



Director of Congregational Excellence, Rev. Dr. Dale White Continues the Fresh Expressions Conversation

Did you realize that 60% of Americans don't go to church on a regular basis? Despite the fact that a large amount of our resources are poured into our Sunday services, seeking to attract people to "lively" worship with new trendy coffee bars and other means of innovation, only about half the population will ever enter our doors, and even less on a long term basis. In a previous article ([click the link here to review](#)), we introduced Fresh Expressions. Fresh Expressions United Methodist (FXUM) is a movement to expand our church to use both traditional services as well as innovative forms of church to live out Christ's mission. One does not replace the other, but rather creates a mutual benefit for both—a "mixed economy of church." [The previous article](#) listed the first three critical stages in the FXUM process: 1) Listening to the community; 2) Loving people; 3) Building a community.

Once we have listened/loved/built community, there are a few key stages needed to solidify a FXUM ministry:

STAGE FOUR: EXPLORING DISCIPLESHIP

"Leaders patiently look for opportunities to introduce discipleship to the group. Often the best way for this to happen is to leave the social gathering untouched, inviting folks who have become a part of the group to come to an additional gathering with a simple element of discipleship. To become a disciple of Jesus means to become a learner of Jesus, and as we learn from Jesus we begin to live like him."

STAGE FIVE: CHURCH TAKING SHAPE

“Faith communities that connect with post-Christian neighbors gradually add elements of church. As opposed to a new church’s launch Sunday, where all the marks of church are present from the start, we start with one or two elements (e.g., prayer, scripture study, or community) and, over time, add more elements until a complete picture of church is realized.”

STAGE SIX: DOING IT AGAIN–REPEAT!!

“By keeping ecclesiology simple, members can start their own fresh expressions and, very soon, a network of fresh expressions takes shape. Since gatherings are more communal in nature, fresh expressions grow by multiplying. The shift from one gathering to a network of gatherings will require creating a system of support and accountability for the leaders. A support system might look like a monthly check-in led by a pastor on staff at the church or a collaborative team of fresh expression leaders who offer support to one another.” (© 2024 Fresh Expressions)

One more thing....the Church doesn’t have to be a “stationary” institution. Churches can actively move to people, and develop naturally among them as a fresh expression. What might “a moveable church” look like in your context?”

In a future article, we will share some exciting models of Fresh Expressions which have been developed in the Valley Ridge District, the Virginia Annual Conference, and across the nation!! And as always, your District Team, as well as pastors and laity across the Valley Ridge District, are a rich resource for growing a Fresh Expression and expanding your church ministries.

Lenten Blessings,

Dale White

