

Partnership for Missional Church

Introduction: Culture change towards mission in a changing culture

There are several initiatives which offer potential for growth in the Church such as LYCiG, MAP, Natural Church Development etc. Dioceses also invest heavily in individual leadership development for clergy and lay ministers.

The question is do these interventions really deliver large-scale culture change in congregations towards an outward-looking missional orientation? Our congregations in general are quite naturally in varying degrees of captivity to the culture of modernity. Growth, if it is to happen and be sustainable needs to arise from a deep shift in culture of the congregation. How can the culture of a Christian community, a congregation, be directly engaged with in ways which transform that culture – and, at the same time make it a significant player in its own community and context?

Partnership for Missional Church was created to address these questions. It has been around for 30+ years and is present on four continents worldwide.

In the **East Midlands** we began working with our first cluster of churches in 2012 between Leicester and Southwell & Nottingham Dioceses with the academy – St. John's College, Nottingham also involved.

What does it involve?

PMC has been developed by the organization *Church Innovations*, (CI), headed up by U.S. theologian Pat Keifert and others. It is based in USA but works internationally. See www.churchinnovations.org

Theologically the process (we must insist it is an organic process and not a programme) sits in a 'missional church' frame and connects with the Gospel and Our Culture network that grew out the work of Lesslie Newbigin. However there are several other sources of material that it draws on so that it is applicable across all church traditions.

There are several things to note about its emphases;

- Works with the *Missio Dei*
- Is a learning process for everyone which returns theology to its original *locus* in the congregation while involving the theological "academy"
- Empowers widespread participation & church members as disciples
- Is not prescriptive or about technical solutions but addresses "adaptive challenges" to use *Heifetz's* ideas
- Every church discovers a different outcome
- Is a patient, long-term, deep, 'faith-filled' and spiritual process, embedding spiritual practices as *habitus* in the performative action of the congregation

In USA (where around 95% of all congregations have less than 50 members) research shows that congregations who stay in the process (there is an attrition rate as it isn't a 'quick fix') grow in worship attendance, conversions, lay leadership base, and in partnership with constituencies outside the church (see later figures). Many of the congregations involved have been Episcopalian – with some whole dioceses getting involved.

Overview of the Partnership for Missional Church (PMC) Process:

Partnership for Missional Church is a three to four year journey that engages congregations in practices that help them discern what “God is up to” in their place and “God’s preferred and promised future” for them. The work is undertaken with clergy (who are named as ‘spiritual leaders’ in the process) and different levels of lay leadership to guide and assess the process. Clusters of around 12-15 congregations engage in the three year journey, with a possibility of a fourth year of learning and reinforcing the change. The PMC cluster meets for three times per year for three years, called Phases. Each year/phase contains three, two day events where the spiritual leaders reflect with the delivery team for a day (Friday) and then everyone meets together on a Friday evening and Saturday. Each year/phase also has a different focus;

Phase One: Discovery

This could best be described as a time of learning to listen and “arriving where we are”. We listen to Scripture, our congregations and our communities – and for the leading of the Spirit of God in allowing ourselves to be shaped and formed for sending into the world. We also learn to listen to our partners, those who help us understand ourselves and the context in which we live and work. A number of inventories, self-studies and evaluations are used to take the pulse of each congregation or group, which will aid in the second phase of the project. Some of this data is collected locally and interpreted by a ‘reading team’ (and here the academy, St. John’s College is involved in developing and reflecting upon this data).

Phase Two: Experimenting

The discoveries of the first year’s work are translated into experiments.

After learning about who we are, where we live and who we are sent to, the next logical step is to take action. The information uncovered during the first step will hopefully lead us into developing experiments for innovating missional transformation. This involves more risk taking, and while not every risk will be rewarded, there is as much to learn from the mistakes as from the successes.

Phase Three: Visioning for Embodiment

In phase 3 congregations will begin moving toward living in God’s preferred and promised future. After discovering and learning from the successes and failures of the experimenting phase, churches and their leaders will develop their own plans for congregational transformation, and will better know how to focus attention and energy toward attaining those goals.

Phase Four: Learning and Growing (Optional)

All through the process clergy and lay leaders have been involved in developing spiritual disciplines and recognize ways to grow leadership within their congregations. Many congregations realize at the end of Phase Three that they were just at the beginning of significant and long lasting change. There are many ways for them to move forward and continue the journey of learning, experimenting, planning and effectively executing their plans. Some clusters elect to continue using Church Innovation services for a fourth year of learning and growing and reinforcing the changes and the new practices of spiritual discernment.

What happens for a given congregation?

The PMC process is designed to help congregations grow in many ways by developing:

- a God-centered, biblical vision for mission
- a greater sense of God's activity in their congregation and community
- ownership of the mission of the congregation by more members
- members committed to and capable of making disciples
- both a vision for mission and a practical plan of action to achieve it
- the particular strengths of the tradition of the congregation
- practical skills for managing change and attending to conflict
- dramatic expansion of lay involvement
- a decision process for planning activities and budget
- a faithful and hospitable congregation
- relationships with other Partner congregations

Fifteen years of research from the U.S.A. on the PMC process have learned that congregations *who stay in through all phases of the partnership* showed a . . .

- 17% median growth in worship attendance over a 5 year period
- 77% correlation to the longevity of pastorate
- 64% correlation to growth in adult conversions
- 74% correlation to increased lay leader base
- 73% correlation to increased participation of young adults after confirmation/high school
- 62% correlation to developing a new constituency base in situations of high social change

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What do we mean by “Missional Church”?

What does the word “missional” mean?

Being missional is more than just doing more social service activities or increasing the membership of a church. Being missional affects everything that a church does and is. Missional describes the character of the church.

In a missional church, mission is not one among many activities. It is instead an intention that is demonstrated throughout the life of the church. A missional church looks for how **God** is in mission in the world today in light of how it knows God has worked in the past, especially through Jesus Christ. A missional church chooses to **join God in that mission in the world**, to let God call it and send it in that mission.

A missional church knows that a part of its calling is to provide for the world a glimpse of God's future, to be a sign of God's reign.