

## **Mission-shaped or Mission‘flavoured’**

In a recent article, George Lings (author of Mission-Shaped Church report) expressed concern that many of the emerging expressions of church were not mission-shaped, but rather mission flavoured. What’s the difference? From his experiences as a church planting coach and trainer with Church Resource Ministries Australia, Ken Morgan writes...

### **Just the same, only different**

Every Sunday morning about sixty or seventy people take over the ‘Green McCaw’ café located in a suburban shopping strip. The small space is packed to the door and people sit around tables to enjoy the music, listen to a brief and punchy message, hear stories and generally celebrate the good things that God is doing in their community.

It’s a pretty unlikely crew – a millionaire businessman sits at the same table as a recovering heroin addict. The head bouncer from the local pub is there, along with IT professionals, welfare dependent single mums and an array of others. The young pastors are desperately seeking a larger space to meet.

About half the people attending that morning have come to faith among this group. The rest were either part of the original planting team or have re-connected with church after a break.

Sunday afternoons, in another city meets another church, which looks virtually the same. The look and feel is café casual, although they meet in a school hall. The music is not too different, the message just as relevant and punchy. The crowd lacks some of the diversity, but numbers about eighty or so. All-in-all, you’d struggle to see from the outside how very, very different these two churches are.

### **What’s the difference?**

Our first example began six years ago as a team of about ten people. For the first two years they had no public worship service, committing most of their time to building relationships with unchurched people, doing simple acts of service, making disciples one by one and gathering them into small groups. When the people they were reaching kept asking to ‘start church’, they commenced a monthly service. They moved to a fortnightly service only when they had enough people involved to sustain both grass-roots mission activity and the public service. They’ve only recently increased the frequency to weekly. Because a favourite pastime in their area is relaxing in a café, they chose a one as a meeting place. Founded and formed by mission, this is a mission-shaped church.

Although a little bigger, the second example church is only eighteen months old. The origins of the church are found in a small group of young adults, frustrated by the rigidity of the traditional church they attended. They wanted something fresh, contemporary and informal - something they could invite their friends to.

The group worked hard to bring their dream to reality. They put together a detailed strategic plan, pulled together ideas, people and resources and even gained the blessing of their home church. Local government demographics told them that middle class 18-40 year-olds abounded in their suburb, so everything about the service - from funky music to plunger coffee – was chosen with these in mind. Their first service was everything they had hoped, and since then a steady flow of new faces has delighted the leadership group.

While the new church appears to be a resounding success, a few nagging doubts rattle about in the minds of the leaders. Firstly, almost all the newcomers are from other churches. Some stay, some attend for a few weeks and move on. Everyone is encouraged to invite their friends, but all their friends are Christians.

Secondly, the church’s efforts at outreach don’t seem to be effective in bringing people into the church. They’ve done everything from a ‘battle of the bands’ to offering free marriage counselling (stat’s showed a high marriage breakdown rate in the area), but there’s been no ‘flow on’ from these to the worship service. Thirdly, the core team is growing tired of the effort required to maintain the current standard in the weekly service, plus the outreach activities. Because successful, large churches emphasise excellence, the leaders have drummed into the worship team to give their all. But now the team is starting to lose their energy and creative edge.

Contemporary and cool as it may be, the second example is mission-flavoured.

### The Differences

<i>Mission-Shaped Church...</i>	<i>Mission-Flavoured Church...</i>
Had its origin in a call to mission	Was born in reaction to the established church
Began work with the unchurched and their needs	Began work with the churched and their preferences
Made serving the lost its first priority	Made a hip worship service their first priority
Launched its public worship service according to health indicators	Launched their public worship service according to a schedule
Sought to discover and meet the needs of unchurched by engaging with them in relationship, then serving them in a relational ‘peer’ approach.	Perceived the needs of the unchurched from a distance and opted for a ‘provider-client’ approach to serving them
Allowed those new to the faith to influence its form and style.	Designed its look and feel based on its own idea of what the community needed.
Became ‘insiders’ in their local culture – ‘Bringing Jesus to them’	Remained ‘outsiders’ in their local culture, trying to ‘Bring them to Jesus’

## 5 Lessons for Fresh Expressions of Church

### 1. **Clarify the call**

The basis for mission-shaped church is a call to mission, rather than frustration that your own needs aren't met. As far as possible, deal with your frustrations and other gripes before you set off to plant.

### 2. **Begin with the end in mind**

Right from the start, spend significant time with those you're trying to reach. Your job is to be good news, not a purveyor of goods and services, religious or otherwise.

### 3. **Keep public worship services in perspective**

In a mission-shaped framework, a public worship service should be the overflow of mission and its fruits, rather than preceding it. It will therefore be shaped by those who've come to faith through mission. The form it takes may or may not follow the style and symbols of the receptor culture.

### 4. **Make time for unchurched people**

Public worship services are usually very resource-hungry. Beware of committing too much of your people's time and energy to the service at the expense of relational time with the unchurched.

### 5. **Let programs serve relationships**

Programs as a concept are value-neutral. They succeed or fail as outreach tools largely on the basis of whether they provide a context for relationships to form and grow. Remember, outreach and evangelism aren't the same thing.

### **A final thought. . .**

Many large, attractive churches successfully reach unchurched people using a 'come to Jesus' model. And some of them began by launching a public worship service. This is valid and worthwhile ministry. Mission-shaped church is not a replacement for this model, but an alternative approach that will reach a different sector of society.

### **Ken Morgan**

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