

What is an Anglican fresh expression of Church? - Ten Criteria

The Church of England's research & statistics department use the following definition. A fresh expression is any venture that works mainly with non-churchgoers and aims to become church. A fresh expression is ...

1. Missional – it intends to work with non-churchgoers
2. Contextual – it seeks to fit the context
3. Formational – it aims to form disciples
4. Ecclesial – it intends to become church

Church Army's Research Unit have taken this further:

- 1 Is this a **new and further group**, which is **Christian and communal**, rather than an existing group modified, adapted or changed?
- 2 Has the starting group tried to **engage with non church goers**? There was intention to create a fresh expression of Church (fxC) not to do an outreach project from an existing church. The aim was to help the Christians sent out to start the fxC to understand a culture and context and adapt to fit it, not make the local/indigenous people change and adapt to fit into an existing church context.
- 3 Does the community meet **at least once a month**?
- 4 Does it have a **name** that helps give it an identity? An active search, not yet yielding a name, is allowed.
- 5 Is there **intention to be Church**? This could be the intention from the start, or by a discovery on the way. This admits the embryonic fxD (fx of Developing community) and cases of fxE (fx of Evangelism) and even some fxW (fx of Worship). The key is that it is *not* seen as a bridge back to 'real church', but as Church in its own right.
- 6 Is it **Anglican** or an Ecumenical project which includes an **Anglican partner**? 'Anglican' here means the Bishop welcomes it as part of the diocesan family¹, not whether it only uses centrally authorized worship texts, or has a legal territory (parish).
- 7 Is there some form of **leadership** recognised by those within the community and also by those outside of it?²
- 8 Do at least the majority of members (who are part of the public gathering) see it as **their major expression** of being church?
- 9 Are there **aspirations for the four creedal 'marks' of church, or ecclesial relationships**: 'up/holy, in/one, out/apostolic, of/catholic'? We see the two dominical sacraments (communion & baptism) as a given consequence of the life of a missional community which follows Jesus, but not the sole or even best measure of being church.
- 10 Is there the **intention to become '3 self'** (self-financing, self-governing and self-reproducing)? These factors may look different in each local context, but are some marks of advancing ecclesial maturity. They are not to be interpreted as indicators of congregationalist independency, or breakaway tendencies, but of taking responsibility.

Application of the criteria:

Examples that do not meet criteria 1-7 are deemed to not be Anglican fresh expressions of Church. Factors in criteria 8-10 may be more like 'health' or developmental issues; their absence may indicate the need for further maturing, present weaknesses and/or dangers, but not necessarily exclusion. The presence of these factors is healthy and indicates maturing.

Variables in the criteria:

- We still consider examples that have since died, but lasted at least 2 years of life.
- Contextualisation of all criteria; thus no. 5 does not require public use of the word 'Church' where it was unhelpful in the context, but it does need an understanding that this is what is forming.

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¹ This instinct is early: cf Ignatius, 'but whatever he (the Bishop) approve, this is also pleasing to God.' Smyrna. VIII

² Jay argues from pre 3rd century texts that 'the possession of an ordered and recognized ministry is integral to the nature of the Church.' Eric G. Jay, *The Church its Changing Image through 20 Centuries*, Vol 1 (London: SPCK, 1977) p. 49.