



A Report on Simple/Organic/House/ Missional Church in the UK and Ireland - 2011

The Wall is in ruins...

Over recent years the Church of Jesus Christ in the UK and Ireland has been in rapid decline and retreat. Church attendance figures have decreased dramatically leaving dwindling congregations and empty church buildings. It is now common to see old 'Church buildings' transformed into carpet warehouses, MOT garages or Sikh temples.

At the same time, over the past 40 years or so (a biblical generation), the work of the enemy has increased rapidly through the introduction of lawless 'Laws', and the eroding of Biblical values in the main spheres of society including family life, education, government, economics, media and arts. Our society is becoming increasingly hostile to 'Christianity'. Visible signs of this are seen through media articles concerning the banning of Bibles in hospitals and B+B's and the removing of crosses and 'Christian symbols' in public spaces.

Vast swathes of people are also leaving the 'institutional church' (whether they be traditional or more 'modern' churches) because they feel drawn to live out their faith in a different way.



These groups of people sometimes describe what they are now involved in with terms like "Simple Church", "Organic Church", "House Church," and "Biblical Church"

At the same time, there are those who feel called to remain in 'legacy churches' to pioneer Fresh Expressions or Newforms of Church or to bring reform from within existing structures. Experiments in mission have led to the exploration and occasionally, the forming of "Simple Organic Churches;" and "Small Missional Communities".

For some these are just the new band wagons to jump on – for others they are simply ways of describing what God is calling them to do (Take a look at www.simplechurch.co.uk, www.simplechurch.eu or www.simplechurch.com for more information)



There are now thousands of books about what some would call this new “*missional*” movement of churches. Many books come from overseas.

Vast numbers of people are coming to a radical and obedient faith in Jesus through these forms of church in countries like India and Africa. For believers in the UK and Ireland though there seems to be few home-grown resources and even fewer stories about where the work of the Holy Spirit is truly flourishing and bearing fruit. And by fruit we are talking about the baptism of new believers, the growth in obedient disciples and the multiplication of disciples, churches and networks.

For some years now believers in the UK and Ireland have been meeting simply in homes with the dream of seeing these groups multiply with people coming to faith in Jesus. (We are not primarily talking about the early House Church/Restoration/New Church/Charismatic movement that sprang up across the UK in the late 60’s/70’s and grew in the 80’s/90’s, but rather, the re-emergence of simple/organic churches and groups that began circa 2000/2001 here in the UK and have been continuing to spring up since, particularly in the past 2-3 years)

We’ve heard many of the stories from overseas. We’ve read all the right books (Wolfgang Simson, Frank Viola, Tony and Felicity Dale, Alan Hirsch, Beresford Job, Floyd McClung, Neil Cole to name but a few). But this explosive movement some dream about, others have read about, and more have discussed and debated, just hasn’t happened here at home in these Isles. In fact some could say that very little has happened here so far!

At this point you might be feeling that this report is turning rather critical. Let us assure that this is not our attention. We are ourselves involved in the Simple/Organic/House/Missional Church movement. We have been involved in the setting up of a number of websites, resources and trainings which promote and encourage the formation and growth of such ideas and principles (see www.missionbritain.com) So we are not outsiders wishing to criticise but rather, insiders who feel that some questions need to be asked. We’ve been involved with simple churches, helped form new groups, read all the books and prayed for God to do the same here in the UK and Ireland – but like you we’ve seen very little happen. Sure we can re-arrange the chairs, meet with other Christians in cafe’s and think up new ways to reach people with the good news. But we have not yet seen an explosive multiplication movement of disciples and churches here at home.

Is what we are doing working?





In August 2011 we sent out a survey to people in the UK and Ireland involved with simple/organic/house/missional churches. These are people we have connection with through the websites, conferences and trainings we help facilitate. We felt God calling us to gather some information about what is happening in these churches. If God is at work through these forms of church then there is a need for measuring their effectiveness (fruit) and evaluating areas of weakness (barrenness). Most of all we need to ask the question whether simple/organic/house/missional churches are actually making disciples and transforming communities here in the UK and Ireland? This report is based on the findings from that survey. There is clearly already enough information and theory about Church and what the scriptures say. This report was written to paint a picture of what is actually happening on the ground in the UK and Ireland and to suggest some ways forward...

Moving the goal-posts...

For many years believers in the UK and Ireland have been working to establish, maintain and promote our churches. Have we been aiming towards the wrong goal?

When Jesus came to the earth he preached the Gospel of the Kingdom and called faithful followers to join him. He then sent out His followers. Jesus' goal is the establishment of His Kingdom in every nation. The called out ones (the Church) are the ambassadors He has chosen to advance this Kingdom - starting from where they are to the uttermost regions of the world. The Goal is no longer a nice church but rather World Kingdomisation!

Many in the simple/organic/house/missional church movement here in the UK and Ireland have been asking the question, 'What is Church?'...this is a good starting point..

It seems clear thought that we now need to move from asking the question "What is Church?" to "How does the Kingdom of God advance?"

The first question requires a conversation. The second question needs an operation. Many of us are still stuck in conversation. Is it time to be part of the operation? An army who never moves beyond discussing plans is no army at all! God is calling us in the UK and Ireland to move forward together and execute the tactical operations He has given us. Much has been written about the conversation. What is Church? How do we live out our faith in a changing culture? With a backdrop of 'Broken Britain', the pressing need is less talk and more strategic intentional action. Throughout this report we aim to present what Jesus said, what disciples in other areas of the world are doing and what our survey shows. Our hope is that this will clearly reveal some gaps in our tactics and strategies and help to propel the movement to a much greater degree of fruitfulness.

If you are content to keep meeting with the same people in the same place for the next 30 years with no intentional obedience to the King and no fruit of multiplying disciples and Kingdom outposts, then this report is not for you!



Statistics from the survey

- 66% of the people surveyed have been involved with these forms of church for 1-3 years.
- Just under 10% of the people surveyed have been meeting in simple/organic/house/missional churches for more than 7 years.
- Most people meet together in these types of church groups once a week
- Groups typically consist of 3-12 people
- 40% of these groups meet in an evening on a week day
- 30% meet during the day at the weekend
- 70% of groups meet in homes and 20% meet in Public Places (Pubs, Cafes etc)

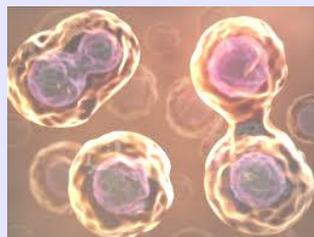


We asked people to describe their simple/organic/house/missional church and the top answer was - *“We are a group of Christians seeking to live out New Testament principles/models of church”*.

- 50-60% of groups in the UK and Ireland are made up of people of all ages.
- 20-30% of groups are made up of people over the age of 35.
- Less than 2% of groups are made up young people.

We asked people to describe their journey so far in terms of seeing people baptised.

- Approximately 60% of people said that they had seen *some* people baptised and discipled.
- No-one said that they had seen *many* people baptised and discipled.
- 40% of people involved with simple/organic/house/missional church in the UK and Ireland said that *“It has been a challenge to keep persevering on this path when it seems that we have seen little fruit from our efforts.”*



- Over 60% of groups have not multiplied or reproduced in the last 2 years
- Approximately 30% of groups have given birth to one more group
- 2% of groups have given birth to 4 or more groups



What is a disciple?

Jesus said...

“If any want to become my disciples, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me ” (Luke 9:23) Jesus invited people to join him in self crucifixion and said that people who are not prepared to surrender everything are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:38) In the parable of the sower Jesus says that Disciples (good soil) bear 30, 60 or 100 fold fruit. So Jesus expects His Disciples to multiply themselves repeatedly and rapidly. Jesus clearly taught his Disciples to pray and fast regularly and often through the night! Jesus rebuked His Disciples for falling asleep when they should have been praying (Matthew 26:40) Jesus said that Disciples show their love for God through immediate and complete obedience. (John 14:15)

They say...

In places like India and China (where explosive discipleship is happening) it is very common for believers to stay up all night to pray and fast for their communities and nation. They place a high value on obedience rather than knowledge. They measure the fruitfulness of discipleship in terms of how many people are being baptized and how many people are discipling others. For example in India the believers keep accurate records of discipleship chains (2 Tim 2:2) and numbers of people being baptised (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvlxWUUytlk>) Believers in these lands don't hesitate to leave families, land and comfort for the sake of the Gospel.

Our survey said...

According to those people in the UK and Ireland involved in simple/organic/missional/house churches a disciple is one who “follows” Jesus. Very few people suggested any way in which this “following” could be measured. Others suggest that a disciple is someone who knows Jesus, who loves Jesus and who loves others. A small majority suggested that a Disciple is someone who hears Jesus and obeys Him.



Thoughts

Jesus clearly laid down *measurable expectations* for his disciples. In places where disciples and churches are multiplying there are also clear expectations about what a disciple is and what they do. Here in the UK and Ireland our survey suggests we generally lack any clear expectation about what a disciple is and what they do.



Church?

Jesus said...

Throughout the scriptures we see how God calls his people to multiply and fill the earth. *“be fruitful and multiply”* (Genesis 1:28) *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”* (Matthew 28:19) *“and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it”* (Matthew 16:18) In the book of Acts we read that the Church grew in numbers, multiplied and reproduced itself into many people groups and locations (Acts 6:1,7, Acts 9:31 KJV)

They say...

In places like India and China (where explosive church multiplication is a present reality) there is a clear vision for church planting movements. They clearly understand that the church has a God given responsibility to multiply and fill regions and nations with the knowledge of God. Every member of the body functions in ministry and everyone is considered a disciple-maker and church planter. In places where churches are multiplying there is a clear agenda, strategy and goal for growth. In one case study (see here

http://www.churchplantingmovements.com/images/stories/CPM_Profiles/tribal-cpm1.pdf) investigations found that 80-100% of churches planted had reproduced.

Our survey said...

According to those people in the UK and Ireland involved in simple/organic/missional/house churches we place a high value on the theological understanding of what Church is. Many people responded that Church is whatever happens whenever 2 or more believers get together. Some said that church is all about people coming together to share around hearing and obeying God but most preferred what they described as a more 'organic' approach to Church.



Thoughts

Throughout the scriptures God gives a clear mandate to His people to multiply and fill the earth. Jesus continues this message when sending out His disciples. Around the world where Churches are multiplying there is a clear agenda for obedience-based gatherings and mobilising the whole body of Christ for church multiplication. According to the results of our survey here in the UK and Ireland those people involved in simple/organic/missional/house churches tend to reject any kind of growth or intentional agenda and prefer to meet in what they would describe as a more 'organic' way. Maybe this is because of some past experience with abuses of power, restrictive structure or wrong authoritarian principles of 'accountability' to a hierarchical church pyramid structure. But maybe it's time to look at the DNA of what we are doing...



When you gather?

Jesus said...

Jesus gave numerous commands that He asks us to obey, like the “one another” commands that give us instructions about how we should serve and love each other. Throughout the New Testament there are also other instructions about the sharing and participatory nature of gatherings.

They say...

In places like India and China (where explosive church multiplication is happening) there are critical elements which are included in their gatherings. These include reporting back whether people obeyed what God told them last week. At each gathering the vision for Church multiplication is clearly presented. A high value is put on obedience to the scripture rather than just knowledge. They talk about who they are going to share the scriptures and the Gospel with before their next gathering. For more information take a look at <http://t4tonline.org/> and read about a simple process that led to Church Planting Movements around the world.

Our survey said...

30% of people in the UK and Ireland involved in simple/organic/missional/house church believe we should have no agenda or plan when we meet together. 40% of people follow a set pattern when they meet. 30% try and work what they regard as the important elements into the gathering. From the results, people involved in these forms of Church in the UK and Ireland think that the most important thing to do when gathering is to share and discuss issues. The next most important element to people is to have no agenda when gathering. The third most important element according to the results is eating a meal together.



Thoughts

Jesus envisaged a Church that preached and demonstrated His Kingdom to the nations. A Church built upon the foundation of the Sent Ones (Apostles) and Prophets. In places around the world where churches are multiplying rapidly there are critical elements needed to help every member of the Body hear God, obey Him and share Him with other people who are lost. They have a clear vision and agenda when they gather together around Jesus Christ. According to our survey people in the UK and Ireland value the things that will never lead to discipleship or church multiplication and discard, and sometimes even reject, the elements that have proven to be critical to movements in other parts of the world.



Observations

- On the whole our results suggest that the simple/organic/house/missional church movement in the UK and Ireland has no clearly defined goals and expectations regarding what a disciple is or what a disciple does and also what a church is and what a church should do
- Our results show that there is a huge difference between the attitudes and practices of those involved in these forms of Church in the UK and Ireland and amongst those involved with Rapid Multiplication Movements around the world (one of the writers of this survey attended the Global House Church Summit in Delhi in 2009 where 200 people from over 40 different nations met to seek the King, share stories and strategic plans. We are eye witnesses and can confirm that people around the world involved in 'simple/organic/house churches' are thinking and acting strategically and intentionally in terms of reproducing disciples, leaders, churches and movements. If we will be strategic in our efforts then the King will build His church)
- The vast majority of these Churches in the UK and Ireland meet in homes
- Most of these churches are made up of 3-12 people
- Very few young people in the UK and Ireland are involved with these types of Churches
- A large proportion of people involved with simple/organic/house/missional churches in the UK and Ireland have struggled to continue on this path and would say that up until now, they have seen little fruit
- Most people involved with these forms of Church/Discipleship would say that they have seen some people baptised and discipled
- In general we are not seeing rapid multiplication in the UK and Ireland through simple/organic/house/missional churches. Most groups haven't given birth to another group
- A very small percentage of groups in the UK and Ireland have given birth to 4 or more groups



A Parable?

“I have food to eat of which you do not know.....” (John 4:32)

Is this story from John 4 a parable of the simple/organic/house church movement in the UK and Ireland?

Jesus engages with a woman. They have a powerful encounter that goes beyond her and through her to many Samaritans in that city.

What were the disciples doing?

Jesus had invited them to join Him on his mission and to see great things happening. Yet while the action was taking place they had chosen instead to go and buy food. When they returned they asked Jesus what he'd had to eat. He replies, *“I have food to eat of which you do not know”* (John 4:32) Jesus is walking in something that is completely hidden to His Disciples. He goes onto explain that this food, *“is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work.”* (John 4:34)

Like the disciples, many people in simple/organic/house/missional churches have hit the road with Jesus; left the building (so to speak) and are on a journey that, up to now, has, by and large, been unfruitful. Is this a cause for concern? Have we joined Jesus on His mission or are we more concerned with our own houses/house churches and families than on His missional plan? Are we focused more on ourselves and our needs or on the priorities of the rule and reign of the King and his Kingdom in our communities, cities and Nation?

The place of meeting might have changed but what they are doing hasn't. So many groups are nothing more than what Wolfgang Simson describes as 'Honey, I shrunk the church'.

Jesus says it to them straight – there's something his disciples are missing. Something that Jesus has – and something that is the driving force behind the amazing things that Jesus is doing and seeing. Without seeing this – the disciples will never truly experience the things that Jesus promises them.

To us in the simple/missional/organic church movement in the UK and Ireland we will never experience the things we “see” in the Spirit unless we push on in complete self-sacrifice and committed obedience. Will we choose to move on from our organic non-agenda and take up the call to obedience to our King? Maybe we need a new eating arrangement in our groups...let's eat of the food which we don't know about. Let's go further than leaving defunct buildings, let's leave our comfortable sofa's also and give ourselves to the work of Jesus unreservedly.

Having challenged the Disciples, Jesus then looks at the crowds of people and says, *“Do you not say, There are still four months and then comes the harvest? Behold I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!”* (John 4:35-36)



Jesus has something for us that we don't even know about. It's never really just been about a new form of church (whether we call that simple/organic/house/missional/café or whatever with church tagged on at the end). It's living in the Kingdom and being an ambassador of the Kingdom wherever we go, both as individuals, families, communities and Nations.

When Jesus looks out across the UK He sees fields ready for harvesting. There's a problem though. There's so few workers and laborers.....

Where to now?

There are clearly some gaps in our 'being', 'knowing' and 'doing' in the simple/organic/house/missional church networks that are emerging in the UK and Ireland. We are hoping to see multiplication and growth, but in reality we are not doing the things that are needed to get us there. This has been confirmed repeatedly, not only through this survey, but also through our travels meeting with friends, co-workers and groups across the nation and seeing the condition we find ourselves in

The final question we asked people in the survey was, **"In your opinion what is needed to help the movement of simple/organic/house/missional churches grow across the UK?"** In many ways the answers to this question highlight the issues raised in this report. Many believe that the movement (if we can call it that!) needs more leaders, more networking, more websites and resources and more Apostolic travelling workers. Others responded that the movement needs more people who have no agenda, more of the Holy Spirit's work and more prayer.

Whilst all these things are good and necessary – are we still missing the point? Are we still missing the DNA needed to ignite a movement of ordinary people? In the parable above we talked about the need for obedience to Jesus. All the way through the Gospels Jesus repeatedly called people to follow him in obedience. Jesus said He would build His Church. But He commissioned us to make disciples (Matt 28:19-20). So as we ask the question, "Where now?" we do well to remember what Jesus said, *"If you love me obey my commands"* (John 14:15)





It is tempting to gaze at other parts of the world and say that God is sovereignly moving over there. **But we must remember that in such places believers do things completely differently to us!**

In the UK and Ireland we are generally prayer-less, passion-less and persecution-less. In places around the world where the church is multiplying they don't have the things that we feel are so necessary. All they have are 'ordinary' believers (who are actually disciples) and God's word. Maybe the way forward is to focus on obedience to God? After all isn't that what Jesus commanded His disciples to go out and do? To baptise people and to teach them to obey? (Matthew 28:19-21) In all the talk about simple church, organic church, small missional communities and house church are we forgetting that all these things are just the vehicles? They are just the wineskins needed to hold the wine. **They are just the means to get to the end – which is the discipling and transformation of the nations with people of every nation, tribe and tongue worshipping the Lamb who sits on the throne.**

Want to know more?

In analysing the statistics, travelling across the nation, writing this report and sharing with others across the world involved in these movements, we have uncovered some positive trends here in the UK and Ireland, but also some principles, thought patterns and activities that are actually hindering the 'spontaneous expansion of the church'. Could it be that the hardness of the ground or the reluctance of the people around us is not down to them but on us and our values and approaches to the work. Is the harvest ripe? What is the condition of us, the labourers who are so few?

As we've travelled around the UK and Ireland connecting with all sorts of great people (many of whom have become great friends and co-workers) who feel passionate about simple/organic/house/missional church and small missional communities, it's become so clear that even stepping out of the institutional Church for a more 'organic' and 'simple' form of Church will not produce rapid movements. In many ways people have been conned into the idea that if they just meet together in homes then everything will grow and multiply magically on its own.

On the other hand, staying in 'legacy churches' doing 'kindness and friendship evangelism,' 'incarnational mission,' and 'fresh expressions' (good though these are) without intentionally making and multiplying indigenous disciples and churches, will leave us with, to coin a phrase our friend Paul D Watson used recently, '*grapes without seeds*'. People will think God is good and we're OK, but fall short of becoming fully committed and obedient disciples of the King who also make disciples of others (2 Tim 2:2)



Can we in Britain humble ourselves to hear and receive the message from our brothers and sisters in India (and most other parts of the world where people are actively involved in the Global House Church movement, Church Planting Movements and Simple/Organic Church)

Discipleship and Church multiplication doesn't happen on its own. It needs clear vision, focused strategy and absolute obedience to our King.

Following our '*organic non-agenda*' has not and will not produce the Vision we are believing for in these Isles. If we continue to do things the way we have then we will continue with our "us four and no more" groups (to use a well known phrase by Wolfgang Simson!)

Our core-conviction is that there is a need for disciple-making-obedience-based training and tools for the simple/organic/house/missional church movement in the UK and Ireland. It's not enough to meet informally in a cafe or in a house to relax and remember the good (or bad) old days or only to focus on our own needs. In fact it's not even about where we meet. The issue is what we do when we meet. Do we simply meet, great, eat, discuss and talk theory. Or do we gather to listen to what Jesus is saying through each other, His Spirit and His Word and commit to doing it and sharing with others around us who haven't heard about Jesus yet? Do we also make time for reporting back all that He has done through our active obedience to Him?

The Army needs you!

Would you like to join in with the growing army of ordinary people who are working to see movements in the UK and Ireland.....?

Mission Britain is a vision to see the UK and Ireland re-built through movements of rapidly multiplying disciples and churches. Do you share this vision? Want to get involved with an army of ordinary people who are beginning to turn their communities, cities, counties and regions upside down – www.missionbritain.com ?

Newforms Resources is a training and resourcing company that serves disciple-making/church planting movements and the simple/organic churches they are birthing in the UK, Ireland and beyond. To read more about the practical training we offer then visit our website – www.newformsresources.com

It doesn't matter where we meet, who we meet with or what our groups are called. The question is: How can we help each other to be disciples who make disciples? *Will you join us in believing for rapid movements of multiplying disciples and churches in the UK and Ireland in our generation?*

If, having read this report, you'd like to know more about what we do or would like to know 'where to start' then please contact us at mail@missionbritain.com



Stories

Church Planting Movement stories from around the world:

- Simple Stories – www.simplestories.co.uk
- Tribal Church Planting Movement in Middle India - http://www.churchplantingmovements.com/images/stories/CPM_Profiles/tribal-cpm1.pdf
- Ying Kai's story (T4T) - <http://t4tonline.org/>
- Movements that change the world - <http://www.movements.net/book>
- Church Planting in Northern India - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvlxWUUytlk>
- Church Planting Movements - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4_o1W8e3iY