



# Turn Around Church: Evaluating the Sustainability of Fresh Expressions of Church

*Ruthmary Bond*

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In our fast changing world the traditional church is in decline. Congregational churches across the west continue to report fewer Sunday attendees and decreased engagement across programs and services. In its decline a new kind of church has emerged, that of Fresh Expressions. A Fresh Expression of Church aims to reach those who are not connected to the church. This thesis explores and evaluates how a Fresh Expression: big, small, rural or urban, can become sustainable through diverse approaches to Leadership, Discipleship, Evangelism and Finances.

Effective leadership is integral to the health and sustainability of any Fresh Expression. Different styles of leadership are needed in different situations. While there is often a place for a primary leader, teams and collaboration are of great importance for sustainability, and assist in keeping a church's vision alive. Analysis and decision making around different types of leaders and different styles of leadership is important including collaborative, transitional, and successional leadership needs. The wider church also has a role in assisting Fresh Expressions to become sustainable by offering guidance in getting the right person in the right placement and determining the type of placement be that lay, ordained, fully paid by the church, bi-vocational or starting an entrepreneurial activity to generate income. This process also fosters links between a Fresh Expression and the Inherited church.

For a church to effectively disciple others there is need for the whole church community to understand that discipleship starts the moment we make first contact with someone. Discipleship and evangelism go hand in hand, complimenting each other. When the church loves people and relates to them in context lives can be transformed. Witness, evangelism and discipleship can then happen in a sustainable and organic way. Authentic living and hospitality promote both discipleship and evangelism creating a model of disciples making disciples. Constant evaluation and listening intently to the community assists in the ability for a Fresh Expression of Church to become sustainable.

Reaching sustainability in the area of finances is different for each church community and context. The Inherited Church funding every Fresh Expression is not sustainable. The church must evaluate existing resources: money, people, buildings and explore entrepreneurial enterprise, identifying how to reach financial sustainability. There is also the model where the Fresh Expression of Church and the Inherited Church work side-by-side assisting both forms of church to become more financially sustainable.

While there is no one model, or approach, to fit every situation, a Fresh Expression of church can become sustainable through actively listening to the community. Listening enables churches to identify leadership structures that meet the needs of their community, find suitable approaches to discipleship and evangelism accessible to the people they are trying to reach, and better understand what resources already exist and how they could be built upon to create a sustainable future for the church.

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