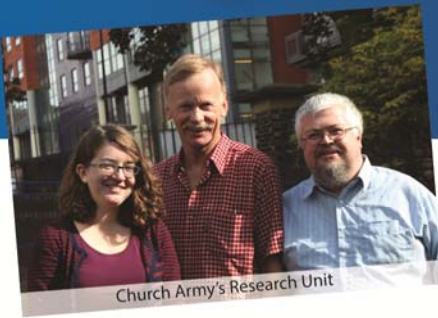


snapshots

stories from the edge

by Church Army's Research Unit



Issue 2: Surprises in a normal setting

by George Lings –
Research Unit Leader

Why tell this sort of story?

Snapshots is intentionally continuing the tradition of *Encounters on the Edge* – a series of booklets previously produced by Church Army's Research Unit that reported on different types of fresh expressions of Church (fxC). Over the years, sometimes the series covered unusual fxC which widened the variety known to exist; their scope, history and values helpfully stretched the boundaries of our understanding.

Other stories were examples whose strength was that they modelled in practice what was within the range of many other churches and could be translated into other contexts.

Why does this latter kind matter? We now know from the Church Army's Research Unit 2012-2013 survey of all the known fxC in ten dioceses that fxC make up between 5-30% of the church communities, with the average so far being 15%. This suggests that they have already become more than the icing on the Church of England cake. But is that percentage enough?

There is wide acceptance that the majority of the population is disconnected from traditional church. Moreover, all the evidence suggests this non-churched segment of society will increase over time, as the younger generations have far less awareness of a practising Christian faith, or the content of the Bible, or experience of meeting the church community, let alone being part of one. In this scenario, churches created to make contact with them and able to start nearer to where they are, make up only 15% of the whole picture. This looks rather inadequate.

As a national Church we are still putting most of our resources into working with existing congregations and hoping their quality and draw will be enough. By contrast there are still only the small minority who are investing spiritual, human and financial resource into starting a wider range of churches. Yet those recently started are finding on average that for every one person deployed, two and a half others come to what has been devised and start down the road to encountering Jesus and becoming his followers.

Its relative simplicity is part of the attraction

Enablers of mission in one diocese in the Midlands have the bold goal that by 2030 the ratio of traditional and fxC will be 50:50. Part of making that sort of aspiration into reality will be the pressing need to uncover stories that can prompt further churches to say to themselves: "We could start something a bit like that." Fun-Key Church is such an example. Its relative simplicity is part of the attraction.



The context of Fun-Key Church in Yorkshire

The market town of Richmond

It is at least curious, having argued part of what we need is examples that could be applied elsewhere, that when I arrived and began to learn more about the context, one of the things I was told was the town name, Richmond, was copied from the Norman example Richemont. It is thought to be the most commonly copied town name, in no less than 57 other places worldwide. I had an early part of my education in Richmond, Surrey. Coincidences are notoriously hard to discern in guidance, so let this one be an entertainment or a message to any who will hear it as such.

The town of fewer than 10,000 people picked up a "Town of the Year" award in 2009 and is justly proud of its features: an early and substantial Norman castle, its very large cobbled marketplace area, its early theatre still in use, and its many 17th and 18th century buildings. These go back to the wealth created by the woollen industry and lead mining in Swaledale, a prosperity that led to a railway terminus being built relatively early in 1846. Standing on the river Swale, it is a gateway to the northern Dales, and today tourism is a major contributor to the economy. Current investment is demonstrated by the imaginative conversion of the long closed railway terminus to shops, cafés and two cinemas. Some readers of *Snapshots* will have seen Richmond for themselves, others through watching episodes of the vet series *All Creatures Great and Small*.

Equally substantial economically and historically are its long and live links to the army, who are based three miles south at Catterick. It is the largest British army garrison. Despite reduction in overall army numbers, those remaining are to be concentrated in fewer places and this is one of them, set to grow by 2020 to more than 25,000 military personnel. The historic regiment based here is the Green Howards and the town has a museum of that name and the parish church has a chapel dedicated to them. Both in the past and present Catterick-based army lads met Richmond lasses and only St Mary's is big enough for large civic and military events such as Remembrance Sunday.

Overall, it is a town with a proud and distinctive traditional feel; there are some historic roads closed to traffic, a good number of listed buildings, niche shops but only one small supermarket. Some social diversity comes because to its north and east there is more recent housing, including more utilitarian

accommodation built by the local authority. It all makes for a classic Anglican setting.

St Mary the Virgin

The church serves as parish church to the whole town, with the vicar as mayor's chaplain. For historic reasons it is on the eastern edge of the town on the way to the station. This sense of its location being slightly outside the centre of civic life is explained by it being predated by nearer church buildings: a castle chapel and also a monastic foundation. A few parts of the building date back to the 12th century and the choir pews are grand and ancient, but in its present form it is dominated by the 1860 restoration by Gilbert Scott in gothic style.

In the 1970s a low platform and nave altar were introduced and in the 1990s some rear pews were removed to make a little social space for refreshments. The church, surrounded by a closed graveyard, is very much its own space in the overall townscape and is built on sloping ground. From a planning viewpoint, it would be forbidden to build extensions and so its present size and shape is a given. This factor and fixed pews, limits how much it can offer wider functions than gathering for worship.



As one might expect in the Anglican civic church of a traditional town, the musical tradition is strong. The robed choir consists of young and old of both genders. They set the tone for the pattern of morning services, in that three weeks of the month are choral Eucharist. The acoustics are good and the church is often used for concerts, such as brass bands or recitals.

I was only able to attend the 4th Sunday which is styled as an all age Eucharist.¹ At this service the

¹ All age Eucharist is normally the third Sunday in the month, but was changed this month to fit with Mothering Sunday.

choir and a small band, are not robed. With their conductor they are located in the south aisle. The sung music was very accessible to me, with tunes from 1960 to 1990, although some words were of older well-known hymns. An anthem both began and ended the service, but *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* and *You Shall Go Out With Joy* were more popular in style. I was told a number of the otherwise regulars don't come to this service, finding it far too modern.

I did a rough count and, excluding the choir, there were around 90 attenders, spread evenly in sanitised Anglican distance from one another at about 2-3 people per 8-10 seater pew. Very clearly most of the attenders had been retired some years, with the addition of a few people in their forties. The service was pleasant and accessible; it was kept moving by the leader's relaxed but not casual style, which fostered the existing sense of community. Yet it did not take much imagination to realise that in 10-20 years' time most of those present will have died and, as far as one could see, not be replaced.



Poignantly a baptismal party were also present, but noticeably silent when it came to the hymns. Some of the family had live links to St Mary's but, if typical of the age group, most of them would be non-churched. The service leader gallantly and appropriately explained the points of major symbolism in the service, but it was not difficult to feel though the baptismal party were in the building, but you would hardly say they were gripped.

Whenever we take a record of a fxC for our database, we ask what motives led to it being started. In the case of Fun-Key Church it included two of the three most commonly selected reasons: providing increased diversity and the existence of an unreached people group. The morning worship I attended was congenial and I was suitably welcomed and looked after, but I could see that if

this was the informal end of the normal diet at St Mary's there was a need for something else to widen still further the styles offered and to connect with younger generations. Hoping choir membership in younger years will tick all those boxes and provide adequately for the future I find unconvincing, however well I freely admit it can work for a few.

Fun-Key unpacked

The starting story with its surprises

When the previous incumbent left and John Chambers was appointed in 2010, the parish profile seeking the new priest highlighted the need of the church to engage at all ages with the wider community. In one sense there were links already, but they were outwards to the local secondary and primary schools and to the military and civic authorities. There was much less return traffic. How would this begin to change for the better?

Founding stories can be marked by
apparent coincidences

Early in 2012, building upon some history of aspirations for youth work in the wider area, a deanery event for young people was under consideration. It was obvious that Richmond itself was the geographical and social hub for the area, but St Mary's church was thought to lack facilities so the idea appeared to stall. Nonetheless, the vicar and a few others decided to have a go and host an event, billed as for the deanery, and a few from the wider area were among those who came. Founding stories can be marked by apparent coincidences and that is true here. Scott Lunn, husband of Gillian, is a senior teacher in a local secondary school, a reader at St Mary's and has experience of wider youthwork. However, he was laid up following a bicycle accident and his wife Gillian, quite unused to doing things up front though happy to be in the background editing the parish magazine, suddenly found herself at the sharp end of making decisions and taking roles at the front of the house. It was quite striking how a number of people during my visit remarked that one of the significant changes of the last three years is what Gillian has found she has grown into. Neither they nor she would have believed it possible. Yet as I heard some of her earlier story, it was not difficult to imagine that, as a mortgage advisor, she would need a mixture of people skills and the ability to make decisions that balance risk with encouraging others to take responsible steps

forward. I could also see how all such experience was not wasted.

Another similar strand in the tapestry of this story is that the person who is now Gillian's co-conspirator, Claire Murray, was another backroom operator. She only recently become the parish administrator, paid nine hours a week, though in practice nearly working full-time. Claire joined this fledgling venture at the last moment having seen it mentioned in the church news sheet. You might say in this case the hour has produced the women.



I find an enduring and encouraging strand of fxC is the opportunity they furnish for new and untried people to do new things. They also have a consistent capacity to provide a context in which these people are surprised by what they find they are able to do. They generate a space that is open enough to try things that are different from the past, a space in which future working colleagues can be found. It is almost a playground where the importance of success and failure is less charged than in established and, one must add, more critical church communities. Our national finding, from over 500 researched examples across 10 dioceses, is that 40% of all fxC led by lay people without formal training or diocesan authorisation. They are apprentices learning skills as they go, doubtless learning by mistakes made, yet pleasurably surprised that as fresh-faced imposters they are getting by, and that what they are doing seems to be working most of the time. This delight is accompanied sometimes by quite a sense of vulnerability. On a research visit I try not to be an Ofsted inspector, but I suppose I do carry a reputation. Here I did meet concern that I might think what was being done was too simple, not thought through enough, not high enough quality, let alone worthy to be written up. Perhaps I have slowly learnt a little about the biblical value of assessing things by their fruits, not by their packaging, publicity or

outward persona, nor even whether the style is one I myself would use. So I sit back, watch and learn.

With others, Gillian Lunn, Claire Murray and John and Liz Chambers ran *Exploring Easter* in March 2012, ostensibly as a one-off for the deanery youth, but in practice it was mainly St Mary's people and their contacts who made up the 75 or so who came, drawing adults as well as children. The expectation was that there might be another event three months later. But up came the question: "Why wait that long?" John Chambers and Scott Lunn both gave "Go for it" responses. But what was this suddenly new born and almost unknown animal?

They wondered if it was the local version of Messy Church, but discarded that as their own shape was different. It didn't include a family meal and they didn't want to uncritically adopt the classic Messy Church shape. I see both similarities in values, as well as differences in shape. Lucy Moore and her colleagues have consciously avoided trying to control all adaptations and outcomes and I am confident she would rejoice in what has flourished here, without wishing to own it.

It is almost a playground where the importance of success and failure is less charged than in established ... church communities

Interestingly, several times I was told by different people, "We didn't do this in order to start a fresh expression of Church." I find that rather refreshing. A curse of the growing popularity of this loose movement and its vocabulary, is the label is misapplied both to new events for Christians and to mission outreach projects designed to bring newcomers back to existing church. Neither of those aspirations is wrong, they just aren't what a fxC is. Sadly the label is also mischievously applied to pieces of existing work to make them sound better. There is no sniff of any of that in this story. The aims were simple: it was about attracting people who would not normally come to church; providing for those who struggle with the formality of existing church. As the name Fun-Key Church implies, it was to be understood as being church for those people. The term 'fresh expression of Church' is but the label for what occurs when those two aims, being missional and being ecclesial, combine.

A name with a message

When I first heard the name, I thought it might be spelt "Funky" – as a possibly cool variant on the Messy, Sweaty and Trashy Church names and the examples of each that I knew. There is more to it than that and greater simplicity too. One of their sayings is "fun is key to learning". If that is nuanced more, to avoid the danger of the name appearing to endorse triviality, the thought is that when people are absorbed in the fun of what they are doing, learning is not far away. It is one application of the awareness of kinaesthetic learning. We learn by doing, and because part of being human is the capacity, indeed necessity of work, good work is, in these senses, fun. Comedy and humour is another source of learning and that too is linked to "good clean fun" - i.e. the humour is not cruel or crude. It has not been common to associate Christians with fun. At best they have been thought serious, more likely to be dull, and possibly determined to prevent people enjoying themselves. To make this connection to fun is to seek to correct that image.



The Fun-Key name was chosen out of a now forgotten short list and it has stuck. The leaders tell me they have seldom met the potential criticism of triviality from others. This may be because there is emphasis on the strapline, the message that goes out on all the publicity, that Fun-Key Church is about fun, faith and fellowship for all ages. There is more than entertainment going on. The leaders are aware of the balance to be held in giving a nod to today's entertainment culture but not being captured by it. So a few Fun-Key months will deliberately have a quirky element, such as the four lambs in church as a memorable centre point to the month, with the dreadful, and therefore memorable, pun in the theme title: "God loves ewe".

The Fun-Key shape

There is a simple and strong shape to the Sunday afternoon gathering – as characterises all

sustainable liturgy. From 2.30pm onwards the church is being prepared by the team for the variety of stations and activities. From 3.40pm adults and children begin to arrive. There are hot and cold drinks available and people are free to wander and see what has been set up already. At 4.00pm a bell rings to gather people from around the building. There is a welcome which includes setting the theme of the day. A linked prayer, song, Bible reading and short talk on the theme follow. Then the activities of the month are introduced, including the options for quiet and for discussion. Adults and children are free to split up or go together. After 10-15 minutes, depending on the theme and month, a bell brings them back for another song, hearing feedback from the activities and underscoring why they were chosen. The theme and date for next time is given, together with any other community news. A closing song and prayer follows, and in theory by 4.45pm it is done, but sometimes people hang on for some time afterwards. If I were to classify such a shape it probably falls within labels like "all age" and "liquid" worship (where worship services are created around a series of zones that participants visit in an order of their choosing). If a label helps, the latter is what the team think fits best.

What makes Fun-Key Church work here?

I have shown that the area served is a respectable market town, the church building has some limitations and the existing congregation is mainly elderly and values traditional worship. I can imagine those factors in operation elsewhere. So how has this happened here?

An enabling incumbent

One factor is that John Chambers is a permission giving incumbent. Ordained in later life after a career in business, he easily recognises good ideas, spots people with potential and wants to see them released. Throughout the story one of his roles has been to listen and to respond with enthusiasm and encouragement. "Go for it" is one of his characteristic sayings. Another is "There's no such thing as failure". By this he does not fundamentally deny its existence, but rather that a culture of some risk is good and there is always learning to be unearthed if things go differently from what was planned. Also having a level of optimism, and freedom from a culture of over inspection and criticism, helps grow the confidence of colleagues.

As such he fits with the direction that the wider Church must take over the roles of its full-time ordained clergy. Steven Croft's 1999 book *Ministry*

in Three Dimensions holds together three roles: the undergirding diaconal or serving role, the local leadership role and the wider role of *episcopate* or overseeing. Both the shortage of full-time clergy, the frequency of them looking after more than one church and now also the birth of a greater diversity of church communities mean it is the *episcopate* role which is coming to the fore.

Many years ago Paul Bayes enabled me to grasp that the core of this task is about seeing. The words telescope, microscope and periscope share a root with *episcopate*. It is no accident that we also speak of overseers and supervision. All these words are dominantly about the visual. So *episcopate* is less about doing, and more about seeing what needs to be done and that it is done. John is comfortable with that *episcopate*. He – and his wife Liz – are regular members of the monthly planning group of Fun-Key Church; he is often one presenter at it, but not seen as the central animator or the month-by-month leader.

It is the *episcopate* role which is coming to the fore

He has also exercised another *episcopate* role, that of being the focus of unity. His active presence and support is part of legitimating Fun-Key's existence within the family of congregations that make up St Mary the Virgin, Richmond. He is one who is very clear that it is Church. Several fxC labour under unfortunate labels. The worst might be "experiment" which takes them down to the level of white rats in a laboratory. Being merely "services" traps them in being understood only as a worship option and a rather passive event led from the front, rather than being seen as a more fully orbed participative community-in-mission who also worship. Being called a "congregation" is better, as the communal is being acknowledged, but the same overall church may still call its 10.30am service "the main congregation" and then the power dynamics are all too clear to see.

Starting out by calling it "church" is usually extremely helpful, setting down quite clearly both what it is and exactly what it aspires to mature as. Accordingly when a baptism request arose within the Fun-Key Church, it took place there. In due time the request for Fun-Key communion will not come amiss. The discernment will be about when that is apt. John's *episcopate* instinct to embody unity and to value diversity was very neatly marked, in that the same Sunday in April 2012 that saw the birth of Fun-Key Church was the same date that saw the fruition of a consultation leading

to the beginning of the 17th century *Book of Common Prayer* (BCP) being used at the early morning communion service.

One sign of the effectiveness of this legitimating role was the comment from a senior member of St Mary's and indeed a pillar of Richmond society: "You know me, vicar, I don't like change, unless it works." This man then paid for the large publicity banner for Fun-Key that is erected monthly in the churchyard. In fairness to how wide and deep such recognition goes, it is thought there is a variety of opinion among the other traditional members. Some, like this man cited, are pleased that Fun-Key is working but are quite clear it is not for them. Some are even clear it is not intended as a feeder to "real church". Others really don't get what it is about and may still think it is just for children, but because it happens at another time of day, and in that sense runs in parallel with traditional church, they are content to operate a live and let live policy.

The challenge following such a wide and positive lead is: what will happen when the time comes for John Chambers to retire? How deeply is Fun-Key Church seen as some equal partner at the table with the 10.00am Eucharistic congregation? It has no legal status, though it covers much of its running costs, nor does it have official representation. At present both Gillian Lunn and Claire Murray are on the bi-monthly PCC, but it is notable this is because of their other church roles. The mugshots on the otherwise excellent "Who does what?" board in the church is similarly blind to Fun-Key's existence. It is good that in practice Gillian and Claire regularly bring a report to the PCC on the major developments at Fun-Key Church, but it is unfortunate this is tabled on the agenda as part of the children's work. Such a designation patronises it. That needs to change to reflect, at the level of the PCC acting as the local consultative church legal process, what is true theologically. It is good to report this change has taken place since my visit. Fun-Key Church is Church, within the family of churches that make up St Mary's.

Moreover, when the time comes to choose the next incumbent, what assurance will be given about the equal rights of the BCP, Fun-Key and 10.00am congregations to exist and how will that be reflected in the parish profile, and even more in the representation choices and the questions put at interview to candidates? I hope these issues of deep recognition across the overall local church will be resolved well in the next few years.

An effective planning group

There are a number of levels at which planning works. Gillian and Claire are good friends, as are their children. Their gifts are complementary. Gillian does details; she is also a connector who uses her blog almost as a public diary of Fun-Key Church's life.² Facebook and email are used frequently to maintain contact with the Fun-Key Church community and they carry the publicity of the next meeting. Claire is the encourager but someone who sifts others' thoughts. She is practical and creative and in effect heads up those activities that would be called craft. Together they live Fun-Key, seeing each other almost every other day.

They bounce future ideas and resources off each other via Pinterest – a pinboard-style photo sharing website. They also email the other planning team members with a few outline first thoughts about the next Fun-Key Church, but these are understood by all to be provisional and changeable. The planning meeting, that can involve eight people, will be a week or so after the last gathering and two to three weeks before the next one. It always includes what they call a "wash up", meaning a review of what went well. This at the very least means asking whether all that they planned served the theme, quite apart from did it work in practice? They also ask what they could do better and therefore what should be changed now. I was impressed that they readily knew what lessons they had learnt over the two years of the existence of Fun-Key Church.

The theme is a given, to the extent that it follows what arises from the lectionary readings. This itself is a sign of continuity across the congregations of St Mary's and in continuity with the longer tradition of the wider Church. As with all lectionaries, it provides a discipline and a balance that goes wider than the interests and passions of the current leadership. Only living with such a scheme for a few years will reveal what mixture of lectionary and being open to what arises from the life of Fun-Key Church itself, is required. Already there is some adaptation from a fixed lectionary in that they are finding that holding an annual pet service works. However, it is no official part of the church year, engaging as it may be.

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<http://funkeychurchatstmarysrichmond.wordpress.com>

Supporting the Fun-Key Church community digitally

I began to sense this was important when I found I was included in the round robin email telling me the next Fun-Key Church was happening soon, and reminding me what the theme was. Gillian Lunn uses different aspects of digital communication to serve a variety of Fun-Key Church aspects. There is the Pinterest website which acts as a picture board of ideas games and activities that aid the planning process, including its choice of future activities. She and Claire might be the main users. The Facebook page works to give local people connection to what is happening and there are some "Funkies" on it in regular communication with the rest of the group. Twitter is used as a learning medium where brief comment on what has been done goes out and requests for ideas and resources can be made. Texting is used to give people a reminder of the next Fun-Key Church meeting nearer the time. Richmond Church of England Primary School help by sending a global text to all parents and Gillian uploads further details to the events section of the school website. Afterwards, emails go out from Gillian thanking team members for their contributions.

Communication in these ways creates a different culture of invitation and inclusion to that conveyed by pieces of paper and personal visits. It makes Fun-Key an offering, never a demand. There is a "come and see if you fancy" feel that seems appropriate when in contact with those considering starting to come and those who in the past may have been hurt by their church experience or simply never had one. It fits too with today's culture of deferred decision making, enabled by a technology that can keep options open until the last minute.

In addition there is the blog,³ written by Gillian after each month. It acts as some sort of diary of the evolving life of the church and a chronicle of its activity and ongoing learning. It is read more widely than the Facebook portal, though feeding it, and the blog entries lead to threads of discussion on topics that come up. She feels some tension about this as to whether it is the official Fun-Key blog or merely her own thoughts written large.

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<http://funkeychurchatstmarysrichmond.wordpress.com>

However, I note that at the beginning Christianity gained four Gospels pointing away from the author and yet we have named them after the person deemed by the early Church to be the author. It seems that there is an enduring Christian link between the eternal and the particular, the universal and the personal, the greatest story and individual witness to it. So while Gillian would prefer by temperament to be invisible in the background, she finds herself in the vulnerable position of being the instigator of conversation about Fun-Key Church, the hub person to whom others respond and in effect its digital chronicler.

Learning lessons as you go

These lessons divide into ones from process and ones from content. Without the first, the second might not be discovered either easily or at all. From the beginning the leaders sought and gave attentive listening to feedback from those who came. This would be gathered via conversation, or watching behaviour, not via any sort of filling in a satisfaction form. Body language and where and how people interact in the building and during the meeting – these are all valid feedback, as well as comments made. The other half of the process is the “wash up” that is designed to hear and sift all this. I suspect this intentional attention to feedback, in the context of an analytical yet supportive team, helps this devoted and sharing team to keep its freshness.

Attention to feedback ... helps this devoted team to keep its freshness

Also in the process side is learning to live with the pressure points of this sort of young church. Fears that lurk and assert their voice include: “Will anyone come this month?” The day I visited was Mothering Sunday and the question was real. Across the two years of its life, Fun-Key Church saw an early pattern of many people engaging, then some drop off, then more recently consolidation and newer growth. Another pressure point is whether the technology will work.

Actually Fun-Key Church is relatively low tech. A laptop and data projector displays a few images, the section headings and the words for communal songs. Most of the activities are hand-made. By the nature of this operation another fear is whether all the team members remember their roles and the timings. Perhaps equally sharp for inexperienced leaders is the question of whether both the short talk and the live response to what emerged in the activities hit the spot. Lastly are two perennial questions: what shall we do next

month, and how do we develop depth on a monthly pattern?

Some lessons have acted to reinforce choices made. For example, choosing to gather on the last Sunday of the month works as such a date is clear enough. The Sunday afternoon works well for younger families, being long enough after Sunday lunch to welcome drinks and nibbles and early enough before the beginnings of bed time. Locally more sport happens on a Saturday, so that clash experienced elsewhere is less acute.

More lessons were modifications to practice and even the invention of new practices. One way to note them would be across the shape of the meeting, from its start to its close.

They found the need to ensure a welcome occurred inside the church, not just given at the door. For those unused to church, receiving a hello and a piece of paper (such as a notice sheet) is inadequate. Better to multiply the number of welcomers and for each one to take arrivals to where the drinks are being served and perhaps even introduce them to others or show them one of the pre-meeting activities. Only then would the welcome return to the door. I have found a more personal ministry also needs some careful thought about which volunteers would be best suited to this friendly role of welcoming.

They have found that putting something to drink into people’s hands is powerful in helping them to relax. Somehow holding a drink is an emotional comfort, not just a thirst quencher. As early as the second gathering they resolved that drinks must be there as people arrive, rather than the culturally strange church custom of dispensing them at the close of the meeting. At just the right moment, the Mothers’ Union offered to serve refreshments so they could be playing a practical role on the day, in addition to their much appreciated prayer support.

Putting something to drink into people’s hands is powerful in helping them to relax

Many other fxC concur with this change of timing of drinks, which is to notice how society functions and so how people are put at ease. Taking this further, they made an extra change that drinks should be available throughout the gathering. I imagine this contributes to making a more homely atmosphere. It also frees parents to walk about the whole building in clearer conscience with

fractious children. Such movement is congruent with the term “liquid worship” and with the deliberate use of the many spaces within this church building.

The use of these spaces is deliberate but has also undergone development. There are the nave, the chancel and sanctuary, the Green Howards chapel, an area in front of it which is often used by a band, the space around the unusually placed font at the top of the north aisle, the long thin open space at the back, and a small area under the tower. The team have had to learn that some of these spaces are felt to be accessible and readily entered.

Others are not easily entered: for reasons of dim lighting, such as the Green Howards chapel; or lack of seats such as in the sanctuary; or a long and very public access route, traversing a ‘holy area’ like that surrounding the nave altar, in order to get to either the chancel or sanctuary. These considerations matter, especially at the time of the diverse activities. This can be compounded when an activity has an obvious beginning point such as a discussion or led meditation. It would take a very bold character to walk into a fresh space and in effect break up the flow of what was already in process.

However, other activities work much more like alternative worship stations where resources are available for individuals to arrive as and when they please. There they can create something, inspect a display, or ponder proffered content. People will easily walk at their own pace around something like an art gallery, but not easily join what they perceive as an already formed group. This variety is key in including spaces which are quieter. These can be a particular gift to parents seeking respite from the incessant demands of their children, seizing a precious moment when the children are both occupied and safe. This also meshes with the desire for depth at Fun-Key Church as well as pleasure and fun.

The activities are just as important as the sections led from the front. Their conviction is that people grow in Christ through doing. This applies partly to those who visit the activities, for what we *do* we remember long after what we *heard* is forgotten. It applies also to the team members who run them. In providing the activities and interacting with those who come to them, aspects of growing as apprentices or disciples of Jesus are present. Therefore the length of time given to activities remains under review and is likely to be extended. In the month I visited, the time taken for them extended beyond the 10-15 minutes in the planned shape and meant the overall worship

finished at 5.00pm, but without any sense of attenders wanting to get away earlier. Another way forward is the thought of a quarterly longer Fun-Key Church with substantial time for the activities section. One is planned for July, including a bring and share tea.

Lastly among lessons learnt is the importance of the closing section of each Fun-Key Church. Here the leader is engaged live with the congregation, drawing out from them what the activities helped them discover and made them think. Giving value to what participants have done affirms their journey of faith and acts to reinforce what has been done. It links the fun and the deeper purpose, it embodies a community learning together and it provides some feedback to the leaders about the effectiveness of that month as well as possible indicators towards the next one. It is a focus for an agile community learning as it goes.

Noting landmarks and evolving a living tradition

I was struck that Fun-Key Church has now been going long enough that it is slowly building a tradition. This happens in all groups: families, sports clubs, charities, churches. Two components of a living evolving tradition are memorable landmarks in its history and identifying rhythms that are characteristic of its values. Sometimes the first leads to the second, but not always.



One landmark has been the one-off visit of Archbishop John Sentamu in September 2012. He was invited by Janet Henderson, the then Archdeacon of Richmond, as one of the things he should see when visiting the area. He could only manage a Friday so an extra one-off Fun-Key Church was arranged. Despite struggling with illness, he fully engaged and clearly understood what Fun-Key Church was about. Naturally this has given it credibility, both locally and in the diocese.

Archdeacon Janet gave her active support via her blog, from the very start. Such permission giving and quasi authorisation, is invaluable to a new venture. Other landmarks have been the memorable if sometimes quirky months; the visit of the four lambs in April 2012 has been mentioned. Having a rescue golden eagle as part of the theme of God giving us wings, in February 2013, was another. At best it creates a tradition that makes demonstrable the value of making room for the surprising, because surprises can be helpfully memorable.



A landmark that is becoming a tradition was the first pet service in June 2012. Clearly popular, it was repeated in 2013 and again reached Richmond people more widely. In effect, this is becoming a local festival held at the church. It is capable of undue sentimentality but linked to a hopefully rising ecological responsibility. In an area where farming is important, how animals are treated is a significant issue today and in the biblical tradition could be taken back to Noah's ark. Other festivals, both Christian and those from folklore, do not fall conveniently on the last Sunday of the month. Fun-Key have taken the view that meeting in December is one Christmas event too many, but they have celebrated an Easter, a Bible Sunday and a Harvest, when the dates work.

Another element of building the tradition is they have started to notice certain songs and hymns keep coming back. Drawing on such items, in my view, creates a helpful balance between creativity and familiarity. It raises what some may find a strange thought, that fxC will grow traditions. Some might see that as the inexorable path from innovation to institution, or a lamented regression from man to mission, through movement to monument.

Questions around growing a tradition connect with what is the role of liturgy. My understanding is that human beings are made to seek patterns.

These indicate rhythms in our lives and help us in our search for meaning. Liturgical thinking is used to patterns and rhythms, but how does liturgy work? I think at heart, liturgy grows from values about how Christians relate with God. Those values in turn are expressed in shapes to worship, which only thirdly lead to the choice of texts to flesh out those shapes. That threefold order, I realise, is a reversal of how we thought 60 years ago. I believe this is another element to the faithful re-imagination of the Church in our day.

Those core values I suggest will at least comprise the following. The first is that God seeks to relate to us by revealing himself, supremely in Christ, and calling us to become increasingly like him. The second value is that we respond freely to this loving and undeserved divine initiative. A third is that this two-way encounter energises us into concern for others, not least those as yet unaware of God's initiative. A fourth value is humility to connect with, and learn from, others who have been engaged in this two-way relationship, either longer, or in richer ways. Some people reading this will immediately see these values in worship connect to the four creedal marks of the Church (one, holy, catholic and apostolic).

Therefore worship will make room in its shapes for how God addresses us, such as through the reading of the Scriptures, a form of explaining them, using some creedal material, and the more narrative sorts of songs. It may also make room for the spontaneous and contextual application of God's desire to direct our lives, that is broadly called the prophetic. Within the shape, other songs and most prayers will be in the nature of response in praise and adoration. This two-way interchange – God addressing us; us responding - is one way to understand the underlying shape of most Eucharistic worship that places word before sacrament. It equally questions how dynamic some "office based" liturgy can be in which the word comes quite late.

The third value, of concern for others, leads to intercession for them and space to interact with others. This might be at either end of the service or during the peace, but also leads to the importance of a deliberate sending out to God's world. The fourth value of wider humble connection is less to do with a shape and more to do with resources. It opens the store house of the songs and prayers of the past, gives access to the wide range of current prayer devised by others, and should lead to appreciative prayer for God's wider Church.

I realise that many local leaders of fxC are not aware of this theoretical framework to what liturgy is and how it works. It is then all the more striking when signs of them being drawn down that road seem to appear naturally. I think all churches do establish traditions and it was good to see that emerging here. The issues are whether these are healthy and balanced, whether they are alive and evolving accordingly to their values, or if such patterns are in effect ruts which are stuck and limiting. Learning to work well in evolving a tradition also signals a profound difference between the instincts to be fresh and to be novel. The former sits easily with growing a tradition, while the latter will reject it. Hence I remain totally committed to expressions of Church being fresh, but see scant value in them being merely novel.

As a result Fun-Key Church has created a further and different congregation in the overall family at Richmond. Attendance has oscillated with a variety of factors, including the weather, other attractions, family ups and downs and who knows what. From the records kept and discounting the mass turnout for the archbishop (and animals at the pet service), the 2012 average was around 70. Last year (2013) was thinner at around 50. In April this year I counted about 70. Usually the adults outnumber the under 16s, but occasionally that can revert. What is also significant is that the average age of the adults present would be perhaps 40 years younger than the Sunday morning congregation. This looks like a clear part of the future life of St Mary's.

Learning from the Hudswell story

St Mary Richmond is linked to St Michael and All Angels Hudswell, a linear village of some 80 dwellings, only two miles away. Concern for others and awareness that Fun-Key Church was creating a significant new younger congregation, led the team to wonder whether its ethos could be taken there, but expressed differently in a smaller and less flexible building. The village is noted for its inertia, in that most of its people there commute out of it and then retreat to their private houses. Church attendance was so marginal that it was almost pared back to the major festivals. The team began by listening to local people. It sounded like Sunday afternoon might work for them, but they requested an earlier start at 3.00pm using the village hall.. The series ran for seven months in 2013 but seldom drew more than 20, of which over half were the team. It was

decided to stop doing the services as it began to feel like the few who did come were only doing so out of duty.

The story contains disappointment as well as creditable flexibility and willingness to serve others. This includes the significant attitude of wanting to find what local people want. Yet it also shows that trying to export something good to elsewhere may not work. Consideration is being given to whether something starting further back, like a pub-based discussion, would be a more appropriate start. This might reveal whether there are village people prepared to take any next steps.

What's essential to this story?

- A sense of call, although this one sneaked up on them unawares;
- An enabling incumbent giving permission and providing *episcopate*;
- A few dedicated team members willing to risk, learn by doing, be changed in the process and willing to keep going;
- Feedback loops that really work and are attended to;
- A church building that contains a number of discrete and diverse spaces.

When most of those parameters are present then many other churches with mainly older congregations could also step out and discover more diverse ways forward.

Those wishing to make contact with Fun-Key Church and learn more can contact Gillian Lunn via Fun-Key Church on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/FunKeyChurchAtStMarysRichmondNorthYorkshire>). Or this could be done via her blog (<http://funkeychurchatstmarysrichmond.wordpress.com>).

A theoretical postscript

One reason for writing a continued series of stories is they provide me with a sketch pad to fling down some doodles of how our understanding of this young discipline of creating further churches continues to develop. Fun-Key Church has provided a particular learning point because it illustrates a wider question that is being asked and offers me a chance to contribute to a response.

A tricky course to steer and a tension to maintain

I have begun to notice there is what might be a paradox, but it may be only a tension, surrounding the whole phenomenon of fxC and the proper question of whether they deserve the honourable name of Church.

This surfaces because, in trying to chart their missional and ecclesial course, they meet a modern equivalent of the Scylla and Charybdis problem⁴ – avoiding a rock only to get sucked into a whirlpool. Therefore some critics can say they are not sufficiently like “church-as-we-have-known-it” to be counted as such. While yet other critics can dismiss them, saying we have seen such things before and therefore they have limited legitimacy because they are not different enough.



I want to argue that this apparently unfortunate combination of factors is precisely and inherently what is going on and why they are important. On the one hand the fxC are different from the traditional expressions of Church and here there is *change* from past practice. On the other hand, by looking at their inner dynamics, not just their outward forms, it can be seen that there is a legitimate claim of *continuity* with a deeper past. When I bring those two factors of change and continuity together, I sometimes refer to it as faithful re-imagination. Of course, just using those two words does not itself prove the re-imagination has been sufficiently faithful in every case, but it does set down what the goal is.

There is a sense in which this is working out and holding together two strands of the term “apostolic”. One of these is intentional holding onto the tradition given to the apostles, the faith once for all delivered to the saints. Yet the very term apostolic, at root in Greek meaning “sent” and so inherently missional, also impels Christians out from where they are, in order to engage with a context different from their own, and for the resultant fxC to take a specific shape within that context.

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Between_Scylla_and_Charybdis

We should expect both *continuity* and *change* to be present in apostolic mission

My understanding is that such a process is profoundly Christian because it is following the founding example of the divine Apostle, God the Son, being born of the Spirit and his mother Mary, as the first century Jewish male, Jesus of Nazareth. In his very identity we see both *continuity* and *change*. The continuity is centrally expressed in that the early Christians came to understand the Jesus they met was God the Son on earth. The change lies in that Jesus, the son of Mary, had not existed before and indeed God had not been a human before. While we cannot fully plumb the depths of how these two realities fully co-exist, we have learnt it is worse to divide, oppose or choose between them.

If we hold that our views about Jesus affect our understanding of church, I have come to think we should expect both continuity and change to be present in mission. If only one of these is present we will either slavishly hold with what has been done in the past, or have a sort of anarchy that so loves change that it does not fear disconnection with the wider Church. Neither route is promising or even truly Christian.

So I am not surprised that Fun-Key Church must live with both features. *Continuity* is expressed through the active presence of the vicar in the team, key team members also having roles in the overall church, purposeful use of the church building, employing a liturgical shape derived from values and reportage back to the sponsoring body. *Change* is embodied by the deeply participative nature of the gathering, a lay leadership and planning group, the use of digital media within and between gatherings, and the sense of a community learning how it worships and continues to conduct its ongoing mission. I now see better that it is deeply normal that both lists exist.

George Lings
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