Cultivating a Movement of Fresh Expressions:
Reflections on the Australian Experience and Vision of Fresh Expressions!

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1. Introduction

Australians have contributed much to contemporary missional and movements thinking. Now there is a concerted effort to cultivate a viral movement of fresh expressions of church in Australia. For some, the synergy of the frames for new churches and movements suggests a convergence of inspiration. We will reflect on the Australian experience and vision of cultivating a movement of fresh expressions.

The European term *fresh expressions*, has been imported to Australia as an Anglican brand but it is now being used as a generic description of what is happening and envisioned.\(^1\) It is certainly missional and *organic* – but few would now identify it with *emerging* or *emergent*. So many divergent interests, and even theologies, jumped onto the bandwagon of *emerging church* that in spite of valiant attempts to rescue it,\(^2\) it is devalued currency for many in Australia.

1.1 Australian Contributions to Contemporary Missional Movements

Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch\(^3\) are widely recognized for their contributions to missional church; Steve Addison for his research into the dynamics of church multiplication movements; and Dave Lawton for cultivating an expanding movement of missional communities in Melbourne and, now Sydney.

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\(^1\) In May 2009 Monte Sahlin and Peter Roennfeldt conducted the first *Adventist Fresh Expressions* summit in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.


\(^3\) Alan Hirsch was born in South Africa, but is widely recognized as an Australian for his world ministry was launched from the base of 15 years in St Kilda.

Of course, others have also made outstanding contributions as missional practitioners and thinkers – Mark Sayers (Über), Sarah Deutscher (Über), Tim Scheuer (Church Army), Bessie Pereira (Oikos) and Bill Hodgson (Campus Crusade for Christ), to name just a few.4 The real heroes, however, are the unknown players – people like Lee and Norman, and Chris and Dean. I have chosen them simply because one couple live in the western suburbs of Melbourne, close to where I live, and the other represent those living in regional Australia.

### 1.2 The Movement Leaders and Thinkers are Practitioners

Few in structured churches are aware of them. They represent a growing number of Australian Christians who are cultivating a movement of fresh expressions –

**Lee and Norman:** From a New Age and totally non-church background, Lee, was introduced to Jesus Christ by a friend. She first experienced church in a

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4 Über is an organization that interprets social trends and articulates a fresh way of living the gospel in the 21st century; Church Army is a church planting and missional arm of the Anglican Church; Oikos networks house churches; Campus Crusade for Christ fosters ministries among students, families and church movements.
charismatic setting. She enjoyed the enthusiasm but quickly realized that her non-Christian friends would find such performance religion ‘crazy’ – and if they knew what she was into, would work to rescue her! Because she was passionate about her new faith she wanted to learn, and signed up to study at the Wesleyan-Methodist Seminary, close to her home. There she experienced careful Bible reading, and there also she met Norman – another new Christian from a New Age heritage.

At a mission retreat, their shared convictions concerning both the gospel and the injustices of the world converged with their growing interest in each other and their visions of church being accessible to non-church friends. The church planting models they looked at did not appeal. They opened a *fair-trade* shop, JustPlanet, in Sunbury – the dormitory city northwest of Melbourne where they lived. They wanted to address injustices perpetrated in the global south. They incorporated a small café into this venture as an environment to interact more relationally with clients – to cultivate conversations, gatherings or church around food, Bible reading, worship and prayer. Recently they have opened another JustPlanet Café in Bendigo and hope to multiply a movement of fresh expressions in this way.

It has taken sacrifice. Lee and Norman live frugally and have really appreciated (and needed) a small reducing allocation from the Wesleyan-Methodists – designed to encourage while also avoiding dependency. They also value the accountability that comes with such denominational connections.

**Chris and Dean:** In contrast, Chris and Dean both had church background. They are passionate about Jesus Christ and for many years have sought to address the injustices of the world through a network of children’s care homes. Also, they have been involved in new church plants within denominational structures. However, this has not always been a happy experience. So, rather than remaining frustrated, they do church outside denominational input – gathering and multiplying new faith communities. And since they have chosen to actively live by the principle of ‘loving the person God puts in front of you’ many opportunities to share faith have come – including some that have been inconvenient!
Chris and Dean are convinced that church is 'doing life together' – and the best way to do this is around meals! Worship is a gathering for a meal – and interaction. 'Every gift of food is welcomed, and I make a fuss over the dishes that new friends bring,' says Dean. 'We eat, we share!' Because a house church can be insular – a huddle that does not interact with those around, they alternate between gathering for a BBQ in a park and meeting at their home. The BBQ in the park every second week attracts people. All who walk by are invited to join them for food, games or just to chat. Key people in their community of faith today were first found in the park. The gathering in their home every other week now regularly numbers 25-35 adults and about the same number of children – most without church or faith connections.

The fortnightly home gathering also revolves around a meal – which is always followed by a blessing. 'Every time we gather we take our children on our knees - or we kneel before them, and express our thanks for them, telling each child individually what we appreciate about them and what blessing we desire for them,' Chris and Dean explain. 'People without a Christian background quickly catch on - and get involved, blessing their children!' For those who are couples, husbands also bless their wives. The practice is taken from the Jewish blessing of families each Shabbat – 'and children and families love it!' Following 'the blessing' there may be 15-20 minutes exploring the Bible – and people are encouraged to read through books of the Bible in their homes.

Recently I received an email from Dean, 'Hi Peter, I have to tell you how excited I am. A mate and I recently decided to start a missional group around fishing. We booked a weekend … and today a family of non-believers agreed to join us for the weekend. Can you pray for (these guys) as we share Jesus with them?'5 Another opportunity for a fresh expression!

Like the higher profile advocates of fresh expressions Lee, Norman, Chris and Dean are practitioners committed to movements. Neither the maintenance of existing churches, nor cloning them in new plants, motivates them. Like the others who are cultivating fresh expressions across Australia, they are passionate about –

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5 Dean B to Peter Roennfeldt (email 13 Dec 2010).
• Sharing their relationship with Jesus.
• Addressing the injustices of society.
• Being at the same time skilled and involved in practical missional service.\(^6\)
• Living for others – sacrificially giving themselves, money and time.
• Movements – the multiplication of gatherings to share the gospel.

Their experiences and responses to structured inherited forms of church are varied. Frost and Hirsch have been strident in their treatment of Christendom forms of church. (Frost 2006: 7-8; Hirsch 2006: 16) Many, like Chris and Dean, have decided that working within hierarchical denominational systems – seeking permission, is too difficult. Others, like Lee and Norman, value the accountability and connection that denominational churches provide – while cognizant of the reality that Christendom is dead and denominationalism is passé to most Australian. All agree with Frost, however, in saying that twenty-first century Christians ‘must reposition (themselves) chiefly, first and foremost, as people of the way of Christ.’ (Frost 2006: 27)

Alan and Debra Hirsch are now based in the United States and Mike Frost is the Vice Principal of Morling College, Sydney and the founding Director of the Tinley Institute, a mission study center based there. Mike was invited to present at this conference and indicated he would have loved to, but he is at this time presenting in Europe.\(^7\) The practical ministry, church plants, writings and

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\(^6\) This is an opportunity for seminaries/Bible colleges to provide in-service equipping opportunities – even undergraduate and graduate study – to skill tent-makers.

\(^7\) Michael Frost to Peter Roennfeldt (email 5 Oct 2010). During his first year at seminary Alan Hirsch led a small group of newly converted ‘gays, lesbians, Goths, drug addicts, prostitutes, and some relatively ordinary people.’ Following graduation he and his wife Debra spent 15 years in South Melbourne, planting churches on the fringes of society. In 1998 Michael Frost supported Hirsch in pioneering the Forge Mission Training Network – ‘possibly the major voice and agency for rediscovering missional forms of Christianity in Australia.’ (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alan_Hirsch: 10/12/2010) In 2001 Michael Frost founded the alternative Christian community smallboatbigssea, in Manly on Sydney’s north shore. Last year he was instrumental in launching Street Pastors in Manly, the first time the English street chaplaincy program has been introduced to Australia.
teachings of these two men have significantly impacted the contemporary Australian church.

This is also true of Steve Addison, author of *Movements that Change the World* (2009). Steve planted Knox Baptist Church and is the Australian director of *Church Resource Ministries*. He and his wife Michelle equip movement leaders – and are currently fostering a new missional community in Box Hill, close to where they live in Melbourne.

Dave Lawton, who worked in India, cultivates planting movements from the base of Crossway in Melbourne. He and his wife Colleen use simple missional and movement principles – learnt from Scripture and used in the dynamic movements of Asia (Mongolia, China, Nepal and India), Africa (Dave is a close friend of Floyd and Sally McClung) and the Pacific (having visited and learnt from Ralph Moore in Hawaii). Dave and Colleen model missional activity and are cultivating a movement of fresh expressions!

### 1.3 The Frames being used suggest a Convergence of Inspiration

There is enormous diversity in the forms and practice of churches being fostered – simple, house, community, café, park, conversational, liturgical, etc. However, there is a surprising synergy in the biblical and theological foundations being explored. *Missio Dei* or all mission flowing from God’s heart, is one such frame commonly applied. Another is Trinitarian community – God seeking reconciliation for he is relational. Then there is the kingdom focus – and the role of church as God’s agency to extend his kingdom, rather than being an end in itself. While there are frequent references to pre and post Christendom or Constantinian forms of church, any deconstruction of ecclesiology is informed by the biblical data and metaphors of church, which is taken very seriously. Frost and Hirsch's three foundational principles of missional churches – incarnational, messianic and apostolic (Frost and Hirsch 2003: 11-12); are now shaping Australian fresh expressions. The old debate over the priority of personal salvation or social action (or vice-versa) has given way to the recognition that the good-news is about both. Eschatology and the soon return of Jesus is also a
common frame; but ‘movements’ is the overarching reference. God has called disciples to multiply and reach the world with the gospel, culminating in the coming of Jesus.

It all begins with discipleship. That is what Jesus said to do, ‘go and make disciples.’ (Matt 28:19) When disciples gather you have churches – Jesus did not say, ‘form churches and then make disciples’! The frames being used for discipleship, church planting and movements in Australia suggests a convergence of inspiration. Within the last two years –

- **Church Resource Ministries** has introduced practitioners from the movements of China; organized visits by potential movement leaders and practitioners to learn from Ralph Moore; and hosted reproducible T4T (training for trainers) with Jeff Sundell who has worked with movements in Nepal and India.
- **Oikos Australia** has sponsored a series of workshops around Australia with Tony and Felicity Dale of house2house, emphasizing the same reproducible principles and using the same basic biblical frames.
- The Crossway conferences of the last two years have explored church planting movements – 2009 with Bob Roberts and Dave Lawton’s teaching, and in 2010 with Gene Appel and Mark Sayers.
- **Campus Crusade for Christ** has made church movements a priority. Bill Hodgson, national director, has introduced *Shift: m2M* – with groups of practitioners identifying with the way Jesus equipped a movement.
- Alex Absalom explored the basics of discipleship – with a special emphasis upon transforming existing established churches into missional communities in the *3DM* summits organized by grass-roots practitioner David Wanstell in Victoria and Tasmania this year.8

I have observed four essential frames being used in these equipping opportunities for fresh expressions in Australia. The first comes from Jesus’ instruction to ‘make disciples’ (Matthew 28); the second from his kingdom

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8 Mike Breem and Alex Absalom, *Launching Missional Communities* (Sheriar Press: 2010).
parables (Mark 4); the third from Jesus’ training for his disciples on how to do evangelism (Luke 10); and, the fourth from Paul’s ‘master story’ for life and church (Philippians 2).9

1. Disciples multiply in relational streams (Matthew 28:18-20)

Jesus said to ‘make disciples’ of every ethne. (Matt 28:19) The ethne of Jesus’ time is not the nation or national entities of today. Ethne are the multiple relational streams found in each society. Jesus was calling them to reach across into Gentile communities – and into new relational streams. In first century times, the oikos – the extended household of slaves, servants, children, spouse and relatives was an ethne. In today’s world, there are diverse relational streams - including the social networks of Facebook and Twitter.

Donald McGavran’s thesis in The Bridges of God (1955), written towards the end of 32 years as a missionary in India, was: the nineteenth century Mission Station Approach is ineffective, Christianity has only ever effectively multiplied out through relational streams! This he supported with biblical, theological and sociological evidence. Unfortunately, his message was lost in the Americanization of church growth, the brand exported to Australia – perhaps hijacked by those with vested interests in maintaining Christendom forms of church.10

These two approaches are contrasted – and the essence of the Relational Streams Approach is summarized, in Figures 1 and 2.
Individuals are converted from a variety of unrelated streams and a small church is established. A compound or campus may be established – even with houses for pastors/leaders; and usually a church structure built. A school is established – and maybe publishing or media facilities and a community health or life centre. Each attracts participants, but the church remains small and usually a relatively unsuccessful entity on the side. The educational, media and community facilities become the employers – of the members first, and then others. Employees may connect to the church – but their primary mission is their work and the successful operation of the mission. The tuning of systems and the polishing of policies become the priorities. There is the hope that one-day the school, media-centre and health work will produce followers of Jesus. But, if this does happen, those fostering this Mission Station Approach are rarely ready or equipped to facilitate a movement of disciples.

By the mid-fifties McGavran was sure that this approach – the invention of nineteenth century missions, was not working. And, the practitioners and
proponents of fresh expressions are convinced of the same. They find their frame in what I call the *Relational Streams Approach*.\(^\text{11}\)

**Figure 2.** The Relational Streams Approach – the first and twenty-first century model

![The Relational Streams Approach](image)

Every society is made up of a mosaic of relational streams. These are the relationships where life is lived, support is found, families are formed and decisions are made. While *oikos* is not found in most global north or western cultures, relational streams are strong. McGavran observed that this is where Christian faith also streams – and multiplies. He argued that the apostle Paul connected to communities where he had relationships. Jesus identified the ‘person of peace’ (pp) (Luke 10:5) as key in each social stream – in each new town (Luke 10:1), *ethne* (Matt 28:19) or *oikos* (Acts 16:15, 31). New believers from the same social stream, but not necessarily of the same rank or background or ethnicity, are gathered around this person. This is church. Once this person receives the gospel and is given simple reproducible processes, the Holy Spirit

\(^{11}\) Although I have found no credit given by proponents of *fresh expressions* to McGavran’s *The Bridges of God* (1955), the frames suggest dependence.
can be trusted both with this church and its multiplication. (Allen 1927: vii) The ‘bridges of God’ are those with relationships into un-entered streams. This frame is foundational to fresh expressions today.

The second essential frame being explored in Australian settings is –

2. The kingdom parables – working the four fields (Mark 4:26-29)

These parables disclose ‘the secret of the kingdom of God.’ (Mark 4:11) The ‘good soil’ – full of manure and turned over, produces a ‘multiplying’ crop. (Mark 4:8) The parable of the growing seed suggests ‘four fields’ of activity – the empty, seeded, growing and harvest field. (Mark 4:26-29) Figure 3 illustrates these.

Figure 3. The Four Fields of Mark 4:26-29

![Diagram of the Four Fields of Mark 4:26-29]

Fresh expressions practitioners examine new communities and un-entered streams to ask: How do we enter? What do we sow? How do we cultivate growth – ‘all by itself’ (Mark 4:28)? How do we gather the harvest? And, a critical question is: Why do we gather the crop? Farmers in the Middle East harvest to sow into the fields in the next season. They keep the best to plant again – to multiply.12 This is a foundational frame.

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12 They even ‘sow in tears’ – going out ‘weeping’, for their families are hungry; but unless they plant, they will starve. See Psalm 126:5, 6.
The third frame being used in equipping for fresh expressions in Australia provides answers to questions posed by the four fields. It is the frame of Luke 10:1-24 –


Jesus’ ministry formed the foundations for a movement. He modeled and taught how to make disciples. This is the frame for Campus Crusade for Christ’s *Shift: m2M* process. This is the frame for David Lawton’s steps for planting churches – basic to his movements thinking. Figure 4 illustrates the process Jesus taught and the six steps to planting churches that multiply.

**Figure 4.** Making Disciples – six steps to planting multiplying churches!

The six steps to plant multiplying churches in Luke 10 are –

1. **Pray** for the harvest and workers. 10:1-4.
2. **Connect** into the relational streams through the ‘person of peace’. 10:5-7.
3. **Sow** gospel seed into the ‘person of peace’. 10:8, 9.

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13 David Lawton identifies five steps of church planting, while I work with six.
Regular focused and passionate prayer opens the disciple to God’s intention – and his activity in the harvest. Those praying listen and approach homes and those in shopping centers that God may be drawing them to – to cultivate relationships. Connection is made into relational streams through eating their food and ‘healing’ – and, ‘as you heal’ (10:8, 9 NLT) share the story of God’s grace in language they can understand.

It has been found that encouragement to read the Gospel of Mark – using simply discussion questions, opens the way for ‘persons of peace’ to sow the gospel into their relational stream. Five questions: (1) what is new? (2) What do we not like? (3) What do we not understand? (4) What will we apply to our lives? and (5) what will we share with others this week? – provide a simple process for reading through the chapters and stories of the Gospel.

Confidence and faith in Jesus develops – with growth and gathering.

4. **Grow** through service and making disciples.
5. **Gather** people who are part of the relational stream.

Other stories from the life of Jesus can be read to explore ‘the elementary teachings about Christ’ – repentance, faith, baptisms, ‘laying on of hands’, resurrection, and judgment. (Heb 6:1-3) Other books of the Bible will be explored – Acts, John, the epistles, etc. Those within the relational stream gather for food and grow in their relationship with Jesus. As people become disciples, new churches form. In serving they grow and multiply.

6. **Multiply** into new relational streams (fields) through the ‘bridges of God’.

Those with connections into other relational streams pray, connect and sow the gospel into those – and other ‘persons of peace’ come to know the gospel.

What Jesus taught (Luke 10), he modeled (Luke 19). The apostle Paul followed the same basic movements approach. He didn’t plant mission station

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14 The ‘goodness’ or ‘kindness’ of God leads to repentance. (Rom 2:4)
churches, he followed the relational streams approach. This can be illustrated from his ministry in Philippi – where he sowed into Lydia’s oikos and then into the jailer’s. (Acts 16:11-40) From Ephesus he sent out ‘persons of peace’ into their streams to sow the gospel and plant gatherings (Acts 19:8-10) – multiplying churches in their homes. (See Colossians 4:13-17; Philemon 1-2.)

The fourth essential frame for fresh expressions is –

4. **Church is to be ‘the (cruciform) body of Christ’ (Phil 2:1-11)**

This is a radical countercultural principle described by Michael Gorman as ‘cruciformity.’ It describes the church that lives in ‘conformity to the crucified Christ’ (Gorman 2001: 4) Gorman sees Paul’s adaptation of the pre-Pauline hymn in his letter to the Philippians as the master story. (Gorman 2004: 412) This is the story of Jesus who, ‘because’ (Gorman 2009: 10) he was ‘in very nature God,’ chose the humiliation of slavery and ‘death on a cross’ – and is now raised and exalted as our Lord. Paul contends that those ‘united with Christ’ and in ‘fellowship with the Spirit’ will share this same ‘attitude’ (NIV) or ‘mind.’ (RSV)

Gorman argues that Paul’s purpose was not to teach theology but to transform lives and patterns of experience. His focus was upon the One he met alive on the Damascus Road. Figure 5 depicts the story of Jesus – the life cycle of the King of status-reversal, God incarnate! Born in a manger, welcomed by foreigners, pursued to the land of slavery (Egypt), anointed at the Jordan, led by the Spirit to temptation – ‘glorified’ when lifted onto a Roman cross. (John 12:23-34) Saved by Jesus’ death and resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-5); Paul’s life, ministry and communities were to be a metaphor of this gospel story. His cosmology was shaped by this story of status reversal – a God of mutual subordination. His intention was that people could imitate his life – and know Jesus; that his ministry would reflect Jesus’ ministry; and that his church communities would portray what God is like!
Paul’s radical cosmology shaped his counter-cultural churches. (See Figure 6) It was counter-cultural in Paul’s time – and is so today. His church communities had no hierarchies – like the religions and political systems of his day. Paul had no place for the kleros-laos divide of Greek cosmology. Paul did not use the word *kleros*. In his church communities all believers were *diakonos* (ministers) and *laos* (or *idiotes*) for God!

Fresh expressions are not proponents of a deconstructionist ecclesiology – but they seek expressions of church that resonate with early church. They seek biblical models, and those that positively manifest ‘the body of Christ’. They affirm organization, but most are somewhat skeptical of ‘The Church as Institution.’ (Dulles 1985: 34-46) Like the apostle, they seek something ‘more organic, more communitarian, more mystical.’ (Dulles 1985: 43)
There is a surprising synergy of thought and commitment to these frames among those committed to movements of fresh expressions.

1.6 Conclusion

At this stage there is no indication of a widespread spontaneous movement of fresh expressions in Australia. Those dissatisfied or burnt by church are mostly just dropping out. Rachel and Josh\footnote{Pseudonyms} represent these. ‘Church doesn’t seem connected to life!’ they say. In recent times they have rarely attended church – but are again seeking one that is ‘not just a performance, but a church that is participatory, where the Bible is read and applied!’ They are now considering cultivating a new community of faith for their de-churched and un-churched friends and acquaintances.

Certainly there are concerted efforts to foster environments and support those prepared to do something. Unlike the arrival of American church growth theories in the 1970-90s and emerging church in the first decade of this century,
there is a concerted effort to relate the principles being observed to the
Australian context.

Just before Christmas (2010) I had breakfast with some Christian leaders
committed to fostering missional movements in Australia. David Lawton – with
the vision of planting hundreds of churches in Melbourne; had just returned
from India. He had taken a group from new church plants to sit at the feet of
movement leaders. I asked Dave, 'What did you and your planters see as key
factors behind these movements?'

Dave responded, 'First, constant passionate prayer - a hunger for a closer
relationship with God and the activity of his Spirit in mission.' 'Second, a
boldness in telling the story of Jesus - not good advice, but the story of Jesus and
his love, his death and resurrection!' And, Dave made the point: 'In almost 100% of
new churches – in the exploding church planting movements of India, miracles
are opening the way!'

This resonates with fresh expressions of church in Australia. The
inspiration comes from the early Christians who knew how to pray, were filled
with the Holy Spirit, and were passionate about Jesus Christ. The question is, can
these fresh expressions be Adventist? And, what would that look like? This is the
subject of my next paper.
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