

FCC CONNECTION

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CELEBRATING CONTINUITY – GREAT FRANCIS STREET – 150 YEARS OF WITNESS



The Great Francis Street Church of Christ meeting in Nechells, Birmingham, recently celebrated their 150th anniversary. The church began in 1871 as a church that wanted to meet the needs of the many poor people who were housed near to the city centre. The church grew strongly in those first few decades with a thriving membership and very active Sunday School. After the war, the City began a slum clearance programme and the entire area was demolished with huge implications for the membership.

Some members had already moved to better housing in the suburbs and those who had not moved were forced to move because of the clearance programme. A faithful remnant continued to commute back to the area for Sunday worship and other programmes. In the 1970's the church employed a full time minister for the first time and the church grew strongly for a time, particularly with people who lived nearby.

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That strong growth was difficult to maintain but the church continues to have a local presence. The ability of the church to maintain its witness over such a long period of time was celebrated with services on Sunday 26th September. It was a pleasure to welcome Chester and Angela Woodhall, Church of Christ missionaries based in South Africa and to hear Chester preach.

FCC CONNECT CONFERENCE (PART 2)



Last February we held the first part of our Connect Conference on Zoom. We promised to hold the second part in person and that will take place on Saturday 6 November 2021 at Rowheath Pavilion.

It is a delegate event though we will have some guests and observers present.

The main theme will be celebration. Several congregations will be welcomed in to FCC at this event, and it will be a delight to meet and encourage these new brothers and sisters.

In keeping with all that we report below, these new congregations are all relatively newly planted congregations. Between them we will witness an amazing diversity of membership. Ireland (for the first time), Scotland and England are all represented in the diversity of congregations joining FCC this year. This is a wonderful time of growth and celebration.

As FCC continues to grow and develop, we need people with particular skills to join the various committees. We are looking for those who are gifted in the areas of finance, administration, property, personnel (sometimes called human resources) and organisational skills. If you are such a person or know of someone who may be interested, please contact Lynda Robinson so that we can share more information about what is required Lynda.robinson@the-fcc.org. You can see the team that currently serve, and the list of committees/boards by accessing at the FCC website <https://the-fcc.org>

A NEW CHURCH COMING



As we emerge from Covid it's clear that there is a new church developing in the UK. There is much that is changing and those changes are impacting the shape of FCC.

- **Migrant churches.** Over the last thirty years there are thousands of churches being established by migrant communities that have arrived in Europe in recent decades. Congregations that are largely composed of members from various African, Asian, and South American nations are springing up, particularly in the cities of the UK. Some of these newly planted congregations are forming relationships with FCC and seeking to join us.
- **Intercultural churches.** As the children of migrants grow up as British citizens, some are finding that they don't entirely identify with the churches of their parents and are beginning to experiment with what it might be like to establish new churches that express the newly emerging intercultural life of the UK. A recent conference held in the centre of Birmingham brought together some guests from different parts of Birmingham and from the USA that sought to model what it might be like to establish multi-cultural churches in the UK.
- **Church planting.** Amidst all the activity of the various migrant based churches we are also witnessing the planting of churches that reach out to neighbourhoods that don't have enough churches who are seeking to reach out to those who have never attended church before. Sometimes, these churches begin in community centres, coffee bars, and re-purposed existing church buildings.
- **Re-planting.** On occasion some churches which have closed because the existing membership has declined are able to attract church planting teams that re-establish older works that needed a fresh input of leadership. These replanted churches often bring a fresh style of worship and community programmes that can impact existing communities.

CHANGING THE ATMOSPHERE – CHURCH PLANTING ACROSS EUROPE – CONFERENCE IN BERLIN



Two events held back-to-back in Berlin from 11-14 October 2021 explored the growing reality of church planting across Europe.

The first event, called NC2P (the National Church Planting Process), brought together national leaders from 15 different European nations to share with each other the progress that each nation is making in relation to church planting. One speaker noted that there is a new atmosphere right across Europe in relation to church planting. Ten years ago, church planting was not really on the agenda of most denominations but today

an increasing number of denominations are establishing church planting plans. The Church of England are planning to create 10,000 new worshipping communities in England over the next ten years. That is an astonishing goal.

The leaders from Norway shared how church planting has actually reversed the decline of the church in that nation.

Over the last 20 years, 400 new churches have opened and 20-25% of all the active church members in Norway are members of these new churches. 4,000 church planters were recruited.

Raphael Anzenberger from France (on the left) challenged other nations to follow the lead of Norway.

The second event – Exponential gathered 150 church planting practitioners, sharing experiences, pointing to resources, new strategies and programmes all designed to encourage a move towards churches that plant churches in a multiplication approach. The keynote speaker, Dave Ferguson, is the leader of a large church in Chicago that is part of the wider FCC family.

MISSION IS NOT ALWAYS ABOUT MOVING

Sally Mann



*Sally Mann is an ordained Baptist Minister at **Bonny Downs Church** in East London. She is also a part-time university lecturer in sociology at the University of Greenwich, and is part of the editorial team of the **Journal of Missional Practice (JMP)**.*

As a born and bred EastEnder, Sally Mann fears the suburbs and loves the grit and grace of local, 'no-facade' people. Given the pace of change in the inner city, she argues that there is something heroic about engaging with place by staying put. A Baptist minister in Newham where her family come from, she makes a compelling case, drawing on her own deep experience as well as theologians including Brueggemann and Newbigin.

My family have lived in the same four streets in the East End of London for five generations, serving the local community through the same church, Bonny Downs Baptist. My family have become conspicuous by our very lack of movement. I had wondered if my family's enduring call to the East End wasn't best described as a lack of imagination.

I hadn't really paid much attention to this until a few years ago.

At one time mission meant moving; sending, exile and crossing cultural boundaries inferred physical journeys. The 'sent out' were the pioneers. But according to John Perkins I am a 'remainder'. I could possibly be a 'New Friar' or an 'Intentional Neighbour' Now I have a whole new set of vocabulary. I am made over. I prefer this new narrative. And I think there is something heroic about staying as a 'planting of the Lord' in the shifting sands of East London. We are a missional specimen.

I think staying is the new moving (in the inner city at least). It holds within it experiences of exile and forces us to confront the great idols of British Churchianity. Much of what is said about mission and moving feels redundant to those who opt to stay in poorer inner-city areas.

Here's an inside out view of mission from a 'remainder' perspective.

Staying involves more movement than moving

21% of the population of East Ham Central were new arrivals in the four years prior to the 2011 Census (the national average is 3%). Where I live in West Silvertown – a regeneration zone along the Docks- there is an annual 20% churn. The pace of change is dizzying. Demographically and environmentally, I live in the midst of perpetual motion. I live in a borough where everyone is in the minority. That's a different spin to saying in Newham 16.7% of residents are 'White-British.'

Seeing all ethnic communities as one great mass of otherness creates the 'white fright' that is behind 'white flight'. When many leave the East End, and other urban contexts, could it be they seek to settle among 'their own' again? Might those who 'move' on actually have a reduced experience of change than those who feel called to stay? What better way to face the Other than to stay put and build community in a multi-everything, changing place?

The radical call to redefine 'neighbour' works because of the ethnic difference between the actors in Jesus' parable. In Newham, no one ethnic group accounts for more than a fifth of the population. I am in a minority. So is everyone else. Marvellous. I was never convinced that those I am called to identify with should be like me. Isn't my God a community of common good? Do we need to be surrounded by ethnic similarity to feel connected? How on earth will we cope with heaven?

Let's be honest. Many people leave the inner city because they feel challenged by waves of immigration and the pockets of deprivation that characterise urban life. The call we heed is often not that of the Jesus who sends to the needy, but the middle-class trinity of good schools, clean neighbourhoods and capitalising on investments. I just wish we would be honest about it.

There's a lot more fun and celebration working in poorer communities than people might imagine. My church throws the best parties and fills the dancefloor at weddings. We are party people. The charity we set up to serve our community has three core values: inclusion, celebration, and empowerment. We do all three extravagantly. You would be surprised how much laughter goes on in our foodbank and homeless project.



Bonny Downs Community Association – family activity in The Well

Living as a missional community has enabled other journeys. Angie has pioneered bringing 'apt liturgy' into our poverty responses projects. If you want the Lord's Prayer to come alive, read it in a community reflection with the homeless and dispossessed. 'Give us this day our daily bread' has a unique resonance there. As a church we are journeying to become a more intentional missional community. It's not an easy road. My aim as its minister is to fulfil Newbigin's aspiration for a local congregation to be an 'embassy' of the Kingdom of God: It will be the church for the specific place where it lives, not the church for those who wish to be members of it – or, rather, it will be for them insofar as they are willing to be for the wider community. It's clear to those who remain in poorer urban neighbourhoods that we are under-resourced 'white fields' for mission (John 4:35). Newham needs missional 'relocators' and, dare I say it, 'returners' too. Robert Lupton says it explicitly, 'Troubled communities will continue to deteriorate as the capable exit in pursuit of better opportunities.'