

# **Report on the Fresh Expressions International Conference 16-18 February 2016 in Cape Town**

## **for submission to South African church councils, boards and synods (May 2016)**

From 16-18 February 2016 an International Fresh Expressions Conference was hosted in Cape Town, South Africa. The 390 delegates were drawn from across South Africa, southern and central Africa as well as other nations. They included key leaders of many denominations and there was a greater cultural, age, race and gender representation than most social gatherings in the country.<sup>1</sup>

The theme of the conference was "***Future Church: discerning the future of the church together***". The issues expressed (and discussed) both challenge us and invite us to go together, with God, into a future which we do not know. Some of the realities put before us require humble, even painful, acknowledgement. We were disturbed. We were envisioned. We sensed Jesus's calling afresh to be his Church, to be sent by him. We, the Fresh Expressions Southern Africa (FESA) executive, as conference hosts, feel that it is crucial that the key decision-making and direction-setting bodies of every one of our denominational and church groupings hear and grapple with these things before God. And so we respectfully submit this report.

The conference articulated significant challenges for the historic or "mainline" churches as well as strategic opportunities. The key question is our willingness to address the challenges and to accept the opportunities with humility, in unity, and with a willingness to change and to be changed for the sake of God's glory and the transformation of our world through Salvation and the sovereign rule of God through Jesus Christ.

### **Some encouragements**

1. It is clear that many are resonating with the call to change. There is a clear argument, which is shared and expressed across all the groups present, for change in the direction of being "mission-shaped". All that is needed is clarity around what that means for church members, church leaders and church structures.
2. It is clear that there are leaders across a diversity of cultures and contexts who are willing to take this journey together. This was illustrated by the make up of the conference and the honest participation.
3. New initiatives are being dreamed, planned and started around the country.

### **Some of the key challenges, with which the churches must engage:**

1. All Christian churches must find ways to continue the conversation on "future church" together and to "be sent" as one body in Christ.
2. We, the Church and its members, must hear, acknowledge and engage with the issues and realities of our context (South Africa).
3. We, the leaders and "permission-givers", must embrace and encourage different ways of being church, and new ways of ministry.
4. We, as Church must affirm a living (and lived-out) faith in the Triune God.
5. We, as Church, are called to discipleship and to disciple-making.
6. We, as God's people, must give ourselves to listen to God, to each other and to our context.

Each of these are expanded below. But first a question about motivation and definition.

## **Why Fresh Expressions?**

Behind this lies a more common question, often heard in church meetings: "Why change?" The decline of historic church in the Western world is well documented and may be a key motivator for creative innovation. However, in Africa over the last century, the church has grown in numbers.

Although those denominations originating in Europe (the fruit of missionaries who brought the gospel of Christ entwined with their culture) are declining in market-share, today by far the majority of South Africans would call themselves Christian.<sup>2</sup> Why would such a church need to change?

Growth or decline is not the only (or primary) issue. The Church is being called to be transformed from expressions shaped by histories of Christendom, colonialism and *apartheid* to a church which is shaped by the *missio Dei* - "the sending of God". Jesus said: "Just as the Father has sent me, so I send you".<sup>3</sup>

What emerged from the conference is that God is calling us in Jesus Christ, not for the sake of the church, but for the sake of South Africa, Africa and the world. Where a church is complicit in any injustice or divisiveness and not in spiritual and social transformation, and wherever the church is complacent rather than compassionate, it does not fully reflect the Church of the Risen Christ. Church is intended to carry the blessing of God to all people, in every context - to "proclaim afresh" the gospel in every generation".<sup>4</sup>

Fresh Expressions of church are an extension of this calling. They are creative and diverse expressions of the body and bride of Christ in each context and for every community, for the benefit of those who are not connected with an existing church. In a changing world new contexts and new communities are emerging. So the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic" Church is freshly expressed again and again, because it is sent in Christ. Fresh Expressions do not replace or even compete with existing expressions of church. Fresh Expressions, along with all churches are to be "contextual, formational, ecclesial and missional"<sup>5</sup> - for people in context; for forming the gospel of Christ in them and them in Christ; for being fully the Church, and; for being sent in the Name of Christ to others.

The momentum generated by the conference underlined an urgent and strategic need for a practical partnership of churches in contributing resources to this movement of the Holy Spirit to multiply the capacity of FESA<sup>6</sup>. Funding is needed to help research, advocate and lead in Fresh Expressions, and in budgeting for an extension of church outreach into and through this wider ecclesiology.

### **Practical suggestions for responding to the challenges:**

#### **1. All Christian churches must find ways to continue the conversation on "future church" together and to "be sent" as one body in Christ.**

There was great celebration at the conference of our diversity as delegates, and yet togetherness. And a recognition that God is calling us to reach out to each other across the divisions that have kept us from each other as Church. As we met in *indaba* (grouped around 15 different issues<sup>7</sup>) we found that we were struggling with the same issues, and that it was invigorating to share our encouragements, challenges and our different responses (both in our traditions and in our experiments). The Fresh Expressions

movement is bringing us together and the mission-shaped ministry (msm) course (now run in ten centres across South Africa)<sup>8</sup> has brought together a surprising ecumenical and social diversity of participants. There was a clear agreement, across the diversity of church groupings and traditions, to encourage our leaders and governing institutions to engage together around the questions of "future church" and that we are called to be shaped by the *missio Dei*. This is underlined by the response to the conference and the great interest in Fresh Expressions at grass roots, among theological researchers, and from church leaders.

Specifically, there is a call:

- for shared consultations, research and reflection;
- for partnership in strategy and in resourcing our response to what God is saying;
- for support of networks emerging from the msm courses and learning communities to share knowledge and experience;
- for each denomination to plan an internal conversation with its leaders to discuss issues specific to its own challenges and possible solutions.

## ***2. We, the Church and its members, must hear, acknowledge and engage with the issues and realities of our context (South Africa).***

A positive and yet challenging aspect of the conference was that people felt able to express pain and frustration as well as disagreement - there was no place for an unacknowledged "elephant in the room". One recent university graduate said that she had been engaged in the recent campus protests but found that she was able to express and explore her questions at the conference without being personally judged. Delegates engaged with honesty and with grace.

Our country is growing in both disparity and polarity socio-economically and culturally. Race is still a divider. There is a challenge to engage in a discussion around the concept and meaning of "Whiteness" and to acknowledge unconscious White privilege. But there was also a recognition that there is misunderstanding on all sides of racial 'prejudice' (in the legal sense of the word, meaning 'judgement before the case is made or decided').

Issues of economic justice, growing socio-economic disparity and frustration around the slowness of social transformation in our country were also expressed. Our platform representation was challenged and we acknowledged the relative lack of young people, women and Black people in leadership. We clearly heard the desire for local stories and local solutions. We need to understand our context better. We need to understand each other better.

We engaged with honesty but with grace. The message to our denominational leaders is blunt and clear: the church must engage with the realities of our context and the need for social transformation or die.

## ***3. We, the leaders and "permission-givers", must embrace and encourage different ways of being church, and new ways of ministry.***

Many at the conference expressed encouragement at being 'allowed' to explore other ways of being church. Some said they felt relieved to find others asking questions about

church polity and orders. Some said they felt unrecognized in their calling and gifting to pioneer new ways. Some were excited to discover that there is more to church than "church" as they have known it. Some said that their denominational structures have not allowed them to explore and innovate.

The theological case for a diversity of expressions of church has been well made but our training courses, colleges and seminaries must address and apply this in preparing the leaders required. Perhaps we have relied too much on inherited orders and structures and allowed them to constrict the church? Perhaps we have perpetuated a notion of "they must fit in with us" rather than an incarnational going to where "they" are. Perhaps we have imbibed too freely of the leadership values of our society and culture? In the challenging context of "our day" it is clear that many kinds of leadership are required. As well as pastoral leaders the church needs pioneers ('scouts', 'entrepreneurs', or 'apostles', depending on your preferred language). Our church structures, like the ropes of a tent, should be loosened and made more flexible in order to allow a necessary extension of ministry - to allow for experimentation and creative development.<sup>9</sup>

Some suggested responses by our denominational leaders:

- To commission, receive and work with research on our changing context as well as theological research on church and mission;
- To encourage the development of different forms of church and new faith communities;
- To examine the processes of selection, training and authorization for ministry and church leadership;
- To plan for the provision of practical and effective support for leaders in pioneering situations;
- To assess the existing rules of church polity and structures to allow the resourcing, authorization and healthy accountability of Fresh Expressions alongside existing churches (this will include the nature and place of buildings, geographical demarcations of ministry and the authorization and administration of sacraments);
- To properly plan and budget to resource the above research and development.

#### **4. *We, as Church must affirm a living (and lived-out) faith in the Triune God.***

At the conference there was corporate worship led in three different styles and throughout there was an affirmation of the Faith, rooted in holy scripture, affirmed in the Creeds and faithfully entrusted to us by the spiritual fathers and mothers of our churches. The future church is not syncretistic nor novel in its doctrine. The Apostle Paul warned against those "having a form of godliness but denying its power"<sup>10</sup> and the church is called to be sent in the power of God, even in our own weakness. God's presence was experienced as we prayed with and for each other, as we reaffirmed our faith, and as we surrendered ourselves in worship to our God and Lord.

Leaders are encouraged to lead us to that humility before God and reliance on his power so that the ministry and message we offer is recognized as coming from God and not ourselves.<sup>11</sup>. With foundations of humble listening and serving and reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit we will be able to be the church that brings the salvation *shalom* of God in Christ to the contextual edges of our world.

#### **5. *We, as Church, are called to discipleship and to disciple-making***

Discipleship and disciple-making emerged as a clear theme of the future church: "If you try to build church you rarely get disciples, but if you make disciples you will always get church".<sup>12</sup> Church practices that encourage passivity and which applaud mere attendance and compliance, do not reflect historic (pre-Christendom) church. We are called to develop churches which are focused on active learning in imitation of the character and works of Jesus Christ as his followers, and which applaud faithful obedience in application of ministry to our context for his glory. We are called not merely to add members but to multiply ministry to the glory of God.

The kind of discipleship modeled by Jesus and called for by him, is relational rather than organisational. The theme of "relationship" emerged strongly as a value for the future church. It was reflected in the design of the conference, which provided maximum space for engagement over meals and around tables, in discussion, story-telling, opportunities for questioning and reflection and in praying for one another and together.

The msm course, coaching and learning communities are all tools in discipling disciples who will make disciples and we commend these to our denominational partners. It is important that these tools are applied with a value of relationship - of people learning together to follow Christ where he leads. There are no experts and nobody who has been in the future church before us, therefore leaders can only be humble, serving those entrusted to their care.

## ***6. We, as God's people, must continue to listen to God, to each other and to our context.***

It became clear that we are witnessing a movement of God.

Only three years ago the first msm course was piloted in South Africa and already hundreds have attended the course in ten centres across the country. And momentum is growing. Unless our denominational leaders are willing to recognise, release and resource this movement, our denominations will no longer be part of it. Already there are those who have found themselves leading pioneering outreach projects which are growing into communities of faith. Unless these communities are embraced by denominational structures, they risk being isolated, unsupported and unaccountable, or searching for alternatives. All of those represented at the conference, including Anglicans, Baptists, Congregationalists, Dutch Reformed, Methodists, Presbyterians, REACH, Roman Catholics, Uniting Reformed and Vineyard, are called to engage in this together.

Some suggested responses:

- Together, partnering in FESA, denominational leaders can provide research, strategic planning, revision of polity and structures, training and envisioning.
- Individually, each denomination or church grouping can make provision for the authorization and accountability of Fresh Expressions within their particular "spiritual household".
- There is a plea for local stories of Fresh Expressions to be collected and communicated to inspire and educate us all. This requires resourcing.
- The msm training requires work to contextualise it and to develop it for the differing learning contexts of our churches and this requires resource in terms of trainers and material.
- There is a need for theological and sociological research to help us to hear what God is saying and to better understand the church of our present context and for the future.

**In conclusion:**

This was the first time that the conference was hosted in Africa. It represented a growing momentum, a movement that recognizes that change is required, that more is needed, that there are opportunities and challenges but that God is moving, by the Holy Spirit, calling the church, in all its forms and expressions to more. This short report captures the themes that emerged from our time together, caught from the discussions around tables and over meals, from questions voiced and submitted by email, from prayers expressed or inscribed on the prayer walls, from feedback forms and follow-up meetings. The hope is that the historic churches, the church institutions as we know them now, will listen to what the Spirit is saying. And that listening, we will all hear both the invitation of God to move with him, and the challenges we must be willing to accept in leaving and letting go in order to so move - from where we are to where the Good Shepherd leads us, for the sake of all God's people and for the hope of the world. Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

This report is offered to the synods, boards and councils of our churches in order to enable them to table their own proposals to their governing bodies and to enable all of us to respond to the call of God. The hope is that all that is useful will be received and that the opportunities provided by the conference embraced.

Gordon Crowther

## Fresh Expressions International Conference



### Future Church – discerning the future of the Church together

	Tuesday 16 February 2016	Wednesday 17 February 2016	Thursday 18 February 2016
<b>Time</b>	Location	Location2	Location3
9h30-10h00	Welcoming/Worship	Welcoming/Worship	Welcoming/Worship
10h00-11h30	Keynote 1: Fresh Expressions and the future church (Phil Potter)	Keynote 3: Disciple making in the future church (Graham Cray)	Keynote 5: Incarnational living in the future church (Michael Moynagh)
11h30-12h00	<i>Coffee/Tea Break</i>	<i>Coffee/Tea Break</i>	<i>Coffee/Tea Break</i>
12h00-13h30	Keynote 2: Worship of the Triune God in the future church (Zipho D Siwa/ John van der Laar)	Keynote 4: Community transformation through the future church (Jerry Pillay)	Keynote 6: Relationships in the future church (Nelus Niemandt)
13h30-14h30	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
14h30-16h00	Indabas	Indabas	Indabas
<b>Junction</b>	Old & New & future church (+Graham Cray)	Missional leadership & future church (Nelus Niemandt)	The Holy Spirit & future church (Alexander Venter, Dirkie van der Spuy)
<b>Base</b>	Future church: from maintenance to mission (Frederick Marais, Phil Potter)	Poverty, injustice & future church (Nadine Bowers du Toit, Craig Stewart, Braam Hanekom)	Diversity, inclusivity & future church (Allan Storey)
<b>Think Tank 1</b>	Intro to mission shaped ministry course (Pete Atkins)	Youth & future church (Jeremy Koeries, Bonolo Makgale)	Environment & future church (Rachel Mash, Glynis Goyns, Ncumisa Magadla)
<b>Think Tank 2</b>	Urbanization & future church (Siegfried Ngubane, Phumeza Makili, Johan de Meyer)	Family church/messy church (Jean Pienaar, Calvin Frans)	Social Media & future church (Verashni Pillay & Guillaume Smit)
<b>Glassroom</b>	Training Pioneers for Future Church (Annie Kirk & Dave Male)	Reconciliation & justice in the future church (Siviwe Mnyiyi)	Research & future church (Michael Moynagh)
16h00-16h30	<i>Coffee/Tea Break</i>	<i>Coffee/Tea Break</i>	<i>Coffee/Tea Break</i>
16h30-18h00	Stories/Best Practice	Stories/Best Practice	Closing Session Celebration & Commissioning

1 from the report by Rev Philip Botha, the conference consisted of:

Key leaders from ACSA, AFM, Baptist, Congregational, DRC, Great Commission, Lutheran, Methodist, Moravian, Presbyterian, REACH, Roman Catholic, URCSA, Vineyard and other church groupings as well as leaders from other mission organisations.

6 Plenary speakers and 6 Respondents

28 speakers led 15 *indaba*

3 different worship teams

390 registered participants at the conference.

40 volunteer helpers

12 delegates from 7 other countries in Southern and Central Africa

20 delegates from countries like UK, USA, Germany, Sweden, Australia and Switzerland.

2 Prof Jurgens Hendriks researched the growth and decline of the churches in South Africa and, according to the 2001 Census, 79.8% of the population are Christian.

3 John 20:21

4 The words used in the Declaration of Assent at Ordination and Licensing of clergy in the Church of England.

5 the four marks of church which Michael Moynagh suggests Fresh Expressions should exhibit when they are full expressions of church - relating to the four relationships of Church: in community (one), in worship of the Triune God (holy), in one Faith with the universal Church (catholic) and among those to whom it is sent in the Name of Christ (apostolic).

<sup>6</sup> FESA has recently been incorporated into a non-profit company (NPC number 015/96755/08) with a Board consisting of senior leaders of the partner denominations and an Executive which is developing 7 resourcing hubs to serve the needs of research, training, strategic planning, coaching, communication, financing and prayer in this movement.

<sup>7</sup> The programme for the conference included the following:

### **Keynote**

1. Fresh Expressions and the future church (Rev Phil Potter)
2. Worship of the Triune God in the future church (Rev John van der Laar)
3. Disciple-making in the future church (Rt Revd Graham Cray)
4. Community Transformation through the future church (Rev Dr Jerry Pillay)
5. Incarnational living in the future church (Michael Moynagh)
6. Relationships in the future church (Dr Nelus Niemandt)

### **Indabas**

1. Future church: from maintenance to mission (Dr Frederick Marais)
2. Old & New & future church (Bishop Graham Cray)
3. Intro to the mission shaped ministry (Dr Pete Atkins)
4. Training pioneers for future church (Rev Annie Kirk, Rev Dave Male)
5. Social Media & future church (Verashni Pillay, Rev Guillaume Smit)
6. Youth & future church (Jeremy Koeries, Bonolo Makgale)
7. Missional leadership & future church (Prof Nelus Niemandt)
8. Reconciliation & justice in the future church (Miles Giljam, Siviwe Minyi)
9. Poverty, injustice & future church (Dr Nadine Bouwers-du Toit, Craig Stewart, Rev Braam Hanekom)
10. Family church / Messy Church (Jean Pienaar, Rev Calvin Frans)
11. The Holy Spirit and the future church (Rev Dirkie van der Spuy, Rev Alexander Venter)
12. Environment and the future church (Ncumisa Magadla, Rachel Mash, Glynis Goyns)
13. Diversity, inclusivity & future church (Rev Alan Storey)
14. Urbanisation & future church (Rev Siegfried Ngubane, Phumeza Makili, Johan de Meyer)
15. Intro to Fresh Expressions (Michael Moynagh)

<sup>8</sup> The mission shaped ministry course has been run as a 24 module learning community that runs for ten months and equips church leaders, pioneers and teams to reshape local churches for mission and to start, develop and maintain Fresh Expressions ([www.missionshapedministry.org](http://www.missionshapedministry.org))

<sup>9</sup> the wording refers to Isaiah 54:2-5, a scripture that was given at the conference as word of God for the movement.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Timothy 3:5

<sup>11</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:1-7

<sup>12</sup> quote attributed to Mike Breen.