THE DIOCESE OF SHEFFIELD

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Foundations Course

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Mission and Evangelism

Journal

Five Marks of Mission

Tell: proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom (εὐαγγελίζω)

Teach: educate, baptise and nurture new believers

Tend: respond to human need with loving service

Transform: change unjust structures of society, challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation

Treasure: strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

Journal 4

1. Write briefly about one new congregation / Fresh Expression of Church or new Christian community you have found out about.

- *What inspires you about it?*
- *What challenges you?*

2. Finish your journal by writing how your concept of the mission of God has changed this term.

- *What has challenged or changed it?*
- *How will you join in with the mission of God going forwards?*

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1.

Around four years ago my family and I began attending a Forest Church[4]. This took place in the grounds of one of our local Church of England churches, but was an independent expression, not connected with the local church nor the Church of England as a whole. At that time we were not regular churchgoers, as we had not found a church that we felt met our needs. We tried various churches, both “high” and “low” and even attended Quaker meetings for a while. None seemed to be “our place”. Forest Church was though. It was organised to suit both adults and children, centred around a camp fire, where various food items were cooked and served throughout the time, and with various “prayer stations” placed around the grounds, some in tents, others open to the elements.

We attended for about two years, meeting people and making friends. Eventually, alongside one of the Forest Church leaders and his family, we decided to commit to our most local parish as regular Sunday worshippers. What helped us commit was changing our question from “what can this church do for me?” to “what can we do for this church?”. It was a church with a small congregation, few families, and no children or youth groups. We felt that along with our Forest Church friends, maybe we could help build that.

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[4] Interestingly, this particular new expression was co-led by Jen Ryder, a fellow student on the Foundations course. That we both arrived here at the same time was coincidental, not planned.

This turned out not to be the case, and eighteen months on we moved to a far more child-oriented, and all-round better attended church. But the experience of going from Forest Church (once every six weeks) to weekly church had now given us the dedication and commitment to really join a community, and be more than attendees.

Inspiration:

What inspired me about Walkley & Crookes Forest Church was its home-made-ness: the sense that it was led by passionate people, and the truth that those people were not ordained. It felt like the gathering of equals. Some attended other churches, some did not, but all were followers of Jesus, and found the great outdoors to be a suitable place to worship.

Challenge:

What was challenging was sometimes missing a service, and then having a long wait for the next one. Also, it seemed the church had reached its maximum as we'd see the same people each week, with few (or usually no) new faces. None of us really knew how to make this grow bigger. It is still running today, and we go when we can, but now we have a strong church community there feels less of a need.

Addendum:

I'd like to add that another new expression that I have experienced just once, in 2014, is Dinner Church, also known as "Common Ground". I love the idea of the core premise being the meal *is* the church, rather than a social hour after a service. It potentially creates a space where non-believers might attend, and mix with believers: they came for the food, they stayed for the grace. If I had to create a fresh expression from scratch, I think it would be something like this: bring people to the table, as equals.

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2.

My concept of the mission of God has changed in one essential way: I now understand mission as *listening*, rather than *talking*.[5] That changes everything for me; it wakes me up to a new understanding of God, the world, and the other person.

[5] I have discovered a lovely term for this kind of presence ministry: *prophetic eavesdropping*.

It is important to add, that while I recognise that the change of concept was sudden and immediate, I must acknowledge that the change in behaviour, in confidence and action, is—perhaps necessarily—much slower. This perhaps explains my reluctance (outlined in Part 3 of this journal) to attempt to engage another in a conversation about faith. I don't quite trust myself yet, nor feel the courage of my convictions.

Nevertheless, I join in with the mission of God with a new-found enthusiasm, or perhaps that is a greater trust. Even that phrase "God's mission" or "the mission of God" is new to me. I thought it was me that needed the mission. How much more simple it is to know that I only have to follow God's mission.

If it is God's mission to bring everyone to him, then I am obliged to do my part. I cannot be part of the Kingdom and separate from it at the same time.