

Unbinding the Church

Missional Realities and Better Options

*"The significant problems we face can't be solved
at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."*



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unboundedchurch.com

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*About "A Church as we have not known it
for a society as we have not known it"*

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In Essence

It is a sad but irrefutable fact, and one that has been charted for many years even decades, that the church in Australia is in serious decline. In this we are not alone, for the situation in most of the former Christendom countries of Europe and their offspring such as Australia, is just the same, if not worse. This is the reality, although with variations, across all denominations.

An important example of this reality that can be cited is the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. As one of the strongest and largest parts of the non-Catholic church in Australia, what happens to it has significant relevance to the national church generally. For this reason much of what follows is based on the Sydney experience, but the same issues and serious missional challenges can be seen across the whole national church scene.

Sydney has put very significant resources into mission campaigns for the purpose of winning the lost for Christ over several decades. However, the result has been a longstanding and chronic malaise in missional fruitfulness, as indicated by National Church Life Survey (NCLS) data showing consistent decline in congregational 'Newcomers'¹ and rising average age. This has been masked by what can be called the 'Transferee Mirage', i.e. attendance growth that is actually largely due to cross-denominational and extra-diocesan transfer growth. Probably mostly due to immigration. This is not the result of missional endeavor and is not Kingdom growth!

It is somewhat paradoxical that the decline in the 'Newcomer' percentage in congregations started at the same time as the 2002-2012 Diocesan Mission and continued with it. The reasons for the increasing decline are part of the

¹'Newcomers' means those who have attended their present congregation or parish for less than five years and previously had not attended a church for many years or have never attended. This is the best measure of missional effectiveness we have.

focus of this booklet, but the fact that the decline commenced at the very time that missional efforts were ramping up may well be worthy of further investigation. Whatever is the case, the number of Newcomers in congregations as measured by the NCLS declined by around 35% between 2001 and 2016.

The reasons for the lack of missional fruitfulness are complex but the thesis put here is that to a large extent it is due to the *'More and Better Delusion'*, i.e. persisting with the largely unsuccessful missional strategies of the past (i.e. the SIC church model - Sunday-Centric, In-Drag, Christendom-form) but trying to do them 'More and Better'. This despite the clear warnings in the Diocesan Mid-mission reports on the largely unsuccessful 2002-20012 Mission that a "Paradigm Shift" was required.

Essentially, there is a failure to grasp that Australia is now fundamentally a pagan country with most Australians living in socio-spiritual universes parallel to and alien to the 'Church' universe. The urgent need therefore is to learn how to do 'Pagan Mission', something the Anglican and other European-originating churches have arguably never really done, or thought they had to do, in their own culture. Such requires the development of 'Another Way' of doing church, a way encapsulated in this essay by the concept (not model) of an *'Unbounded Church'*, that is a church set free from its traditional forms, styles, structures and the walls that 'bound' its buildings.

Such a 'church' will be 'Organic' and 'Mission-Fluid' in order to replace traditional 'Go and Bring' (into Sunday services) strategies with 'Go and Stay' (in the community) truly missional strategies. This means the embedding of 'Missional Communities' (churches in their own right) in the *'live, work and play'* universes inhabited by non-Christians.

A Clarion Call for A Dialogue with Reality

"At one stride comes the dark"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Up to some point on that icy, dark north Atlantic night in 1912, on the SS Titanic's fatal journey towards the notorious iceberg, there remained a window of opportunity during which decisive action could have been taken that would have averted the death and disaster that ultimately took place. We know of course that such action was not taken, at least before it was too late, the window of opportunity closed and the ship full of party mood passengers plunged into its icy tomb. I wonder is that kind of closing window image, a terminating 'Kairos', a fading time of opportunity now apt for the Australian (western) church of our time? The well documented trends of decline across denominations must beg the question 'how long have we got'? Indeed, is there still time to change the direction of SS 'Church', or is the 'Window' already closed?

I was caused to ponder this by an article entitled "*Having Forgotten its Foundations, Europe's House is Falling Apart*" in the 'Wall Street Journal'. The article claimed that the "*death of Europe is in sight*" for it has become morally incompetent, because it has undermined its own (Judeo-Christian) foundations. To put it another way, the Judeo-Christian metanarrative (the grand story) that was the womb that gave birth to and nurtured modern Europe and its communities is now ignored and even denied by modern Europeans, particularly the intelligentsia. The result is now a moral vacuum, a society fragmenting and drowning in a moral shallowness.

We live in a momentous time in western society, indeed a time that has never before been in human history, a time that can truly be described as

unique. The characteristic that marks its uniqueness is rapid and constant '*Change*'. It is a time in which we are seeing the slow motion collapse of western civilization, a civilization shaped by a Christendom that is now but a distant echo. There has appeared a wormhole in the fabric of history that has sucked most of western society out of its Christendom universe into a kaleidoscope of parallel universes where the church is not.

Surely in the context of the current and ongoing cultural meltdown, the idea that a church model that developed for the pastoral maintenance of existing Christian congregations, and that thrived in a Christianized European society, can continue to be the main vehicle for the equivalent of 'Mission Africa' would seem to be highly improbable to say the least. Current attendance and membership statistics issue a clarion call confirming that improbability.

The '**More and Better**' Delusion

Across the Australian church landscape, indeed across the western world generally there is a now decades old malaise in terms of missional fruitfulness. The reasons for this are of course complex but the thesis underlying the '*Unbounded Church*' concept promoted in this booklet, is that to a large extent the malaise is due to a '**More and Better Delusion**'. This is the delusion that continuing with a Sunday-Centric, In-Drag,² Christendom-form (SIC) church model and persisting with the largely unsuccessful missional strategies of the 20th century, but trying to do them '*More and Better*', will actually produce better results.³ This persistence continues despite the longstanding and growing evidence that a radical '**Paradigm Shift**' is required.⁴

² 'In-Drag' because the prevailing intention of most mission activities, even those that take place in the community, is to get (Drag) people into existing services.

³ Einstein is reputed to have defined insanity as "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results"

⁴ This "calls for a fundamental mind-change/paradigm-shift in the way our churches see themselves and respond" - Sydney Anglican Diocese 2008 'Midpoint' report on the 2002-2012 Diocesan Mission.

Reality Isn't What it Used to Be

The motive for the writing of this booklet is a growing and overwhelming conviction that the Australian church is at a crisis and there is a need for a tectonic shift in the way we 'do mission' in the post-Christendom kaleidoscope of constantly morphing tribes constituting 21st century society. The 'Reality' regarding our missional strategies and policies is not what it used to be. They have not worked for a long time, are not working and will not work. Hence the development of the 'Concept' of an 'Unbounded Church'.

However, although we must acknowledge our missional failure and how serious that is, the primary goal here is not to dwell on that, rather it is to seriously grapple with the new 'Reality' and generate a search for 'Another Way', a more effective and fruitful way forward for the church's mission. In order to provide context for the seeking of this goal, it is however first necessary to briefly outline the facts and the issues contributing to the decline in both attendance levels and missional fruitfulness of the church.

The reality of church decline in the post-Christendom world and the chronic failure of traditional church models to reach the increasing numbers of the lost, except for those on the fringes of influence of such models, is now well documented. In this we are not alone, this decline can be seen across the whole landscape of the formerly Christendom countries and their offspring such as Australia. In Australia we see the same flood tide running, with the number of people claiming 'No religion' now at 29% according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 census⁵, up from 22% in the 2011 census. Further, those claiming '*no religion*' are now significantly the major '*religious*' category in Australian society.

⁵ 32% according to 'Faith and Belief in Australia' McCrindle Research Pty Ltd, May 2017

Another societal factor indicating the increasingly difficult missional challenge is the data showing that the percentage of Australians identifying with Christianity has fallen from 61% in 2011 to 52% in 2016⁶.

As a further example of the severity of the challenge, data available for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney evidences major concerns. These were revealed in part in a report on the 2002-2012 Mission to the 2013 Diocesan Synod⁷-

- The net attendance growth over the period of the 2002-2012 Mission was approximately in line with the population growth. i.e. just retaining 'market share', but more recent data indicates that in the period 2011-2016 the trend in attendance growth (if indeed there has been growth) has further deteriorated and now has fallen well below the population growth trend.⁸
- The average age of attendees has continued to rise.
- There continued to be a **VERY** significant decline in the percentage of 'Newcomers' in congregations from approximately 12.4% in 2001 to 9.3% in 2011.⁹ However there is reason for greater alarm in that the 2016 NCLS survey reveals a further drop in Newcomers to 8%. This amounts to a cumulative decline of 35% from 2001 to 2016.

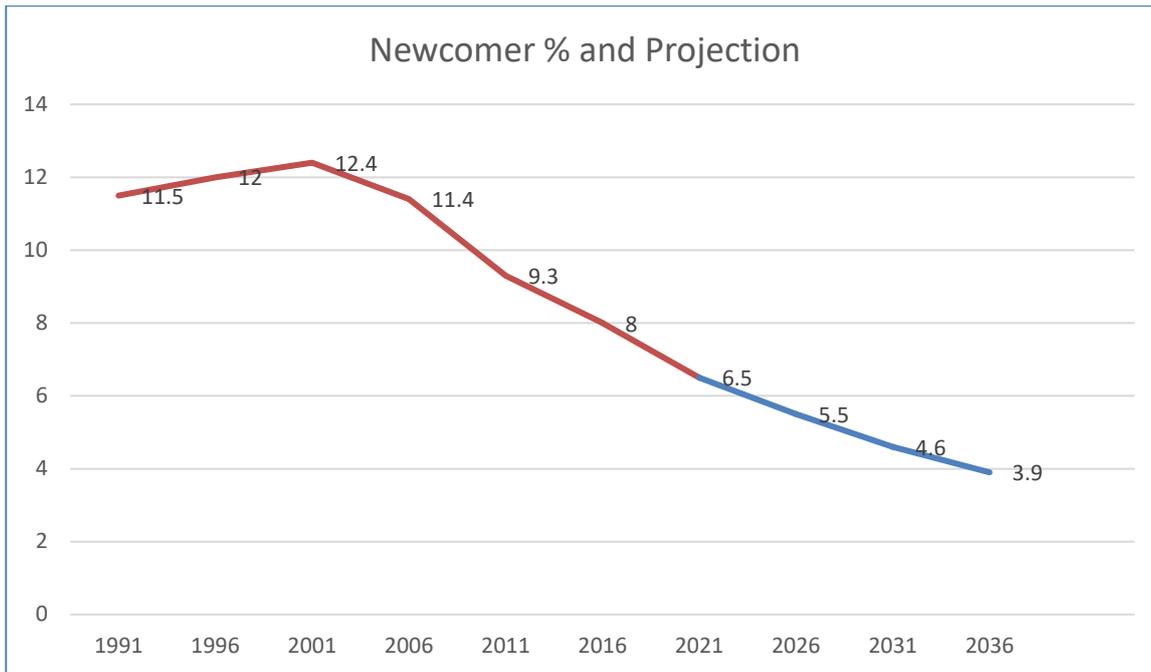
Arguably it is the 'Newcomer' figure that is the best indicator of Kingdom growth.

⁶ 45% in 2017 according to McCrindle.

⁷ "Review of the Diocesan Mission and the Next Phase of Mission", Synod Reports, 2013

⁸ Attendance growth has been 3.4% over the period 2011-2015 whereas population growth according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics was 14.7%.

⁹ 'Newcomers' means those who have attended their present congregation or parish for less than five years and previously had not attended a church for many years or have never attended. This is the best measure of missional effectiveness we have.



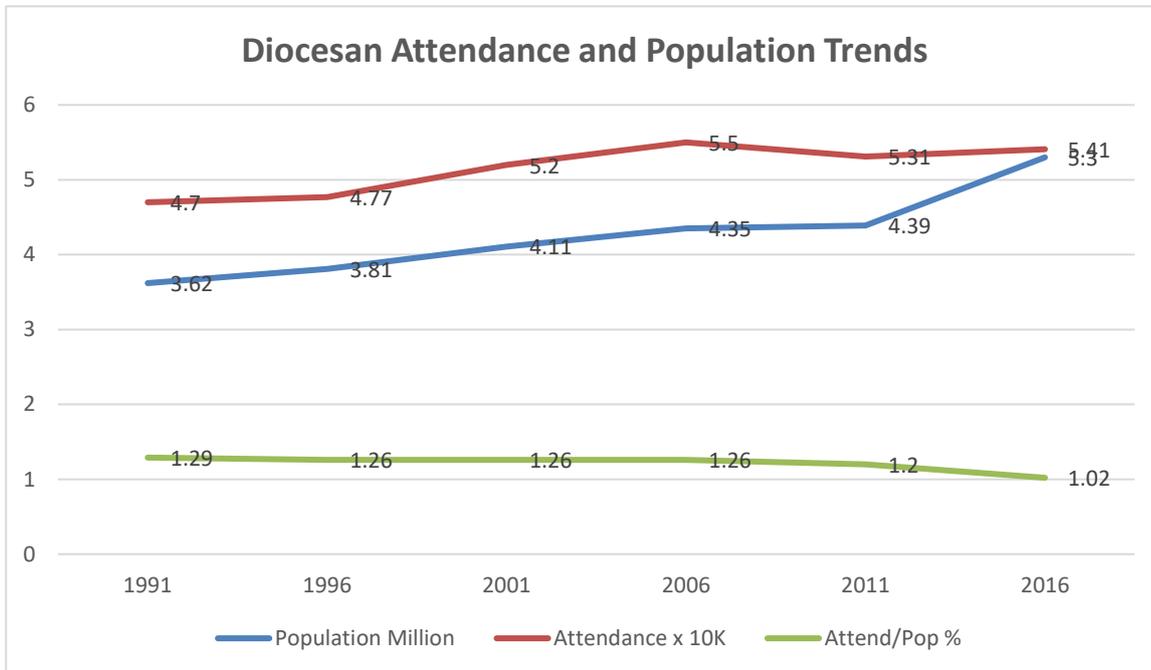
The 'Fading Footprint'

While a 2013 report to the Diocesan Synod showed that the Sydney population growth trend and the Diocesan attendance trend had been basically parallel for the 20 years up to 2011, that situation has now seriously deteriorated.

According to the Archbishop's figures given in answer to a question at the 2017 Synod the aggregate Diocesan attendance in 2011 was 53,162 and in 2016 was 51,533¹⁰. However, 26 Parishes had not yet submitted returns so in an attempt to improve accuracy we will assume that the average weekly attendance of these Parishes was 100 each in 2016. This is the equivalent of 2600 extra attendees taking the aggregate to 54,133. Assuming this figure would indicate an increase in attendance growth of 1.8% or 0.36% per year over the period 2011 to 2016.

¹⁰ Archbishop's answer to question 17, 11th October, 2017 Synod.

On the basis of the National Census data for 2011 and 2016, the population of Greater Sydney increased from 4.4M to 5.3M which is around 20% (or 4% per year).¹¹



This means that Sydney population is growing at 3.64% per year relative to aggregate Diocesan attendance. While there will be a significant margin of error, the mathematics of this means that the Diocese needed to gain up to 1900 extra attendees *per year*, just to have kept pace with population growth. This is the equivalent to the creation of **38 new congregations** of 50 persons each *every* year, and this just to stand still in terms of '*maintaining market share*' or to maintain the Diocesan '*Footprint*' on Sydney!

Such statistics surely warrant the use of the word 'Crisis', for they highlight trends that if we continue to leave them unaddressed (as is generally the case) will have serious consequences. They also contain a very inconvenient yet little remarked truth, namely that even the growth that did occur up to

¹¹ <http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/nsw-131> (accessed 27/09/17)

2011 was largely *not from the results of evangelistic/missional efforts* but because of 'Transfer' growth.¹² This may be called the '**Transferee Mirage**' and this is NOT KINGDOM GROWTH! This fact should focus our minds sharply as we plan future missional strategies.

'Missional Communities and Networks will need to become the norm not the exception'

A significant insight into the current difficulties in mission was provided by statement not long ago by a Methodist minister in England. He was quoted as saying that he thought most of his thirty five year ministry had "*been insane*"! For he had-

"Enthusiastically followed the latest ideas for ministry, evangelism and church growth. However, none of them have gone deep enough to examine, much less challenge, deep-rooted ideas about what church is"

That would be typical of many leaders and churches, for one of the factors contributing to our missional unfruitfulness is a lack of critical analysis. This is a failure to in fact go "*deep enough to examine, much less challenge, deep-rooted ideas about what church is*", and to release the 'Divine freedom'¹³ of the New Testament-voiced ecclesiology to create a truly missional church.

Rather than engaging in such critical analysis however, there is generally an almost unquestioned continuation of the Sunday-Centric, In-Drag, Christendom-Form (SIC) model of church that persists in re-treading 20th century forms of local mission. This includes the traditional classic church

¹² Such transfer growth will be made up of already Christians switching from other denominations or entering our churches from elsewhere, either other parts of Australia or overseas. It is clear that despite all the effort involved our missional efforts are generally not resulting in a great degree of missional fruitfulness.

¹³ See page 52

plant which in reality is still culturally alien, generally too expensive and too slow to change for a culture in turmoil.

The purpose of this essay however, is not to dwell on the facts of decline, irrefutable though they are, rather it is to seek a new way forward. Central to this quest is an argument that what is urgently needed is for the church to develop multiple expressions of an '*Unbounded Church*'. This is a church set free, unbound, from its anachronistic and culturally alien forms, its captivity to long past 'use-by-date' missional strategies of yesteryear, and also with the walls (bounds) that separate it, spiritually, culturally, physically and psychologically from the 'worlds of the lost', removed.

There is a failure "to in fact go "deep enough to examine, much less challenge, deep-rooted ideas about what church is", "

The argument here is that a paradigm shift to new strategies and forms is required as a matter of urgency, those which the '*Unbounded*' Church concept can release. This will require a radical change such that the currently developing and fruitful alternative forms of 'church', using the title given to a recent church conference, move '*From Margins to Mainstream*'. i.e. Missional Communities (MCs) and networks will need to become the norm not the exception.

A Crisis

The reality is that the 21st century western, specifically Australian, church faces a *Crisis*, arguably an existential crisis in that we are at a point where we will go one of two ways, continued decline or revival, in the same way as it is said of a patient with a life threatening fever that they come to a point of

crisis' in the progress of their sickness from which point they either decline to death or recover to life.¹⁴

The fact is that for many years (indeed decades) large numbers of godly, committed, faithful Christians engaged in local church gospel ministry have worked hard in 'Mission' campaigns and events, and in the development of new evangelistic strategies. However, while we must honour those efforts, regrettably the fruit has generally been significantly and persistently less than is needed.

The reasons for the lack of missional success are complex. One of the main ones frequently given is that we live in a culture that is very hardened to the gospel. Indeed, gospel ministry in Australia has been likened to ploughing concrete! However, while this is true, I believe that there is another major reason, which is that the 'Church' and church people exist in a 'Parallel Universe' to the ones in which non-Christians live, and our 'church universe' is totally alien to them. In fact, we are called to mission in a spiritual culture more akin to a pagan Africa than one with any remaining resemblance of the Christendom in which, and for which, the contemporary church model developed. It is I believe a dangerous delusion to think otherwise.

The Need

So what is needed? Firstly and essentially, it is time (indeed long past time) to grasp that Australia is now fundamentally a ***pagan country*** with most Australians living in socio-spiritual universes alien to the 'Church'

¹⁴ Again it must be stated that this is written of course from the specific Anglican Diocese of Sydney perspective but the fundamental problems are repeated across the whole Australian ecclesial landscape. Thus the issues, concerns and potential ways forward canvassed in the following pages are relevant to the church in general.

universe, in which they worship 'other gods'. The urgent need is for a church designed to do 'Pagan Mission', something mainline western churches have arguably never done, or thought they had to do, in their own culture, but now need to learn how to do. It is this that underlies the concept of an '*Unbounded Church*', that is a church set free, unbound, from its traditional forms, styles, missionally anachronistic thinking, and also the walls (bounds) of its buildings that separate the 'church' from the majority of the population.

The argument for a very different concept of church compared to the missionally failing Christendom form we have had for so long is that we are at a point of crisis. This crisis is most acutely represented not just by the falling attendance levels across the nation but more significantly the decline in conversions, i.e. new Christians. The need for a rapidly increased level of missional fruitfulness is dire, but to achieve it requires-

- A complete '**Mindset shift**' to a 'new level of thinking', a beginning to strategize as if we are faced, as we in reality are, with evangelizing a pagan Africa of 200 years ago.
- A '**Radical change**' that will essentially involve 'redirecting of resources', financial, staff etc. away from the SIC church model to more fruitful missional endeavours.
- A '**New Paradigm**', one that owes nothing to the Christendom structures and forms, and ironically would actually be far less expensive!
- '**Missional Communities**' (churches in their own right) to be embedded in the 'live, work and play' universes inhabited by non-Christians such that they are regularly '*observable*' by and regularly engage with those around.¹⁵

¹⁵ Such can be in a myriad of settings from pubs and coffee shops to playgroups and youth groups, from workplaces to skateboard parks to name but a very few.

- That '**Go and Bring**' (into Sunday services) strategies be replaced with '**Go and Stay**' (in the community) strategies. i.e taking 'church' 'on mission' into the 'universes of the lost'.

Very Uncomfortable Questions

The purpose of this writer is most certainly not to claim the possession of the proverbial magic bullet that will solve all our mission problems, rather it is an attempt to begin to chart a new way forward, a way of revitalised mission. In order to achieve this, there is a need to return to the basic principles for Christian community voiced to us by the New Testament. This will involve a deconstruction of many, if not most, of the man-made trappings that constitute 'church' today, most certainly useful their time but now road blocks on our missional journey. Most of all it is to provoke a desperately needed '*Dialogue with Reality*', a dialogue in regard to the question as to whether we need to revisit our whole way of thinking about mission in the context of the 21st century Australian culture.

The starting point for such a dialogue must be to address two key questions, namely-

Does our fundamental approach to 'church' (our Ecclesiology) and mission (our Missiology) operate within a box and with a mindset that are themselves constraints on, indeed delude us regarding, our potential missional effectiveness?

Has the time come to let go of our current way of thinking about mission and move to a new level of thinking, to 'Another Way', a way that actually requires us to revisit our understanding of 'Church' (our Ecclesiology), and to create a truly missional church that will penetrate the spiritual darkness of the 'parallel universes' where the pagans live (our Missiology)?

This 'Clarion Call for a Dialogue with Reality' will certainly raise many difficult and extremely uncomfortable questions. These are questions that have for

far too long been avoided, but it is now of extreme urgency that they be both asked and answered.

Why Do We Struggle?

*"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again
and expecting different results."*

Albert Einstein (reputedly)

In the last section we highlighted a number of concerning trends in terms of church attendance and missional fruitfulness, as well as exposing the '*Transferee Mirage*'. In the light of those trends surely it is now time, indeed long past time, to critically analyse our whole approach to mission, and to ask some very uncomfortable, indeed painful, questions for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For the, what I call, lack of critical analysis of the available data has given rise to a delusion in regard to appropriate missional strategies.

The 'More and Better' Delusion

This delusion I believe springs from a number of factors. Firstly, there still appears to be a largely implicit, unspoken assumption that we can be more missionally effective using the same model of 'church' as we have been doing but doing it '**More and Better**'. In fact the 'more and better' ethos seems to be the controlling metanarrative for the mission landscape, including current mission strategies.¹⁶ Here lies what I would call the '*More and Better Delusion*', for the evidence does not support what appears to be a more 'she'll be right' hope than reality.

¹⁶ For example Mission 2020 commissioned by the 2014 Sydney Synod

Secondly, there appears to be a very limited realization that we are in a cultural matrix far more like the world of the Apostles, or the northern European context of the Celtic missionaries (Columb, Aidan etc) or the pagan Africa of 200 years ago for example, rather than anything resembling the 'Christendom-shaped' culture most mainline denominations developed in and were, and still basically are, designed for. Whereas our urgent need is for, to put it bluntly- ***Pagan Mission***.¹⁷

Thirdly, there appears to be insufficient acknowledgment that most mission to the kaleidoscope of tribes that now make up contemporary Australia is effectively '*Cross Cultural*' mission, a mission to those who live in cultural and spiritual universes parallel to the church universe, by many commentators now estimated to be up to 80% of the population. Such is the degree of the church-society divide and alienation that is our missional context.

Fourthly, there appears to be a '*Form of Blindness*', a '*she'll be right*' mindset that ignores the overwhelming evidence of the 'iceberg ahead', and keeps the good ship (Anglican) church heading on the same course as it has been for several decades. It seems that there is a systemic myopia that ignores the statistics, a deafness that mutes the voice of the evidence, and self-comforts with a delusion that argues from the particular of occasional missional success to an alleged generality of widespread fruitfulness.

Given this absence of real engagement with the well documented reality of chronic limited missional fruitfulness coupled with the delusion of failed '*More and Better*' mission strategies yet expecting to get better results, would this not be an example of an '*Einsteinian Insanity*'? This begs many questions as to the reasons why we struggle? I would like to suggest six relevant factors.

1. The 'SIC' Church Model

¹⁷ At best our current model of church and mission strategies will reach only 20% of society.

A major reason for the missional failure is the almost ubiquitous persistence with the Sunday-Centric, In- Drag, Christendom-Form (SIC) church model and associated missional strategies.

Sunday-Centric – This is the entrenched idea that the main focus for growth is Sunday (or at least weekend) services. This when 40% plus of Australians can't attend even if they wanted to because of work, sporting or recreational commitments.

In-Drag- Nearly all 'Outreach' strategies try to get (drag) people into our church buildings which has now been failing for a long time.

Christendom-form- The continuation of the model of church that has been used for centuries, yet is now alien in almost every way and so culturally inaccessible to 21st century Australians.

2. We Are Only Tinkering!

Twenty or so years ago Darrell Guder argued that-

*"The current predicament of churches requires more than a mere tinkering with long-assumed notions about the identity and mission of the church."*¹⁸

Could it be that 20 years later we are really still only tinkering? The belief expressed here is that it is no longer tinkering improvement that is needed but something that is truly radical,¹⁹ indeed a new concept of 'church' that will produce a-

"Church as we haven't known it, for a society as we haven't known it".

¹⁸ Darrell L. Guder (Ed) *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998) p.77

¹⁹ See Sydney Anglican Diocese Mission 'Midpoint' report, 2008, p.2

The need for the development of such a church, generically conceptualized here as an '**Unbounded Church**' is the concern of this booklet²⁰.

3. The 'Prior Question' is not being asked.

Could it be that what may have evolved up to today, undergone many improvements, and even functioned well until recent times, may well not at all be, or more importantly be capable of being changed to be, what is required for the needs of the hour? Could it be that in assessing the future needs of 'Mission Australia', and in spite of the many missional endeavours in train, we have not asked the 'Prior Question' the asking of which is essential before decisions on missional strategies are made? Such a question would take the form of-

'If we were to build a Mission structure for a Sydney, or any other city or region, where there were no churches what would we build?'

In part, the answer to that question most certainly will be that we would not build 'what we have now'. If indeed that is our response to that prior question then this would confirm that 'what we have now' is not what we need. Such a conclusion should instigate a process of critical analysis as to what we actually do need, so that we can then begin to work out an overarching strategy (meta-strategy) for the difficult, painful for many and costly journey from where we are now to where we need to be.

4. Wonderlands and Parallel Universes

At the end of World War 1 the mindset of the church and of general society were almost the same. Over 95% of Australians declared themselves Christians and had a view of the world largely shaped by the Bible even if they weren't aware of it. This was the historical situation, but as time has gone by the fabric of that historical situation has become torn. In fact now

²⁰ unboundedchurch.com

the tear has become a hole, indeed a 'wormhole' which connects our (the church) sociological, spiritual universe with other parallel universes, the ones where the church is not. It is as if most of 'society' has been sucked through a 'wormhole' into other universes with little connection to, in fact increasingly alien to, the church universe in terms of everyday language, view of the world, values etc.

Most of what are usually called 'Outreach' activities that churches carry out are actually 'In-Drag' activities, that is attempts to 'drag' non-Christians back through the 'wormhole' into a church universe totally alien to them. However, we are failing, and missional strategies must be developed that will seek to reverse that flow, and rather than trying to 'drag' non-Christian people into our universe, will specifically be designed to take the church into their universes, like a spiritual 'Star Trek' mission.

The church of the future, if it is to become vital, needs to become a truly 'Missional' church. The days are long gone, indeed went before the end of the last century, when we could just do Sunday church (no matter how well done) and invite people to come, either directly or indirectly through outreach activities. This society-wide cultural shift is well summed up (although in another context) by Michelle Guthrie the ABC's managing director when she said-

*"The idea that the customer has to come and find you
and must play solely within your boundaries is now obsolete"²¹*

The missionary task we face is indeed that of 'pagan mission', and this new mind-set must increasingly shape the church of the future, as we do what needs to be done. The essential task is to create a Church specifically designed to journey through the 'wormhole' into those parallel universes, into the strange worlds where people are very different to those of us who live in

²¹ Speech at the Australian Creative Country Conference, Melbourne, 28th July 2016

the church/Christian universe. These are worlds where they don't speak or understand bible-speak or church-speak, 'wonderlands' floating on a sea of relativism, where words mean as Humpty Dumpty said, 'what you want them to mean', and where 'Truth' is what I want it to be. These are 'worlds' that the contemporary church is largely not equipped to enter.

Indeed, the future church will need to be a church that journeys through the 'wormhole', into worlds alien and even scary to most western Christians, but ones we have to enter for the sake of the lost. This requires a 'Paradigm shift' to a-

"Church as we haven't known it, for a society as we haven't known it".

That is a truly missional church-one (generically) conceptualized here as an '*Unbounded Church*' a church set free from its Christendom forms, and with the walls (bounds) between it and 21st century Australian society removed. The confronting reality is that we need a radical Paradigm shift. Why? Because of what has happened to the 'Village'.

"Yes the 'church' still stands, or at least the emptying building does, presiding over the space of the faded 'Christendom Village'. The 'Village' now shattered into a Kaleidoscope of a thousand live, work and play shards, each of which has migrated in time and place, in world view and cultural flavor, to a second, pagan village in fact a city, a mosaic of 'Villagettes' where the message of Christ rarely ventures; a new 'Village' for which a new church must be designed to penetrate, with a new concept of mission."

5. Christendom Lost

It needs to be remembered that our current church model largely developed in the 'Village' i.e. the communities of 'Christendom' Europe where church structures and ministries were constructed not for mission but for the

maintenance of existing congregations. Such communities were ones which were-

- Ethnically homogenous
- Where there was only one language.
- Where nearly everybody went to church.
- Where all had a biblical world view (even if sub-consciously)
- Where even non-Christians were in church on Sundays to be evangelised
- Where the church was the centre and integrating hub of community life.
- Where everybody worked locally, and not at all on Sundays.
- Where change was so slow as to be imperceptible.

It should come as no great surprise then that we struggle, for our culture is nothing like that, rather it is one -

- That is not homogenous-indeed it is a society being churned by society-changing immigration flows,
- Where the pool of Europe-originating people that has formed our natural constituency is shrinking as a proportion of the population.
- Where few go to church.
- Where the biblical world view has disappeared.
- Experiencing the rampant collapse of religious affiliation, with 30% claiming 'no religion'.
- Where the need for 'Cross cultural mission' is arguably now to 70-80% of what is a largely pagan society, not just to those who originate from non-European backgrounds.
- Where the church is on the retreating periphery of society.
- Where people work great distances from their residences, with often long commute times.
- Where 'work and play' micro-village activity has consumed the erstwhile activity-free zone of Sunday.

- Where change is ongoing, rapid and accelerating.

Given this massive socio-spiritual disconnect would it not be an example of 'Einsteinian Insanity' to keep on repeating a missional strategy based on an improved and expanded Sunday-Centric, In-Drag, Christendom-Form (SIC) church model and continuing with 'More and Better' versions of what we are doing now, yet expect different outcomes? Indeed is not the question that now begs to be asked-

"Why are we still so thoroughly wedded to Christendom that we refuse to entertain consciously (the) great transition through which we are passing, and therefore fail to engage in the kind of radical reassessment and reforming of our calling, our mission, our structures and ministries that would enable us to pass through this paradigm shift . . . ?"²²

Surely, the time has come when we have to develop a church that is specifically designed to be an effective 'Missional' church in this post-modern, post Christendom, pluralistic, pagan culture in a constant state of change. We need to think and strategize more as if we are faced with evangelizing a pagan Africa or Celtic Europe, not a residual part of Christendom. If our response to the 'Prior Question' is 'Not what we have now' then this may just suggest that 'what we have now' is not what we need for our mission, although it may be for keeping comfortable Christians comfortable.

The reality is that we continue to persevere with what might be called the '**SIC**' church model as our missional platform, that is '*Sunday-Centric, In-Drag and Christendom-Form*'. However, the '*Concerning Trends*' and the realities of the 'Parallel Universes' beg a very scary question-

²² Hall, Douglas John, - *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 2006) p.20

- ' *Can the form of church that we are running with, even extended and reformed, with many new improvements and 'mission' add-ons actually on its own become capable of the missional task that faces us?' i.e. winning Australia for Christ?*

6. A New Mindset

The question being posed here is 'Why do we struggle?' A significant part of the answer to that question is that we have not developed the totally new mind-set or level of thinking required for effective mission in our 21st century western culture. This is where I think that again this Einstein quote is helpful-

"The significant problems we face can't be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."

The great concern is that if we continue to operate at "*the same level of thinking*", and particularly the same level of thinking about church (ecclesiology), as we have in the past, we will keep on with the failed 'More and Better' mission strategy. If so we will almost certainly see a continuation of the now chronic lack of missional fruit, and all the time the 'Iceberg' approaches! We struggle because the quite rigid, inflexible denominational behemoth we have inherited, epitomized by our buildings and church structures is far too slow, and far too difficult to change to be the truly '*Missional*' church needed for our constantly and rapidly changing and evolving culture. The question is, 'When does the time come to stop relying on trying to improve the 'SIC' church model we have, and to develop a new one?'

The urgent need is to design a church for the task of 'pagan mission', something that the western mainline denominations have arguably never really done 'in our own culture'. It is long past time to ask the question as to whether it is not just '*thinking outside the box*' that is needed rather the need is to actually '*get out of the box*', or it may become our coffin.

As we continue to sail 'Titanic-like' across the ocean of spiritual darkness that is Australian society, there seems to be a blissful lack of awareness, a complacency, a 'sleepwalking into the iceberg' ahead. There is a dialogue that is desperately needed in relation to the question 'Why do we struggle?' To help reflect on that issue I suggest that there are some painful 'Diagnostic Questions' that we should ask-



- *Could it be that it is not just our methods of doing mission that is our primary problem? Rather it is our view of church itself (our ecclesiology) that is a significant constraint on our missional effectiveness?*
- *Does our fundamental approach to mission operate within a box and with a mindset that themselves constrain our missional fruitfulness?*
- *How do we answer the 'Prior Question' - 'If we were to build a Mission structure for a 21st century Australia with no churches, what would we build?' What are the implications of our answer?*
- *Has the time has come to let go of our current way of thinking about mission and move to a new level thinking about church?*

A Paradigm Shift- Into the Parallel Universes

"Listen, there's a hell of a good universe next door! Let's go..."

E.E Cummins

Thinking the Unthinkable

Great effort to prosecute the mission of the gospel has been made over the last fifteen years and longer, however we have still ended up with the concerning trends highlighted previously, trends that are actually evident across the whole Australian ecclesial landscape. This being the case the conclusion of this essay is that we have come to a point where it is time to think what was previously unthinkable, something quite shocking for many (most?) church members. This is the urgent need to develop a completely *new mindset* that will instigate a paradigm shift in regard to church and mission. This means a ***Re-imagination*** of what the 'church' should look like in post-Christian Australia; that is in a shimmering kaleidoscope of sociological, cultural and spiritual universes '*where the pagans live*', universes parallel to and alien to the one the 'church' is in.

For significant, trend-reversing missional fruitfulness we must grasp the fact that the task we face is, to put it bluntly, that of 'pagan mission', now more like evangelizing a pagan Africa. It is this goal that must increasingly shape the church of the future, as we seek to be obedient to Scripture, which is again to be-

"All things to all people that by ALL POSSIBLE means (we) might save some"²³

This means to develop a church truly designed for the missional journey into those parallel universes, down the Alice in Wonderland rabbit hole into the strange 'wonderlands' where people are very different to those of us who live in the church/Christian universe. Indeed, the future church must be one that journeys into worlds alien to most western Christians, but it is a voyage we have to make out of a Spirit-driven passion to see more of the lost saved.

We ended the last section considering an important question, which is-

"Has the time come to let go of our current way of thinking about mission and move to a new level thinking about church?"

This can be difficult for many, even most, people who find new levels of thinking, radically new ideas, and new realities hard to adjust to or even accept. This is certainly true in the scientific realm when ideas that once seemed crazy have now been shown to be true e.g. that an electron can appear in two places at the same time, or light can be 'bent'. However 'craziness' is not necessarily grounds for dismissing the possibility of a new reality. Another 'crazy' idea which has been for some time on the scientific radar is that there are more universes than the one we inhabit, but as the great scientist Niels Bohr once said to a colleague-

"Your idea is crazy. The question is, is it crazy enough to be true?"

Of course this idea of 'crazy new realities' is not only true in the area of science, but now also in the social and spiritual realms. Accepted 'Reality' once was that everyone dwelt in a single social and spiritual 'Christianized

²³ 1 Corinthians 9: 22 Author's emphasis

Universe' (in the western world anyway), one in which everybody went to church, believed in God and there was one world view, or controlling 'story', namely the one we see in the Bible. However, this 'one universe' mind map has now crumbled into a kaleidoscope of parallel universes each with its own world view, belief system and controlling story. Indeed there are multiple 'Universes Next Door' to the one everyone used to live in and they are indeed 'crazy'. It is this 'crazy' multiple social and spiritual (often called Post-modern) 'universe' idea that so many church leaders and members find so hard to understand and accept.

Thinking about this reminds me of a story about an Aboriginal tribe that lived on the banks of a mighty river.

-

"For many generations the river gave life to the community, but over a period of time the river slowly began to cease to flow, eventually becoming no more than a series of stagnant billabongs. Along the banks of the disappearing source of life the people watched with dismay; asking 'what was going on here?' While most continued to sit by the dried up river, waiting for the river to flow once more, a few began to look further afield and discovered that the river was not actually gone, it had simply changed course upstream and was flowing elsewhere."

I do not know the origin of this story, but it functions well as a parable about the state of many churches which are like those sitting by the dried-up river bed waiting for the river to return. The church, as we learn in Acts (2:1-4), owes its very existence to the coming, flowing, blessing and empowering of the Holy Spirit, the 'River of the water of life' flowing from the presence of God Himself (as we see in the book of Revelation 22:1,2). It seems however that today the river of the Spirit is not flowing and giving life to traditional model Australian (western) churches.

Why might this be? We know that God expects obedient and servant-hearted gospel ministry from His church, this is why it exists. However so often, while

a church has been vibrant in the past, with a large congregation and numerous young people, as years have gone by the life has been lost, the River has stopped flowing. It can be argued that a major reason for this is because of a failure to realise the 'crazy' reality that the Christendom 'Village' is shattered and its inhabitants have changed their socio-spiritual address and now dwell in universes parallel to and alien to the one for which our model of church was designed. If the church is to regain its missional vitality and fruitfulness it is essential that we stop sitting on the old dried up river bank and seek to follow the river of God, the Holy Spirit and allow Him to take us where He is flowing and wants us to go in order for our mission to be blessed.

This is where prayer is so, so important—that we both as individuals and corporately when we gather together, pray that by God's grace both we will know and be obedient to the leading of the Spirit into the social and spiritual crazy 'universes next door'. These are the addresses where most Australians, indeed westerners, now 'live' with their cultures, ways of thinking and world views increasingly alien to the 'church' universe in which most church members still live. Then perhaps God may be gracious to us and not leave us on the dried up river bank of the declining church asking 'where did the River go?' For surely it is the case that the Spirit of God will only bless our church life and mission when for the sake of the lost we are prepared to follow the 'River' wherever He flows in order to enter the 'multi-verses' that now make up Australian society, difficult though that maybe.

We need to grasp the new reality (crazy as it may seem) that it appears that the River of God has changed course and is not sweeping people into our standard 'Christendom' model church services anymore. He, the Holy Spirit, is flowing elsewhere, giving life to new models of 'being church' around the world, models that God is blessing. The concept of the '*Unbounded Church*' is an attempted response to this 'Crazy' reality.

So, in the words of E.E. Cummins, and I suspect they would be Jesus' words too-

"Listen, there's a hell of a good universe next door! Let's go..."

The concern of this essay is that, as the statistics indicate, our missional endeavours are failing-and chronically. The reasons for this are complex but include a failure to re-asses the fundamentals of our ecclesiology (doctrine of church) and missiology for our times and culture, a failure to ask the 'prior question' as to what type of church we actually need for the mission. Also we have not adequately grasped the urgent need for a paradigm shift out of our fundamentally Christendom box.

I do not believe that it is just a lack of zeal for the missional task (although sadly this is too often the case), or hard work, or planning but that it is our existing model itself (and the level of thinking that goes with it) that is a significant constraint on our shared vision to be more effective in reaching the lost for Jesus, because fundamentally it is not designed for mission. It may well be in fact a box that inhibits our mission. I think this paints a picture of the situation for most mainline denominations. This after much effort and resource expenditure. The question is then what is our response? There would appear to be two options.

One is to continue to repeat the type of missional endeavours we have been engaged in for a very long time but seek to improve them-what might be called a continuation of the 'more and better' strategy which still seems to be the approach of the vast majority of churches. Before we make that decision however we probably should first pay heed to another quote attributed to Einstein-

*"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again
and expecting different results".*

The second option is to look for a 'Game-Changer'. Something completely different that seriously takes note of the 'Concerning Trends' already discussed and related multiple Mission reports, and instigates action that will break us out of the cycle of chronic missional disappointment that our current model and strategies have produced.

Given this, surely it is time, indeed long past time, to 'Think the Unthinkable', quite shocking for many church members, and that is to develop 'a new mindset about church'. It is time to prayerfully Re-imagine what the 'church' should look like in post-Christian Australia; that is in the sociological, cultural and spiritual multi-verses where the non-Christians live, universes actually parallel to, yet disconnected from and alien to the one the 'church' is in. That is why-

*"Witnessing to others in daily life and inviting them to church at the weekend frequently requires too big a jump. The style of Sunday worship, the language, and the assumptions ask too much. Visitors have a look. Sometimes they stay. But more often they think, 'It's not for me', and don't return."*²⁴

The reality is that we are now at a crisis in our missional journey that requires us not just to '*think* outside of the box', but to '*get* outside our box', to in fact create a

"Church as we haven't known it for a Society as we haven't known it".

This means a church specifically designed for the journey through the 'Wormhole' into those spiritual 'multi-verses'. For our mission needs to be like a spiritual 'Star Trek' mission. i.e. to go where no (Australian Anglican

²⁴ 'Being Church/Doing Life' M. Moynagh p.36

anyway) church has gone before. If this is the case the question then becomes what would be the characteristics of such a church?

A Church for the Journey Into an Unmapped Future

*"Is it not time to stop trying to fix the broken bike
and look for another form of transport?"*

(Author unknown)

The journey that has led to the writing of this booklet (a journey continuing into a futuristic landscape as yet unmapped) has been driven by a 'Holy discontent' initially with the limited missional fruit of the churches I have been responsible for. This 'Holy discontent' has been given significant impetus by the largely failing year by year missional efforts of the Australian church in general, leading to the conclusion that there must be a better way. The peak of this 'discontent' was reached by the release of a report on the results of the Sydney Diocese ten year Mission. Large resources, human and financial, were invested in this Mission, resulting (at least initially) in an upsurge in the planting of new churches (this appears to continue to be the ongoing primary strategy). Yet the official report on that Mission, submitted to the 2013 Synod, asked and answered a most relevant question-

"Did the 10 year Diocesan Mission achieve its goals?"²⁵

To which the answer given was *"Clearly not."*

²⁵ Review of the Diocesan Mission, p.74

However, dispiriting though this may be, it should not really surprise us for all the evidence is that there has been a generally diminished and diminishing missional fruitfulness for decades, and it is this that has led me to the concept (I emphasize concept not model) of the *'Unbounded Church'*. The term *'Unbounded'* has a dual meaning in that it is a church set free (unbound) from its bondage to its Christendom forms, and also one where the 'bounds' (i.e. walls) between it and the 'multi-verse' dwellers are removed. The following is a brief indication of what I believe must be some of the essential characteristics of any expression of a truly missional i.e. *'Unbounded'* church, a church for the required 'Star-Trek' journey into that yet unmapped future.²⁶

'Organic and Mission-Fluid.' History has not previously presented anything like our rapidly and constantly changing culture, changes being driven inexorably by brilliant technological innovation and the immigration flows reordering society's ethnic mix. Thus our time is indeed unique, and this means that for the church to be effective in mission intrinsic to its DNA must be an ability to constantly reinvent itself. Here is the key 'Mind-shift' required because the missional church must not be locked into any specific shape. It surely follows therefore, that also essential to its DNA will be an ability to 'flow' into a form required for the mission needs of any time and cultural context.

However for most people the opposite is currently the case. For generally the 'church' is defined in most people's mind map by a matrix of fairly fixed and inflexible concepts: a meeting of relatively fixed people who gather at fixed times, at fixed places, in fixed buildings and take part in relatively fixed 'services' controlled by relatively fixed 'liturgies' (whether written or assumed). What is needed however is an organism that is always able to

²⁶ See the table in Appendix 1 for more comprehensive list of characteristics.

quickly change its form, one more resembling a skeleton-less unshaped Amoeba than a skeletoned mammal. It must therefore be highly 'Flexible', without which capacity it will be impossible to follow Paul's example again to-

*"Become ALL things to ALL men so that by ALL possible means
(we) might save some".²⁷*

In contrast to this, current standard mission orthodoxy is by and large a 'classic' church planting one in order to build more sizable congregations generally meeting again in fixed buildings with static forms and structures that are far too rigid, far too difficult and far too slow to change to be able to meet the missional challenge we face. Such an approach is intrinsically 'inflexible' the very thing we cannot afford to be!

'Adaptable' - Strongly connected with the need for flexibility, a missional church must have the rapid adaptability of a Chameleon to fit into the 'cultural colour' of any given missional background, and do it quickly. This requires a DNA characteristic of 'Adaptability', something our standard church model is not noted for, as anyone who tries to change even small aspects of 'how things are done' quickly finds out! I know of a number of examples where a Senior Minister moved the 'family' Sunday service from the traditional church building to the more 'family-friendly' space of a church hall, and as a result World War 3 broke out, which in at least one case forced the minister to resign.

'Mobile' - One of the characteristics of the mosaic of 'Villagettes' that make up the 'Kaleidoscope Village' is that it is a shimmering flux, if for no other reason than 40% Australians move on average every five years, not a characteristic of the 'Christendom Village'. Thus '*Unbounded Church*' expressions must be 'Mobile' organisms more like the World War 2 Field Marshall Rommel's flexible and fast moving Panzer units, or guerilla warfare

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 9:22. Author's emphasis

cells, than the large, slow and fixed standing army which was characteristic of the Christendom era, and which serves as a metaphor for the church in Australia as it now is. This is not some new and radical idea for-

"Christians have been doing this since Jesus. When the Celtic missionaries moved south from Scotland, for example, they formed highly mobile teams, which could pack up and move on like the nomadic people they sought to reach."²⁸

'Visible' - If we make even a cursory journey through a number of church websites we will often see them setting out their stalls with statements like "Dynamic, relevant preaching, great music, or wonderful fellowship!", and those claims may be true. However, who would know unless they came inside the walls of the church building? In this post-Christianized society the fact is that even with our best 'In-drag' activities few people come in anymore. In fact every Sunday morning as 'church' happens hundreds even thousands drive past to their 'work and play' micro-villages and have no idea of what is happening inside our buildings.

Our churches are largely bounded by walls (both physical and cultural) that actually divide the parallel universes of the church and the pagan worlds of those without Christ. Church membership is generally considered to be those who 'come in' through those walls on some sort of regular basis. This begs the question asked by Michael Moynagh-

"How can the congregation represent the gospel to people if it is not present in their daily lives? How can outsiders understand what communal life with Jesus might mean if they cannot see what's involved? How easily can evangelistic and other outreach events 'lead back to the believing community'?"

²⁸ 'Being Church/Doing Life' M. Moynagh p.34

*if the latter is some distance away? Church is often invisible to people through the week.*²⁹

If we are to be serious about mission, we need to reinvent the church as an 'Observable' community, a multiplicity of '*communities without walls*' that are actually embedded in the 'Villages'. Such communities would by definition impact non-Christians where they spend their time on a regular basis, for they would see the operation of live Christian communities, with frequent opportunities for interaction, service and witness. This would be much like the 'house churches' of the NT time, built close together with glass-less windows so the whole local village was aware of what was going on when the fellowship met. This also has similarities with the strategy of the Celtic missionaries who set up their missional communities in the midst of the pagan villages.

'Membership' of such 'Visible' fellowships will be graduated and actually hard to define in terms of the walled church 'bums on seats' paradigm. 'Members' will range from those who have a peripheral engagement to those who are drawn into the group and participate on a regular basis.³⁰

'Spiritual DNA' Not 'Form' - A Missional church must be set free, unbound, from existing forms, structures and traditions which while they may be *biblically permitted* are not *biblically required*. Rather, the shaping of Missional Communities will be a 'Back to the Future' exercise in that shaping must be by the principles for Christian community voiced to us by the New Testament. So Missional Communities will be varying sized groups of people—

- Which meet intentionally in the name of Jesus
- Where the Bible is learned
- Where there is Prayer

²⁹ 'Being Church/Doing Life' M. Moynagh p.35

³⁰ This is not theory, but what actually happens with missional communities such as the real example shown in Appendix 2.

- Where there is Mutual Care
- Which meet on a regular basis where non-Christians already are
- Which are live Christian Communities that are observable by the non-Christian people around their locations.
- Which are 'outbreaks of the Kingdom' through actively, and practically showing God's love as a positive and beneficial presence to those around.
- Which are missionally intentional i.e.
 1. Seek to 'Serve'
 2. Endeavour to make disciples
 3. Seek to 'Multiply' to form a 'Movement' spawning a network of other 'Kingdom outbreaks'.
- Where baptism and the Lord's Supper are practiced as appropriate.

A group defined by the above DNA set can be of any shape and of any size as is appropriate for the context. It can meet at any time at any place, all or any of which can be changed very quickly and at will.³¹

'Dispersed and Embedded' - What is needed for a missional church is both a mindset and locational shift, what could be described as a movement from *Cathedral to Coffee Shop!* i.e. from the static form, and culturally alienating style of the sizeable and mostly 'in-drag' church operations,³² to a truly 'penetrative' model. This would consist of networks of small missional faith communities of variable sub-congregational sizes, dispersed throughout and embedded in the shards of the 'Kaleidoscope Villages' in the parallel universes where non-Christians actually live, work and play. These missional communities will be *'Kingdom Outbreaks'*, a *'Nearness of Christ'* embedded in, and engaging with, the community, and will be able to be moved, changed and reshaped as needed.

³¹ Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission Report 2008- *A Theology of Christian Assembly*- Clause 24

³² 'In-Drag' because the prevailing intention of most mission activities, even those that take place in the community, is to get (Drag) people into existing services.

It will NOT be a case of getting people into Sunday church services (In-Drag) as our current strategies try to do, with decreasing effectiveness. Rather it will be a case of reinvention to take the church to the people where they already are.

'Culturally Accessible' - One of the key causes of our missional weakness is a serious failure to grasp the fact that the pagan universes are culturally alien to the 'church' universe. The missional communities that would be multiple expressions of '*Unbounded Church*' must not only *access* the parallel universes but be *accessible to* their inhabitants in the sense of reflecting, using and relating to the cultural forms of, styles of and the 'street' languages of, the pieces of the cultural mosaic in which they are set. Such requires significant effort to 'exegete' (unpack and understand) the alien culture of the pagans. This quite frankly is 'mission basics 101' yet seems to have largely dropped off the radar of many local church mission endeavours.

Sprinkled-Not Sunday-Centric – A while ago I accidentally tuned into a radio station playing the song 'Never On a Sunday'. As I listened I heard couple of the lines which went-

*"Never on a Sunday when the church is full of people
and the bells are ringing in the steeple"*

And I thought –well that doesn't work anymore! There are fewer and fewer church bells rung on Sundays these days (and when they are the neighbours tend to complain!) and the times when the churches were full are long gone. However, it then occurred to me that maybe the title of the song has a message for our future! That is perhaps it is time to conceive a church which is 'Never on a Sunday', well almost anyway.

What a shocking statement that will be for many. For the fact is that we are so conditioned to think that 'church' is really about the 'religious services' we provide on Sundays. The idea of a 'Not always on a Sunday' church was reinforced as I was watching the kids at a Friday youth and kids church weekly dinner. Most of them were from non-church and often deprived families that will not or cannot attend on Sundays. The same is true of the vast majority of families attending a 'PlayLife' (Church in a Playgroup) and all the people contacted by a network of '*Unbounded Church*' type missional communities each week. (See Appendix 2a)

What in times gone by used to be a Sunday 'work, play, and shop'-free zone has now been consumed by work, all types of play and much retail therapy. Further, 20% of Australians work on Sunday, and another 20% plus are engaged in other sporting or recreational activities. All of which means that a large proportion of non-Christians and their families are simply not available to attend 'church' on Sundays no matter how hard we try to get them there even if they wanted to come. Given all of this if we think we will grow the church with a Sunday-centric model (as nearly all churches are still trying to do) then paraphrasing an iconic Australian movie character "*we must be dreamin'*!

A further fact that is making our need to change difficult to achieve is that centuries of our current model have left most church members with frozen imaginations in regard to how we 'do church'. There will often be an assumption that how church has been done in their lifetime (Sunday-centric) is how it must continue to be done. Further the objection of many to the idea of a 'Never on a Sunday' church will be that this just isn't 'Church'; meaning not the Traditional/Christendom form of church that they are used to and are comfortable with.

There is however no Biblical reason that a 'Never (or at least not usually) on Sunday' church cannot be created as a network of new 'Kaleidoscope village-penetrating' missional communities. These will be ones that are still shaped

by the New Testament spiritual DNA for Christian community, but that are spread largely away from Sunday and '*Sprinkled*' throughout the week. It is important to remember that the idea that things may be done differently has always been envisaged, as for example by Article 34 of the Anglican "*39 Articles of Faith*".

As the church fails in its mission to our society we need to look at the harsh reality that the vast majority of our resources are consumed by Sunday-centric ministries yet they bear decreasing amounts of gospel fruit. This is why many mission reports have said, not exactly 'Never on a Sunday', but certainly that there needs to be a switch of our resources (including use of staff time) "*away from Sunday gatherings*".³³ Quite shocking maybe but an essential step for a vital church future and missional fruitfulness.

So for the sake of the lost maybe 'Never on a Sunday' is a relevant slogan. Well maybe not 'Never' but to a much lesser extent, and with correspondingly less resource use.

'Messy' (Organic Emergence) Investigation of current missionally fruitful 'alternative forms' of church around the western world reveals a fairly common theme, the theme of 'Messiness'! New forms of church are arising which are 'Messy' in their process of development, their style and their appearance, often resulting more from a 'messy' process of evolution or '**Organic Emergence**' process rather than the result of the clear process and planned characteristics of 'Classic' church planting strategies.

The '*Unbounded Church*' concept is intended to produce multiple forms of Missional Communities suitable for a '*Knightian Uncertainty*' environment³⁴. This is an environment in which there is just not enough data available to be able to predict and therefore plan with any certainty for what is going to

³³ 'The Diocesan Mission- Midpoint Report' (2008) produced by the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

³⁴ Named after University of Chicago economist Frank Knight

happen, so the process of the development of new missional communities is one of emergence out of uncertainty. This is far distant from current planned church planting type strategies, rather it is one of '*Organic Emergence*'. It is also a process for which many current church leaders are neither psychologically suited nor trained.

The evidence is that such new forms are reaching far more of the lost than the 'SIC' church model. They appear in a wide variety of contexts as the very limited number of examples in Appendix 3 shows. The list is endless, however a common thread is 'Messiness'. Indeed it would appear that, in contrast to our well-ordered and planned 'SIC' church model mission events, programs and 'Classic' church planting strategies, God actually 'does messy' and is blessing 'messiness'!

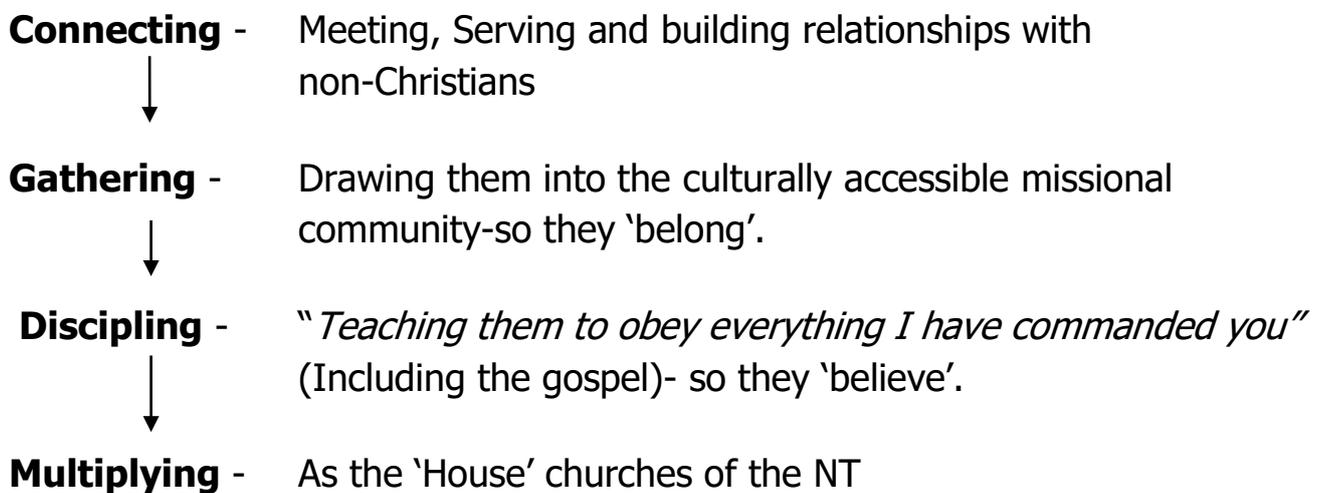
The argument here is that it is our insistence of keeping God in a box of rules and regulations, traditional forms and structures for mission that is a major factor in the general missional unfruitfulness of the mainline churches. For a God who 'does messy' will not be put in a box of tidy rules and forms demanded by us, yet that is exactly what we seek to do when we insist on refusing to let go of our 'SIC' church forms as the platform from which to do mission.

Thinking about this whole idea of a '*Messy Theology/Missiology*' is-well yes messy! However, as we struggle then with our general missional unfruitfulness, could it be that for the sake of our mission, now is the time to give more thought to a '*Theology of Messiness*' that will at least allow for an '*Organic Emergence*' approach to mission in our post-modern 'messy' culture? This will mean letting God out of the box in which we have confined him. It will mean seeding 'possibilities of church' with individuals and groups planted as gospel seeds in the 'Knightian uncertainty' environments of the messy, swirling confusion that is the kaleidoscope of tribes comprising western culture. It will mean praying that the Holy Spirit will cause these

'possibilities', shaped by the New Testament DNA for Christian community, to emerge organically into missional communities. Crucially these will be indigenous to their 'messy' cultures unlike the alien insertions of most current imported missional endeavours.

The Missional Community Process

The intention of embedding missional communities in the public domain is to provide an opportunity for, and to initiate, a process such as this



Why multiplication is so important³⁵

We should however take a moment to reflect on why multiplication is so important. Given the rapid rate of increase of the Australian population, the church needs to increase rapidly the number of 'missional' Christian fellowships. Most importantly it needs to do so to have any chance of reversing the well documented trends of decline. Currently the most common strategy is for churches to seek to 'add' new sizeable congregations ('Classic' church plants) but this, limited by the large resources required, can be done

³⁵ See Appendix 6

only every year or so if that. However, the basic mathematics of this approach shows that it will fail. An 'addition' strategy cannot add enough new fellowships fast enough, and so a multiplication model is needed as indicated in the table below.

Year	By Addition	By Multiplication	
1	1	2	
2	2	4*	*dividing every year
3	3	8	
4	4	16	
5	5	32	

The reality is that, even if we had the human resources, we just cannot fund a multiplying increase with the 'expensive block of land, building, minister' model. The fact is that multiplication can only be done with small, low cost micro-congregations or Missional Communities. This is the ONLY way the previously referred to decline trends can be reversed.

'Leadership'

Given the chronically small level of missional fruit being produced from our current methods, could it be that to continue to produce a flow of graduates from theological colleges the majority of whom see themselves, and indeed in many cases their primary gifting is, as preachers and teachers, is not the need of the hour?³⁶ Could it be that what is actually needed, and needed desperately, is the production of missionaries, and the fact is that those gifted as teachers/preachers are not necessarily gifted as missionaries?

³⁶ This is not intended to deny that those selected for missional leadership do not need to be biblically well taught and able to handle the Word of God well. Rather it is to say that it is not enough for the current missional crisis.

Our current Leadership model is strongly shaped by the Christendom paradigm, primarily suited to maintenance, the building up of the 'saints', not mission. However, the person with a missionary heart, the heart that should be a primary requirement for any one considered for training for, or appointment to, the leadership of what now must be a truly missional church, will display distinctive characteristics. A Missional church needs missional leadership which-

- Is 'Entrepreneurial' and is prepared to take risks.
- Is focused on building the 'Kingdom' not the 'church'.
- Is able to not just *think* outside of the box but to *get* outside the box.
- Is 'flexible and innovative'.
- Has an '*Organic Emergence*' rather than a '*rigidly planned*' approach to mission.
- Can live on the '*Edge of Chaos*'.
- Has over the horizon radar-i.e. is able to see, indeed prayerfully 'imagine', the church as it must become before it is! i.e. has a Vision for what needs to be.
- Prayerfully submits its imagination to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the voice of the New Testament, and dares to '*imagine what is not*' for the glory of God.
- Has a *Star Trek* vision, i.e. a preparedness to go where "*no man (or church) has gone before*", that is along a '*road as yet unmapped*'.

Here lies a significant problem. For large numbers of existing church leaders do not fit the personality, gift and passion profiles required for the new missional paradigm. Rather they are chosen, trained and gifted for the SIC church model. This would suggest the need to change the selection criteria such that those chosen for leadership are best fitted for '*Unbounded Church*' mission, and then provide specific training for that. It may be also that there is actually a need to establish a re-skilling program for existing leaders.

To be effective in mission the church must travel a road which the western church has not really done before. It is a journey through a pagan land, a kaleidoscope of alternative universes, through a land for which no road map has been written, indeed we have to write the map as we go. For such a journey the vehicle needed will be a very different one from the SIC church model we have used for so long, it must be a church that does mission with a new form of transport. Further, the leadership required is very different to those who are currently being selected and trained for the existing, and missionally failing, Christendom local church model.



Square Wheels and Other Options

"It is not necessary that the Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places, one and utterly alike: for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries times, and men's manners"

Article 34³⁷

Square Wheels

Christians around the western world are debating, analyzing and seeking to heal the general and now chronic missional malaise. As we seek to engage in the same task, it is important that we learn from their experiences, both positive and negative. It is especially important that we do not continue to reinvent *'Square Wheels'*.

Of course it's ok to invent something and then find it doesn't work. You just try something different. However, to keep on reinventing and using the *'Square Wheel'*, the design that didn't work in the first place would seem to be somewhat unwise! Yet it seems that we in the church are quite good at just that.

As an example, a few years ago at a regional ministers' conference in a session on church planting, we were listening to a speaker who was describing his experience in a church plant for which he was at the time responsible. The talk was largely about the mistakes he realised he had made in planting the new church, which ultimately failed. As he talked I remember thinking he could have been warned against making those same mistakes by

³⁷ Anglican 39 Articles of Faith

reading any number of books on church planting written during the previous ten years or so! Yet he and others had persisted in reinventing the '*Square wheel*'- i.e. the model that had previously been shown not to work elsewhere.

I am concerned that we continue to see the '*Square Wheel*' approach to mission too often today. Several examples have been noted in recent times. These include the building of extremely expensive, 'in-drag', Sunday-centric, Christendom style large 'church' facilities- the very model that has now been failing in mission for decades. One might be tempted to question whether it is suddenly likely to be particularly fruitful now. Square wheels don't suddenly become a good idea!

Other Options

In response to the widespread missional malaise, in the United Kingdom, Europe and the USA, rather than persisting with 'Square Wheel' reinventions, Christians have been developing 'alternative' churches and 'Missional Church Networks' (MCNs) for well over a decade. Along with this, organizations that foster, equip, train and support such new ventures have emerged.

Characteristics

When meeting and engaging with those involved in the development of alternative missional church networks (MCNs) a number of important common characteristics can be observed-

- There is a high degree of passion to make disciples of Jesus, indeed at a level not very common in standard church congregations.
- There is a high level of commitment to the missional task that is evidenced by a willingness to sacrifice much time, effort and money to the gospel cause.

- Members of MCNs tend to be entrepreneurial and demonstrate high degrees of creativity, initiative and flexibility in the *'how, where and what'* they do for the gospel cause. Indeed there is a *'whatever it takes'* mentality (1 Corinthians 9:22,23).
- There is a very high commitment to prayer, prayer meetings and prayer-walking for their ministry areas.
- The above characteristics combine in a powerful effort for disciple-making.

The issue of limited missional fruitfulness has been addressed to a much greater degree overseas, particularly in the UK where there is now 15 or so years of experience of developing alternative forms of church (including many Anglican). Such alternative forms manifest an extremely wide variety in terms of their form, style, location and cultural accessibility in their attempts to penetrate the wide variety of cultural and spiritual worlds now inhabited by non-Christians.³⁸ However common threads and themes can be discerned and these are important when considering the development of alternative forms of church in Australia.

- They are frequently *'Messy'*
- Many are the result of *'Organic Emergence'*³⁹
- Most develop and/or embed missional communities in the wider community i.e. where non-Christians already are.
- They are largely *'Go and Stay'* rather than *'Go and Bring'* (In- Drag) initiatives.
- They are generally highly flexible
- They meet at a variety of times, places and are *'sprinkled'* across the week
- They are expressed in an unlimited variety of culturally accessible styles

³⁸ See Appendix 3 for examples

³⁹ Organic Emergence- The emergence of a Christian Fellowship in an organic way that was not necessarily predicted.

- They generally start with some form of serving not the bible
- They are highly relational
- They often start very small (3-4 people)
- Start-up, and usually continuation, costs range from low to virtually nothing.
- They are alternative multiple expressions of New Testament Ecclesiology
- Most are easily reproducible.

The central argument of this essay is the need for the church to be *'Unbound'*, that is set free from the forms and associated thinking that have proved to be of such limited fruitfulness in mission. Otherwise I believe we will be in danger of reinventing the *'Square Wheel'* by continuing to implement missional strategies that have repeatedly been shown to be largely ineffective. As an antidote to this we should in humility be prepared to learn from others further along in the journey both from their successes but most importantly from their *'Square Wheel'* experiences, and indeed there is a lot to learn from as we look around the world today.

Concerns and Challenges

"It's not the strongest of species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change"

Charles Darwin

A Theological Concern

When meeting and engaging with those involved in alternative missional church movements I have sometimes been concerned by questionable theology, and sensed the what I call the *"Who will be Timothy?"* question arising.

A major reason much of the material in the New Testament letters is there at all is because of the problems that arose in the new house churches. Perhaps the most extreme example of things going off track is the Corinthian church. A large proportion of 1 Corinthians is a litany of problems e.g. lack of love, abuse of the Lord's supper, misuse of spiritual gifts, factionalism around specific church leaders, false theology in regard to the return of Christ and the resurrection, rejection of authority-the list goes on and extends into most of the other NT letters.

That there is a need for some form of theological *'checks and balances'* is shown by the apostle Paul himself. He actually spent only a little time with many of the faith communities that formed out of his evangelism, before moving on and leaving them as fledgling missional communities in a spiritually hostile world. However, they were not abandoned, for we see Paul writing letters to these small faith communities full of pastoral advice,

encouragement, answers to questions, sometimes rebuke and, relevantly, often instructions in regard to problems. He also revisited many of them or if he could not he sent his representatives (Timothy, Titus etc) like travelling overseers. Later on in the NT story he placed people in particular locations to deal with problems in the local churches as he did with Timothy in Ephesus, "*to command certain men not to teach false doctrines*" (1 Tim. 1:1, 2) or Titus in Crete.

If Paul himself was very aware of the dangers for small group, house churches and put external safeguards in place should we not be equally alert? We must most certainly continue to seek to develop alternative forms of 'church' set free, unbound, from the failing SIC church model, in order to be effective in our missional task. There are times however when we must for the spiritual health of missional communities ask the question – "Who will be Timothy?" It is for this reason that I think expressions of the *'Unbounded Church'* concept should have some form of theological oversight in place.

Challenges

Many of the thoughts and proposals canvassed in this essay in regard to changes in how we 'do church', changes to church forms and structures, and how we do 'mission' are likely to produce strongly negative reactions. This will be the case for many if not most 'standard church' members, many of whom are not able, or do not wish, to think outside the current paradigm. A number of reasons can be suggested for such reactions.

Christendom and the Divine Freedom

The 'Christendom' paradigm, or metanarrative, has a set of core beliefs that define the church culture for many members, even if subconsciously.

Centuries of our current model have left many church members with frozen imaginations in regard to how we 'do church'. However, there is no

biblical/theological reason that the *Unbounded Church* concept cannot be birthed in a range of new 'universe-penetrating' missional communities that are still based on and shaped by the NT DNA for Christian community and theologically at one with the Creeds. While there are variations, the missiological strategies of most mainline churches are primarily based on and operate with a fundamentally SIC mindset. This despite there being what might be called a '**Divine Freedom**' to do things very differently. There are a number of arguments that can be made for such a freedom, for example-

i) The New Testament gives that freedom by implication because it does not specify any particular model for 'doing church and mission'. Rather it gives us principles for the forming and shaping of Christian community.

ii) A study by the Sydney (Anglican) Diocesan Doctrine Commission in its report "A Theology of Christian Assembly" concluded that-

"Christian assemblies can take place anywhere, do not require the presence of any particular person, can occur at any time on any day and do not involve any essential ritual. Christians do not have a place on earth to which they must come to worship . . . and there is no need to observe particular days or rites" (Clause 24)

iii) Further, the Anglican articles of faith reflect this Divine freedom. In particular Article 34 says –

"It is not necessary that the Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places, one and utterly alike: for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word."

iv) That things can be different is also reinforced by Griffith-Thomas when he writes with reference to this Article-

"It is a matter of simple fact that Traditions and Ceremonies have never been alike, and it is not going too far to say that they never will be. The history of the church.

*. . . has been again and again, marked by change, according to differences of place, occasions and circumstances.*⁴⁰

Therefore, in the search for greater missional fruitfulness we should obey Paul's exhortation to "*imitate him*" (Phil 3:17) by following his example when he says-

*"I have become ALL things to ALL people
so that by ALL possible means I might save some."*⁴¹

It is important to note he does not say 'Some' but ALL things, people, means. Yet it is largely the case that centuries of our current model have left many church leaders and members with frozen imaginations in regard to how we 'do church'. There will often be an assumption that how church has been done is how it must continue to be done. Further, the hard to comprehend objection of many allegedly biblically well taught church members to the exercise of the 'Divine Freedom' will be that this just isn't 'Anglican' (or Baptist or Presbyterian etc). By which is meant not the Traditional/Christendom form of church that they are used to and are comfortable with.

The reality is that in effect we continue to limit our missional efforts and methods to what we have been doing and failing in for decades, and of course what fits with our particular traditional parish paradigm. However, there is no doubt that for greater missional fruitfulness we must recapture and fully exercise the Divine freedom. This requires us to urgently reimagine a new church, a new paradigm that will unbind the church from its currently limiting and missionally failing forms. This is all for the sake of the mission of the gospel- our core business. Such a reimagining will be shocking to many, but we are at a time when shock is needed or we will keep on sleepwalking into the iceberg.

⁴⁰ The Principles of Theology. An Introduction to the Thirty Nine Articles, W. H Griffith Thomas, p.440

⁴¹ Author's emphasis

Illusory Success

There is a general lack of preparedness on the part of many to consider something different, in part perhaps because they allow themselves to be lulled into a false sense of security by some limited missional success. Success does and will occur as we harvest the 'low hanging fruit', that is largely those in the community who have some affinity with the traditional church for some reason. That however is a shrivelling orchard, and reality is still defined by the negative trajectory of the 'Concerning Trends' which warn us against being seduced by occasional localized reports of success, and the '*Transferee Mirage*'.

It is important to note that alleged 'successes' can often be illusory, a result of a lack of critical analysis. For example, claims may be made for the missional success of a 'Greenfield' church plant in a growth area where the number of '*bums on seats*' looks good. However, if the question is asked 'where did all these new members come from?' it is mostly the case that the vast majority were previously members of other churches before moving into the area of the 'Greenfield' church and have in fact been lost by their church of origin. This is not Kingdom growth!

Then there is the example of the large Anglican parish with a thriving and growing youth ministry, held up as a great 'success'. That is until one puts it in the context of the diminishing, even folding, youth ministries of the surrounding parishes from which the 'successful' church has 'poached' its growth. An example of the '*Transferee Mirage*' on a local scale.

Another area of usually illusory success is in regard to special '*In-drag*' outreach events. Large numbers of attendees and a well-run event can leave the 'Christians' with the 'illusion' of missional success. However, critical analysis usually reveals little or no gospel fruit (i.e. how many of those attending were not members of another church **and** became an ongoing

member of any fellowship) in return for what is often a large investment of resources.

Often cited as an example of 'Success' is that led by what can be called the 'Rock Star' minister. This is the especially gifted and often charismatic leader who by dint of exceptional gifts, personality and drive grows a dynamic church. For such we praise God, however this is not a model that will be a vehicle for general missional success for it is rarely replicable. Rock Stars are few and far between!

Yes it does have to be said that some 'success' is occurring and must be celebrated. However, the fact is that this is usually little and isolated and it is not legitimate to argue a general conclusion of missional effectiveness from isolated particular 'successes'. The reality still is, despite such 'success', that the *'Missional Emperor'* has no clothes on!! And *'Newcomers'* are still declining in our congregations!

Discomfort Averse

To create anything truly missional will be costly because in general the vast majority of church members are not likely to embrace such change for as Tom Frame says-

"the culturally compliant strain of Christianity promoted in Australia does not oblige (people) to embrace lifestyle choices that might involve discomfort."⁴²

The cold hard reality and serious challenge is that large numbers of contemporary congregational members see the church as a convenience store, a provider of religious services, there for me to be involved in its life and ministry as is convenient for me and my family.

⁴² Tom Frame, *Losing My Religion* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009) p.15

One indication of this phenomenon is shown by the low attendance index of many, even most, churches, often as low as the 50 to 60% level even in many bible teaching churches.⁴³ We should be clear that where the commitment of the membership to even basic church attendance is so low there is little likelihood of enthusiasm for the radical change needed for the sake of fruitful mission. So when the missional project is promoted with its requirements for change, sacrifice, inconvenience and discomfort, a large proportion of church members will be at best apathetic, and if pushed too far many will simply move to another church, one that allows them to keep on being 'religiously comfortable'.

Resource Cost

A very big challenge in trying to create a truly missional church, however it is proposed, is that it will to a large extent take the 'best people' out of the life and ministries of the standard church. These will be the most committed people with the greatest passion for the lost, and with the highest degree of flexibility. The effect of this is that it can become more difficult to resource standard church ministries.

It is not just the challenge of human resources however. Mission is always cash flow negative, because for example, if a church is supporting a missionary in Africa it will be cash flow negative in terms of that congregation. i.e. funds flow to the missionary with no financial return. It is the same with mission-local- it costs!

A key resource for the establishment of expressions of '*Unbounded Church*' is 'missional' leaders. In terms of mainline denominations these would be expected to predominantly be church ministers (usually ordained). However, time and time again in conversation with such leaders, comments are made along the lines of-

⁴³ The Attendance Index is the average weekly total attendance expressed as a percentage of the total of all who attend with some regularity.

"Well I am really interested in developing new missional alternatives, but quite frankly I just do not have the time or energy. It's all I can do to run the existing model as I'm expected to do. There's simply nothing left over."

I would argue that this issue **alone** is enough to prevent the creation of an effective missional church based on the standard parish paradigm. When the resources of the people who should be the most trained, equipped and motivated for driving mission are almost totally consumed by keeping the standard missionally limited church model going, there is little prospect of the missional fruitfulness that will reverse the trends of decline.

Then there is the 'Cost of Not'!

The Cost of the 'Concerning Trends'

Given current trends, it does not require great mental ability or advanced mathematical skills to see that these will inevitably result in permanent decline. Newcomer decline will continue and the average age of attendees will continue heavenwards (literally!) if nothing changes. That will be the serious 'Cost of Not' doing anything. Yet it is hard to see anything significantly different being set in train, and certainly nothing akin to "radical change". These words, admittedly taken from another context, make an important point if applied to our missional task.

"It's not the strongest of species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change"⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Charles Darwin

The Cost of the Constraining Model.

If we continue to maintain and rely on a SIC church model, as is almost everywhere still the case, that is in its very self a constraint on our missional fruitfulness and one that is not required by scripture. If retaining our traditional form or expression of NT ecclesiology is more important than the gospel imperative, then I would suggest we fall foul of the schemes of the 'Stoixeia' (Galatians 4:3). These are the Satanic elemental spirits that seek to control and bind human, and Christian, behaviour through holding us captive in-

"human institutions, traditions, ideas, and religious philosophies".⁴⁵

The cost of allowing this to continue to happen is that we lose the New Testament-voiced freedom for the new humanity so dearly won for us by Christ⁴⁶, and our ability to mission is severely hampered. Of course, the Enemy likes it that way.

Christians throughout the western church have carried out much innovative work over the last decade or so in the cause of greater missional fruit, and it's important that we learn from their experiences, both positive and negative. It is especially important that we cease reinventing the '*Square Wheel*', the failed strategy of yesteryear.

When the '*Unbounded*' Church' concept is discussed, usually a theological concern is expressed in regard to the maintenance of theological purity in the multitude of missional communities. This is a valid question but one that the

⁴⁵ M. Frost. "The Shape of things to come". f/n 2, p.183

⁴⁶ Ephesians 2:15

New Testament church had to deal with also, yet they showed that it is possible to put in place appropriate checks and balances as we need to do.

It is true that the establishment of '*Unbounded Church*' missional communities has associated costs, challenges, dangers and difficulties including the requirement to redistribute resources and the discomfort-averse attitude of large numbers of congregational members. However, the 'cost of not' overcoming these things is that the 'Concerning trends' will continue in a negative and ultimately disastrous direction.

Given these realities and the ongoing failure of what we have been doing for decades we now surely need to move to '*Another Way*'.

Towards 'Another Way'

"Your idea is crazy. The question is, is it crazy enough to be true?"

Neils Bohr

Great efforts have been made for a long time, indeed decades, to increase the missional fruitfulness of the Australian church, with significant ongoing expenditure of human and financial resources, but with chronically disappointing results. The regrettable reality is, as the statistical data show, that our current approach is fundamentally ineffective. This is borne out by the documented trends indicating ongoing 'Newcomer' decline, a rising age profile of attendees and the fast widening gap between flat or declining church attendance levels and population growth trends. Even the 'comfort' of the attendance growth that occurred in some places (e.g. Sydney up until 2011), is torn away with the mask of the little remarked '*Transferee Mirage*'. While I have quoted Albert Einstein in this essay, one does not have to be him to see the bleak future if those trends are not reversed, and soon!

Yes, there are some things that we cannot control, such as the gospel hardness of our culture. We also cannot control the degree to which God will send His Spirit to open human hearts to the gospel and bring people to faith, although we can and must fervently pray for an overflowing of that Spirit to empower our missional endeavours. However, there is one thing we can control and that is 'How' we do mission and the strategies we use for it. We know that we need God's blessing but how can we expect him to bless us if we insist on continuing to 'do church' and mission 'Our way' rather than 'His way'?

This 'how, what and where' issue is the subject of this essay, and in this regard there is a need for a much greater, and prayerful critical analysis of

our missional efforts and regrettable failures than currently appears to be the case.

Roadblocks on Mission Highway

The inspiration for the '*Unbounded*' Church concept is an idea—the idea that the Australian church, if it is to resurrect its mission, needs to be 'unbound'. That is, it needs to be set free from its current rigid, cumbersome and change-averse 'Christendom' influenced forms, structures and mission strategies in order to be –

'A church as we haven't known it for a society as we haven't known it'

The facts of our now decades long missional malaise cannot be disputed and, while the reasons for this are clearly complex, I believe that a significant factor is the number of, often self-constructed, roadblocks on the missional highway (or unnamed 'Elephants' in the mission operations room).⁴⁷ We have highlighted many of these in this essay as summarized in the following list. They require a lot more discussion, analysis and creative response than is currently the case.

- i. The largely unspoken false assumption that we can just continue with an overall '*More and Better*' missional strategy and there will be better outcomes. To keep on doing this, even though the evidence is that our fundamental model is failing, would appear to have at least a whiff of Einstein's definition of 'Insanity' about it.
- ii. The "*More and Better Delusion*" that is often disguised by the '*Transferee Mirage*'.

⁴⁷ Most of these are discussed in more detail in articles to be found on unboundedchurch.com

- iii. The failure to truly grasp that the Christianized 'Village' in which our church model developed and was designed for is no more. Indeed it is shattered into a Kaleidoscope Village of 'Live, Work and Play' mini-communities, cultural 'universes' that are alien to the 'church' universe, a kaleidoscope that is a shimmering flux in a constant and rapid state of change.
- iv. The Reality is that we now live in an effectively 'pagan' country (one which worships 'other gods') and the need is to learn how to do 'pagan mission' *in our own culture*, something the western mainline churches have not really done before.
- v. The fact that the vast majority of our 'churches' are 'SIC' (Sunday-centric, In-drag, Christendom-form), a model that has for the most part been, and is increasingly, missionally ineffective.
- vi. The fact that the vast majority of resources continue to be focused on maintaining congregations not mission, whereas the focus should be to redirect ministry from congregational gatherings to local mission.
- vii. There is a problem with leadership-
 - a) Church leaders continue to be selected and trained for a role that is not the missional leadership role that is now urgently needed. The inescapable reality is that 'Mission' needs Missionaries!
 - b) Most leaders are so consumed with meeting the demands of standard church congregations that they have little time and energy for pursuing the creative missional endeavours without which the 'Mission' will fail.

- c) Those that do desire to develop new missional strategies often feel that they don't possess the skills.
- viii. For our longed-for increase in missional fruitfulness to actually eventuate there needs to be '*radical change*'⁴⁸ yet it is hard to see any changes to which the adjective radical can reasonably be attached!
- ix. The lack of '*Critical analysis*' of our missional crisis, and the lack of any great degree of '*Out of the box*' thinking.
- x. The reliance on 'Classic' church planting which has demonstrable very limited effectiveness. Certainly not of the magnitude required.
- xi. The widespread crushing apathy in congregations to the significant cost required for effective mission, by significant numbers of 'Christianity-Lite', consumerist, discomfort-averse congregational members.

This is a major roadblock on the highway to fruitful mission if we continue to insist on relying on our existing 'SIC' church model as the primary, and usually only, platform for mission. For, when the requirements for effective mission are pushed, such members will either disappear down the road to a more 'accommodating' church where they can continue to be '*religiously comfortable*', or fight like 'hell' (literally) against the significant change required for more fruitful mission.

All of this I would suggest amounts to a Crisis in the true sense of the word. These are roadblocks on the missional highway about which much more

⁴⁸ Sydney Diocese 'Midpoint Report', 2008. p.2 Implied 9 years ago that this is what is needed.

discussion is needed. It is vital that these issues be addressed, and urgently, if we are to see the degree of mission fruitfulness required to arrest let alone reverse the documented church decline in our culture.

Another Way - The Parallel Option

It is very easy of course to point out the weaknesses and failures of our strategies and approach to mission, but much more difficult to say what should be done. In response to that question the argument of this essay is really nothing new, rather it is that we need a radically new "mindset", which I believe will involve grasping something like the '*Unbounded Church*' concept, to set the the church free (unbound)from what are largely 20th century (or earlier) and missionally limited forms and strategies.

This will be extremely difficult, costly and painful as discussed previously. However, this would release the creative moment, pregnant with the possibilities of a multiplicity of new non-Christendom expressions of a basic NT voiced spiritual DNA set, i.e. missional communities embedded in the Kaleidoscope of 'live, work and play' parallel and alien universes 'where the pagans live'. In short, the need is for the creation of a bespoke missional church, a 'Church specifically designed for mission' instead of relying on our current 'Church that does mission' paradigm.

The stark reality is that to redevelop a standard congregation into a truly missional one with a truly 'missional' mindset is likely to be an extremely slow, painful and attritional process if it is possible at all. This is not least because of the certain strong congregational 'push-back' against anything remotely 'radical'. In any case experience shows that to achieve such change takes many years. Given the seriously negative trends discerned earlier, can we realistically afford to move at that speed?

So What is Needed?

The thesis of this essay is that we need 'Another way', which is not to try and redevelop the existing model but to begin to develop at least what can be called a '**Mixed Economy**' church (See Appendix 2). This means at minimum to start to develop Missional Church Networks (MCNs) separate from, but in parallel to the standard church, something that could be done on a church by church basis, as is happening in the UK, some embryonic examples of which are beginning to arise in Australia.

The MCs making up these networks must be the organic, 'Mission Fluid' groups that demonstrate the characteristics described in the '*A Church for the Journey Into an Unmapped Future*' section of this essay. That is MCs established within, and observable by, the 'Live, work and play' communities of the lost.

A Bigger Vision

More than that however, for the sake of effective mission to the kaleidoscope of alien 'multi-verses' in which non-Christians now live, the question needs to be asked as to whether the time come for a bigger indeed more radical vision. That is a vision for a paradigm shift to a new bespoke, non-parochially connected church specifically designed for mission to what is now effectively a pagan culture. This would consist of a web of non-parochial Missional Community Networks (MCNs) embedded in the kaleidoscope of '*Live, work and play*' parallel universes that constitute 21st century Australia. Such would require some form of oversight, a body that would initiate, encourage, support, and facilitate the development of alternative MCNs shaped by the principles for Christian community voiced to us by the NT. For the sake of this discussion I will call this new body '**Unbounded Church**' i.e. A missional network church for the 21st century indicatively defined as below.

***The Vision for an 'Unbounded Church'
Missional Community Network***

- To see Networks of new and alternative forms of church developing and multiplying in the 'socio-spiritual universes' where non-Christians live, work and play. These are the worlds that the traditional 'Christendom' model churches are chronically failing to reach with the gospel of Jesus.
- To promote the formation of new theologically biblical missional paradigms that are Missional Communities of disciples of Jesus Christ and which will multiply to form expanding Missional Community Networks (MCNs).
- To facilitate, resource, and provide training and encouragement to those who are already on, or who wish to commence, such a journey.
- To provide a forum for knowledge sharing and mutual reinforcement
- To provide a Consultant group that can assist local congregations and/or individuals to start parallel MCNs
- To develop and provide access to training- workshops and materials
- To maintain a Theological oversight.

And So-

'This would release the creative moment, pregnant with the possibilities of a multiplicity of new non-Christendom expressions of a basic New Testament-voiced

DNA set . . . missional communities embedded in the Kaleidoscope of 'live, work and play' parallel and alien universes where the pagans live'.

We live in momentous times, historical times indeed perhaps a hinge point in history in which we are seeing the slow motion collapse of western civilization, a civilization shaped by a Christendom that is now but a distant echo. In the church there is now I believe a looming existential Crisis, and as with all crises there will be one of two outcomes, the question for us is which will it be? There has appeared a Wormhole in the fabric of history that has sucked most of western society out of its Christendom universe into a Kaleidoscope of parallel universes where the church is not.

In the context of the current and ongoing cultural meltdown, the idea that a church model that developed for the pastoral maintenance of existing congregations, and that thrived in a Christianized society, can continue to be the main vehicle for the equivalent of 'Mission Africa' would seem to be highly improbable to say the least.

All the available and most recent data points to serious negative trends in regard to the health of the church, the most serious, but least remarked, of these being the now decades old decline in missional fruitfulness as measured by 'Newcomers'. Yet the response to these very serious realities has been less than radical, almost as if they are some sort of illusion, a bad dream from which the hope is that we will awake, a mirage that will fade with the dying day. The reality is more probably that we are sleep walking into the iceberg. The urgent question to be asked is-

'Is it wise to limit our missional strategy to one that involves repeatedly seeking to use 'More and Better' versions of what we are doing now, yet expecting different outcomes? Is this not some sort of delusion that take us close to Einstein's definition of insanity?'

The argument in this essay is that we are at a point of crisis, the response to which requires a complete 'Mindset shift',⁴⁹ to a 'new level of thinking', a beginning to strategize as if we are faced, as we in reality are, with evangelizing a pagan Africa not a residual part of a now but faintly echoing Christendom; a 'Radical change' that will essentially involve 'redirecting of resources', financial, staff etc. away from the SIC church (Sunday-centric, In-Drum, Christendom form) model to 'a new paradigm', one that ironically would actually be a whole lot less expensive!

The unpalatable alternative to that is a future when we will once again look back on this time and repeat the condemnatory statement of a 1970's Mission report on the church that the-

"Reality of change was being shelved for another day".⁵⁰

It is important to restate that there is certainly no claim here to have found the proverbial 'magic missional bullet'. Rather the aim of this essay is to raise some very uncomfortable yet vitally necessary questions that have been begging to be asked for, it would appear, over 40 years, and about which there is a need of an urgent dialogue.

- a. Is it at all realistic to believe that the **form** of church we have is actually capable **on its own** of achieving, or even being changed to achieve, the gospel purpose we want?*
- b. Is not what is actually needed a **new concept** of church? That is one that uses the opportunities provided by the 'Divine Freedom' of the NT voice which allows for multiple expressions of the biblical DNA for Christian community.*

⁴⁹ Anglican Diocese of Sydney 'Midpoint' Report, 2008. p.4

⁵⁰ Diocese of Sydney, 'Strategic Directions Report' p.16

- c. *Do we not need a shift to "**A new level of thinking**", a new mindset that grapples with the reality that we live in a society effectively now pagan, biblically illiterate and retreating rapidly from any sense of Christian affiliation, indeed becoming hostile to it?*
- d. *Is it not now time not to just '**think** outside the box' but to actually '**get** out of the box' within which we are currently 'bound', to envisage a radically new concept, an organism that is Mission-Fluid and not bound by any remnants of the Christendom model? This for the sake of what is effectively something akin to 'Mission Africa' i.e. 'Pagan Mission'.*

It is surely now time, indeed many years past time, to crystallize our thinking in regard to our missional crisis, to grasp the creative moment, to in fact prayerfully put on 'over-the-horizon' spectacles and envision a 'church yet to be'.

This will mean seeding 'possibilities of church', individuals and groups planted as gospel seeds in the '*Knightian uncertainty*' environments of the messy, swirling confusion that is the mosaic of tribes comprising western culture. It will mean praying that the Holy Spirit will cause these 'possibilities', shaped by the NT DNA for Christian community, to emerge organically into missional communities. Crucially these will be indigenous to their 'messy' cultures unlike the alien insertions of most current church planting endeavours.

It will mean starting to develop new (*Unbounded*) expressions of 'church' that are deliberately, intentionally and specifically designed for mission, for the voyage into those parallel universes that the 'pagans' now inhabit, indeed a-

"Church as we haven't known it for a society as we haven't known it"

Or be condemned by a continuation of chronic missional failure and the screams of those drowning in the sea of pagan darkness because we have continued to sleepwalk into the Iceberg and yet again-

The "Reality of change was being shelved for another day".

"Yes the 'church' is still there, but like the vestigial smile on the 'Cheshire Cat', it presides over something that has faded from view, the 'Village' that is no more"

Yes, the 'church' still stands, or at least the emptying building does, presiding over the space of the faded 'Village'. The 'Village' now shattered into a Kaleidoscope of a thousand shards, each of which has migrated in time and place, in world view and cultural flavour, to a second, kaleidoscope village, a now city-wide mosaic of live, work and play 'villagettes' where the message of the Christ rarely ventures; a new 'Village' for which a new church must be designed to penetrate, with a new concept of mission. "



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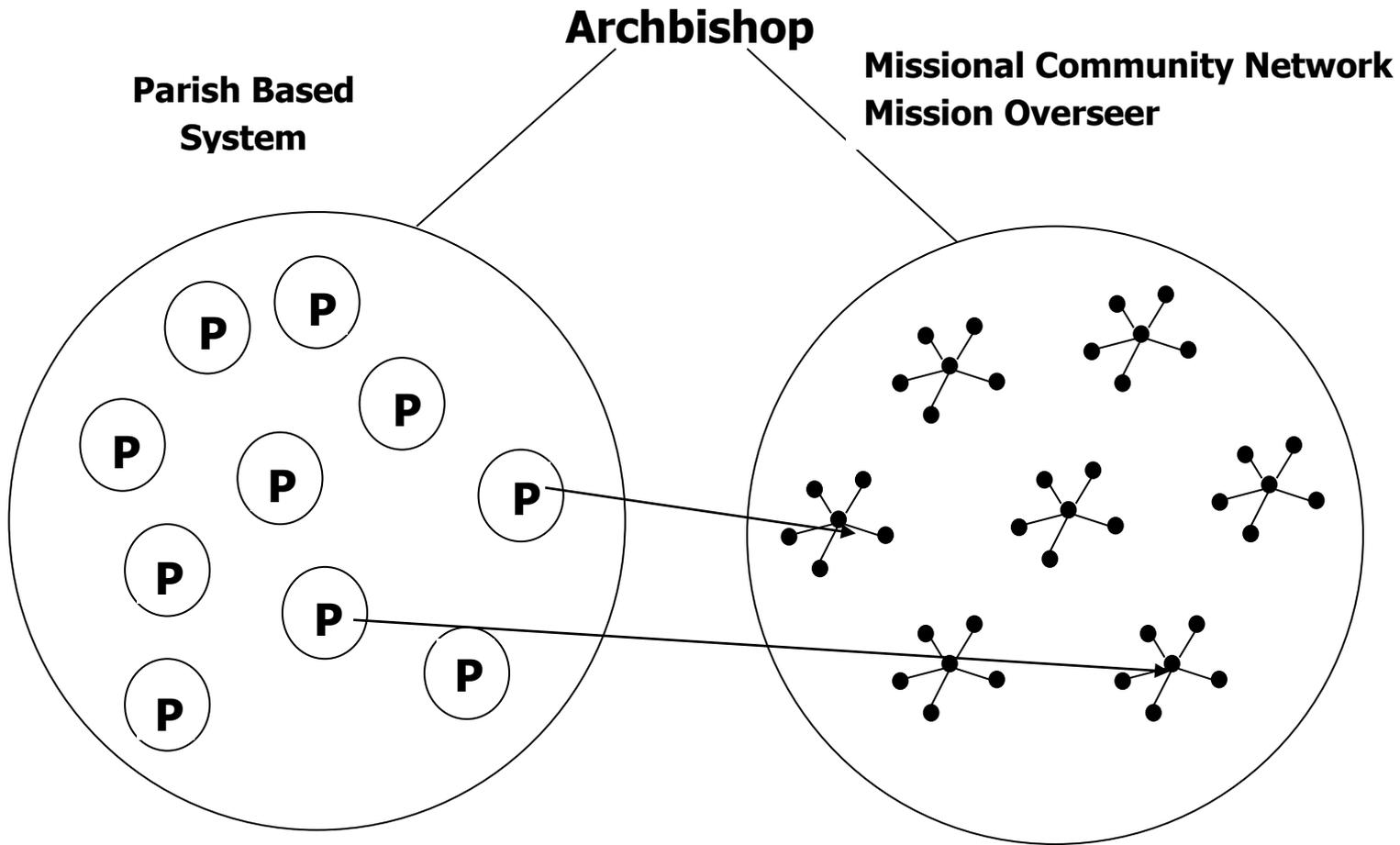
Appendices

Appendix 1- Unbounded Church and Standard Church Characteristics Comparison

Characteristic	'Unbounded' Church	Standard Church	
Place	Anywhere	Fixed	
Time	Anytime	Scheduled*	*Still mostly on weekends.
Visibility	#Open Observable (No walls)	Bounded -Closed (Walls)*	*Members=those who come through the door #Members=those who attach themselves
Style	As required	Relatively fixed	
Flexibility	High (Amoeba)*	Low (Skeleton)	*Mission Fluid
Cultural Accessibility	High	*Low	* A Parallel alien cultural Universe
Mindset	Post Modern-21stC*	Modern-20thC	*'Humpty Dumpty' mindset i.e. A word mean what I say it means!
Mobility	High (Guerrilla Units)	Low (Standing Army)	
Adaptability	High (Chameleon)	Low	
Change Readiness	Very high	Very limited	
Mission DNA	Missional	Church with Mission 'Add-ons' *	*Usually called Outreach activities
Mission Strategy	'Go and Stay' Community Presence Relational Dispersed Kingdom focus	'Go and Bring' 'In-Drag'- Programs Events Campaigns Church centre focus	
Leadership	#Star Trek (Entrepreneurial)	Pastoral/Maintenance*	*Focus on Members #Focus on the Lost
Nature (Ontology)	Organic Movement	An Institution	

Appendix 2b

A Parallel Mission Agency



-  Parish
-  Missional Community
-  Parish 'Buy ins'

Appendix 3

Case Studies

Overseas experience and practice

The issue of limited missional fruitfulness has been addressed to a much greater degree overseas, particularly in the UK where there is 10 or more years of experience of developing alternative forms of Anglican church. Such alternative forms manifest an extremely wide variety in terms of their form, style, location and cultural accessibility in their attempts to penetrate the wide variety of cultural and spiritual worlds now inhabited by non-Christians. However common threads and themes can be discerned and these are important when considering the development of alternative forms of Anglican Church in Sydney.

- They are usually 'Messy'
- All develop and/or embed missional communities in the 'Community' i.e. where non-Christians already are.
- They are largely 'Go and Stay' rather than 'Go and Bring' (In- Drag) initiatives.
- Mostly are highly flexible
- Meet at a variety of days, times, places
- An unlimited variety of culturally accessible styles
- They generally start with some form of serving not bible
- They are highly relational
- They often start very small (3-4 people)
- Start-up costs range from low to virtually nothing.
- Are to a large extent expressions of a new Missional Ecclesiology
- Most are easily reproducible.

Case Studies Overseas

The examples that follow are a few of the very large numbers of examples of Alternative Anglican Churches overseas that are intentionally different for the purpose of increased missional fruitfulness.

Network Church - Sheffield- Diocese of Sheffield UK⁵¹

- '**Network Church**' has three Bases which function as resourcing centres supporting a network of Missional Communities amounting to 600 or so members.
- These are places where missional disciples live out their faith through community on a daily basis, to be good news in word and deed to the city and its people.
- Each missional community gathers around a common missional vision for a particular neighbourhood or people group within the city.
- The missional communities are highly varied in their make-up, style and culture as their location requires.
- Some members, but not all, attend a central gathering once a month.

'Sorted' – North Bradford UK – (Anglican)⁵²

- Established in a Skateboard park
- Developed into a Youth and then adult Church
- Skateboarding is now just one of many activities.
- Meets three nights a week with an average of 100 young people.
- The age range is 13 to 20. Started by listening to their concerns, serving them and this then developed into a 'church' community including a Prayer/Worship time.

⁵¹ www.networkchurchsheffield.org.uk

⁵² www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/sorted

- Repeated so now multiplied to 'Sorted' 3

Comments

- This highly fruitful mission to unchurched youth is highly relational
- It starts with 'Serving' (ministering) by listening to their concerns, not by bible study that comes later in what is a process.
- It is not fitted into, and does not use, formal church structures.
- Is officially a church in its own right.

Harrow Language Café - London – (Anglican)⁵³

- A church member noticed the growing alienation between her congregation and the surrounding community. She also noticed that a number of women with mostly Muslim backgrounds had poor English skills.
- She gathered a team to enter the culture of the ethnic women.
- They then started a weekly afternoon tea and invited the women to discuss a topic in English.
- They put up a prayer board and invited requests which brought in the Christian dimension.
- Then they developed a Bible study.
- There has been much fruit from this missional initiative including people coming to faith.
- It has also multiplied itself.

Comments

- This started with an awareness of the church/society divide.
- Began by listening to the needs of the community, then ministering to (serving) them
- A process

⁵³ <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/languagecafe>

- Easily replicated.

A 'Messy Church Plus', South Croydon, London – Anglican

- A Messy Church started with six families. It grew to over 130 people in half a year.
- One afternoon is a short 'All Age' service with a bible story, followed by crafts and games
- Messy Church Extra' two weeks later included a short informal 'Worship' service.
- Parents and children were forming community, hearing Scripture.
- Supportive relationships developed that impacted their wider social existence in small but significant ways.
- Some kind of 'ecclesiological overflow' seemed to occur. Elements of Messy Church found their way into the homes of participants

Comments

- An expanded form of the original 'Messy Church' concept.
- Significant missional fruitfulness in the non-churched community
- Easily repeatable

An Entrepreneurial Church, Shrewsbury, England

- Hosts a thriving 'Messy Church', up to 100 people on Wednesday afternoons.
- A mini-'Messy Church', meets on Friday mornings for families with under-fives.

- About 60 young people from outside the church meet in 'Zone' on Friday evenings.
- 'Stepping Out' is a group formed around walking.
- 'Coffee in the Living Room', is a partnership with the local medical practice, attracts over 60 people on Thursday mornings.
- A monthly 'Outlook' caters for the over-55s with a guest speaker and refreshments.
- A 'Seniors' lunch is followed by hymns, prayers and a short talk.
- Membership grew from 200-250 participants in 2010 to over 500 in early 2014.

Comments

- The aim of these activities is not to be a bridge to Sunday church, but to become expressions of church – new congregations – in their own right.
- All are highly relational groups
- Service is a key component
- A key factor is an entrepreneurial minister
- A somewhat more localized version of the 'Network Church' above.

Case Studies Australia

Coffee with Spirit – Wollongong, Australia

- Initial community founded by a single Evangelist
- It meets in a café in a busy suburban Community Centre
- Many people attend various activities in the Centre each day
- As the cell studies the bible together, prays together, and has fellowship together it is easily observed by and enters into conversation with many who pass by.

- The coffee is heavily subsidised for those who join the group.
- Has a high 'Newcomer' component – 50% plus
- An early 2017 venture but it has already multiplied

Comments

- Almost zero cost.
- Has gained support of café franchisee
- Is easily multiplied and has already
- Has developed quickly

Eagle Vale

Eagle Vale is a suburb of southern Sydney where the local church has been developing a missional ***Model Construction Network*** (See Appendix 6). This now consists of missional communities including a spiritually re-engineered Playgroup, one based on a 'Self Defence' group, a Pub community and (shortly) one based on a 'Board Game' community. There have been a number of conversions and the network as a whole has a Newcomer, unchurched and de-churched, component of over 50%.

Comments

- An example of a ***Model Construction Network*** (See 'Multiplication- a Many Splendoured Thing' article).
- The network as a whole has a Newcomer (unchurched and de-churched) component of over 50%.

'Jesus Club' – Sydney

Another example is the 'Jesus Club' model created by Mel a Sydney psychologist. She brought her Christian faith and her work together by starting the first 'Jesus Club' as a Christian fellowship for mostly intellectually

disabled adults. While not her initial intention the club has all the characteristics of 'Church' for the members (bible, prayer, Christian songs, fellowship and pastoral care), who for the most part would not attend a standard church.

The initial club has now multiplied to seven by others replicating the idea and another five are currently being planned. Further, it is also a classic example of a 'Messy' process because the multiplication was not at all planned. It seems that the Spirit of God used the initial club to inspire others- a true case of *Organic Emergence!*

Comments

- Has already multiplied
- This is an example of Multiplication by cloning.
- Has developed grown relatively quickly
- Has a high proportion of 'Newcomers' i.e. non-church attenders
- Is an example of Messy development

Appendix 5

St Thomas Sheffield Network



Appendix 6

'Multiple Ways to Multiply'

As we have already demonstrated, the populations of the erstwhile Christendom countries are growing at the same time as church attendance is in significant decline. This overall trend of church decline can only be reversed by a rapid rate of increase in the number of new converts. This will require a corresponding rapid increase in the number of Christian communities. If this is not achieved then the church will continue on its current trajectory, ever fading towards irrelevancy, retreating to the ever expanding periphery of western society. The required increase in the number of Christian fellowships simply cannot be achieved by 'Classic' church planting using a strategy of *'adding'* largely standard size congregations (i.e. 30-40 plus) because it cannot be done fast enough and in any case, it is not affordable. There is no doubt that that the need is for a movement of multiplying missional cells and networks that increasingly permeate western society.

Multiplication by Cloning

There is however a variety of ways by which multiplication can be achieved. One example of a basic *'multiplication by cloning'* strategy is ***CrossNet***, a network south of Sydney, Australia which started with one very small group meeting in a coffee shop. Over a period of three or so years this multiplied by cloning to create similar cells meeting in other coffee shops but also in clubs and pubs. Basically the new groups were similar to the original except for differences in the type of location.

Another example is '**Sorted**'. This is an Anglican missional community in Bradford, England that started and developed in a Skateboard park, became a full blown fellowship and then multiplied itself several times.

A third example is the 'Jesus Club' model set up by a Sydney woman. She started the first 'Jesus Club' as a Christian fellowship for intellectually disabled adults. The initial club has all the characteristics of 'Church' for the members (although this had to be pointed out to her!). The initial club has now multiplied by cloning to seven by others replicating the idea. It should be noted that this is a classic case of a '*Messy*' process because the multiplication was not at all planned. It seems that the Spirit of God used the initial club to inspire others- a true case of *Organic Emergence!*

Multiplication by Mutation

When it happens that we can't find an existing word for what we wish to communicate there is always the option of inventing one. Hence '**Multiplication**', an invented word that describes something essential for future mission, and which we would argue can only take place when the church is set free (*Unbound*) from its current forms, thinking and strategies for mission into the 'Universes of the unchurched'.

While the multiplication argued for above is essential it does not necessarily mean cloning as is often assumed. Rather what is needed for at least part of the multiplication strategy is '**Multiplication**', that is multiplication by **Mutation**. The reason for this is that post-Christendom society is not like the largely ethnically homogenous, single language, all available for 'church on Sundays' European societies that the contemporary church model was developed in and designed for. Rather it is a shimmering mosaic of ethnically, linguistically, frequently working or playing on Sundays, 'live work and play' micro communities.

Given that our modern society is such a mosaic, a multiplicity of tribes all defined and shaped very differently from one another, there is a need for a corresponding range of designer communities that will penetrate and embed themselves in the varying pieces of the mosaic. A strategy that multiplies only one particular type of new community will be little more effective than our traditional one size fits all type of 'church'. Thus the essential multiplication of missional cells, in order to embed gospel seeds in society's mosaic, must be in part by mutating gospel inserts-hence not just '*Multiplication*' but '*Mutiplcation*' is required i.e. giving rise to a wide variety of new Christian community forms.

'*Mutiplcation*' happens when some members leave one type of '*Unbounded Church*' expression e.g. in a coffee shop and form a mutated expression of a **completely different type**, a Playgroup or a group that which was established in a Melbourne Smash repairer's yard for example. Again, multiplication does not have to mean by cloning, the possible range of spiritual mutations is only limited by our imaginations.

Multiplication by Modification

As argued above, both Multiplication by *Cloning* and by *Mutation* strategies are necessary in order to create an increase in the number *and* variety of new Christian fellowships required to penetrate the mosaic of 'universes of the unchurched'. However, there is a third option that is already being employed with significant success, and that is multiplication by ***Modification***. Essentially this involves the re-engineering of the spiritual DNA of an *existing* activity or group, which may be a secular group in the general community or even a current non-missionally fruitful church activity. Two examples may help illustrate.

The first occurred when '*Unbounded Church*' DNA was intentionally imported into an existing 30 person strong playgroup causing it to be re-engineered into a playgroup that was a '*Church for those who come*'. This included Christian songs, a bible reading and talk, prayer times and pastoral care for members. About 80% of the attendees were non-church members.

A similar process occurred in the (spiritual) genetic re-engineering of a standard youth group by the importation of '*Unbounded Church*' DNA. This largely (80%) unchurched group was recreated as '*The Hub*' a '*Youth, Children and Adults Unbounded Church Community*'. Clearly neither of the above examples looked anything like the coffee shop type cells but have been shaped by exactly the same New Testament-voiced DNA for Christian community.

Model Construction

A fourth way of developing and growing an '*Unbounded Church*' network is by what might be called '**Model Construction**'. This means the specific construction of a wide variety of designer missional communities to be embedded in specific pieces of the mosaic. Multiplication occurs by designing and '*constructing*' an expanding range of different types of missional groups for different contexts. This does not mean however that any of the model constructs once established cannot then begin to multiply by cloning or mutation strategies.

An example of a '**Model Construction**' strategy is an Anglican Parish in Shrewsbury, England. Their network includes an original type 'Messy Church', with up to 100 people on mid-week afternoons; a mini-'Messy Church' for under 5s one weekday morning; a 'Youth Community' of about 60 *non-*

church young people; a 'Walking Community; a 'Coffee' fellowship in conjunction with a local medical practice; a 'Seniors' Lunch' community with hymns, prayers and a talk. Membership of the whole network grew from 200 to 500 in four years. A further example is an Anglican church in south west Sydney where a range of 'Models' have been or are being constructed to fit various missional contexts.

All the evidence is that traditional 'Classic' church planting strategies are chronically failing to increase the number of Christian communities at anything like the rate required for mission in growing populations. To rely on such a strategy alone will condemn the church to increasing irrelevance.

All the above described strategies are the outworking of the intrinsic principles for Christian community, the New Testament DNA, NOT by any particular form. It is about specifically creating new forms of Christian fellowship that are culturally accessible to the unchurched members of society, an accessibility defined by-

'Their place, their style, their language, their time'

Such an approach is intentionally designed for mission to the totally unchurched and, in virtually all characteristics, is as far as it can be from the commonly used missional strategies of the standard Sunday-Centric, In-Drag, Christendom-form church model.

In order for there to be a significant increase in missional fruitfulness, rather than a continuing decline in the Christian influence in western society, there is need for a rapid 'Multiplication' of new missional communities strategy. This does not however just mean 'cloning' as many take it to be. Rather, in order to release the full potential of the '*Unbounded Church*' concept requires

that the missional community networks grow not just by cloning '**Multiplication**' but also by '**Multiplication**' and/or '**Modification**', and/or '**Model Construction**' strategies that will vastly increase the number of cultural contexts in which new missional fellowships can be embedded.

As stated earlier, failure to achieve this, (colossally difficult though it will be) will mean that-

"The church will continue on its rapid journey towards an ever fading irrelevancy retreating to an ever expanding periphery of western society".