and further training and recognition would be appropriate. The further training should again be distance/mixed mode supported by apprenticeship and the appropriate recognition should include ordination for many.

At this second phase, we can foresee some becoming church planter/trainers. For a region (diocese, etc) these experienced youth workers, whilst moving up on age group to pioneer young adult church, could mentor and coach a team of younger youth workers planting regional youth churches.