**SUMMARY OF CHURCH MULTIPLICATION FORUM**

**OCTOBER 4-5, 2021**

**OCALA AND TAMPA, FLORIDA**

Persons present: Esther Cottrell-Church of God, Matt Poole-Free Methodist, Tom Planck-Healthy Growing Churches-Church of God, Dale Schaeffer-Nazarene, Ron Duncan-GWA.

The focus of this meeting was to meet with Dr. Michael Beck and Fresh Expressions and then to meet with Jeremy Stephens of Underground Network and micro-churches.

Both conversations were stimulating and inviting to broaden your view about reaching those outside the church with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Reaching beyond the “inherited church” (traditional) in a manner which takes the gospel in new ways to those on the edge of society. In both presentations there was a strong Biblical foundation and an even greater emphasis on what is Jesus calling you to do.

Dr. Michael Beck is Director of re-Missioning for Fresh Expressions US and Cultivator of Fresh Expressions for the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church. He and his wife Jill co-pastor Wildwood UMC and St. Mark’s UMC. Michael teaches at United Seminary in Dayton, Ohio and has created certificate, as well as degree programs in Fresh Expressions. His latest book is, “Fresh Expressions in a Digital Age: How the church can prepare for a post-pandemic world”-Abington, 2021.

Fresh Expressions is not intended to replace the “inherited church” but to develop a blended ecology. We were presented with a 70-slide power point to share about history, the Biblical foundations, how to get started, how it works, and the end goal. One of the questions to start the discussion was, “If all we are doing is what we do now, even if we do it well...WHO will we Miss?” (slide8)

A Fresh Expression is…” A form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of people who are not yet members of any church.” (s15)

“A fresh Expression…will come into being through principles of listening, service, incarnational mission and making disciples. …will have the potential to become a mature expression of church shaped by the gospel and the enduring marks of the church and for its cultural context.” (s16)

“The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighborhood.” [John 1.14 MSG version} (s21)

Fresh Expressions works toward the incarnational model of church rather than attractional and engaged models (s22). The emphasis is connecting in first, second, and third places around practices-connected by flows (s24-25).

First place is seen as home, second as work, and third as gathering.

Developing Fresh Expressions with the inherited church requires some new language. The Blended Ecology Ecosystem is one way to view how all fits together (s35). Fresh Expressions is not intended to take the place of the inherited church, but to provide new and different outlets for the gospel to be shared. One way to talk about this is to place a plus in the middle of your page. At the top is the word Physical, to the right is Incarnational, on the bottom is digital. and to the left is Attractional. Most of our models of church are Physical and Attractional. Can we think about digital and incarnational (s45)?

Acts 15 talks about the Jerusalem church and those at Antioch who might be considered Pioneers. Using this same paradigm, the Inherited Church would be like the Jerusalem church and the fresh expressions like Antioch. The pioneers would be those folks who are searching for new ways to share the gospel (s48).

The blended ecology is coming from the roots of the inherited church (s53).

A few quick examples of “Fresh Expressions” in the United Methodist Conference in Florida: skydiving church, tattoo parlor church, digital yoga church, paws and praise, Burritos and Bible, Living Room Church, and Dinner Church.

The process for cultivating fresh expressions (fxC’s) is listening, loving and serving, building community, exploring discipleship, church takes shape, connecting to inherited congregation and doing it again (s61).

Three types of persons are needed in order that fxC’s can happen: innovator, permission giver, and supporter (s63).

What would happen if each pastor spent fifty per cent of his/her time thinking and responding to the Holy Spirit in regard to fxC’s?

One of the ideas discussed was the “unlearning” which must occur before concepts like fxC’s can be heard and understood. Dr. Beck has created an academic program at United Seminary which teaches how to unlearn and then learn a new way of thinking about missional activity for the disciple.

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On Tuesday we spent time with Jeremy Stephens one of the founders of Underground-innovating church-empowering networks and generating movements. “The Underground in Tampa has equipped leaders for God’s mission, served the poor, and reached the unreachable. Everything we do is aimed to unlock the church’s potential to create an empowering missional culture to send and serve lay-missionaries.”

Jeremy provided each of us with a booklet about Underground which I will use in this summary. Underground “started as missionaries to the college campuses in Tampa through InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in 1995. For ten years we faithfully reached college campuses while also planting incarnational communities in the inner-city. While we produced many disciples on the campus, we increasingly became frustrated as young, passionate, and mature leaders were stifled in the traditional church context” (p4). This led to a time of discernment, prayer, time in the Philippines which produced the framework for Underground. “The basic structure, Manifesto Values, and conviction to serve people to hear their calling and help them try, all came during that time” (p5).

The entire concept is to release and empower lay missionaries to reach persons in their communities and address the needs and hurts of society. Micro church development goes through 4 phases: Initiative (idea and intercession); Practice (experimentation); Engagement (all 3 ecclesial minimums of worship, community, mission); Expansion (p8-9). The Missional Hub is created to provide infrastructure services to the micro churches who choose to utilize these services (coaching, co-op facility, financial services, media services and ministry training). Green lighting is our process for receiving new micro churches. 3 conditions: Manifesto, Covenant, and relationship with leadership (p10).

Since 2007 network has grown from 21 micro churches to over 200 in 2017. Attrition rate is 10% with Growth Rate at 30% (p15). The average life cycle for a micro church is 2.5 years.

The booklet details the structure, finances, the Manifesto (18 values that reflect theological convictions) and Leadership Covenant.

We also discussed the tensions that are present in this type of network and the areas of concern.

We are thankful for the time of Dr. Beck and Jeremy Stephens for sharing and answering all our questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Ron Duncan