



Pioneer spirit

DAVID MALE

SHARING IDEAS FROM:
RIDLEY HALL AND WESTCOTT HOUSE

Following the publication of the 2004 report *Mission-shaped Church*, the Church of England has taken steps to identify, train and deploy a new generation of church leaders to be known as Ordained Pioneer Ministers. Helping lead this movement is David Male, Tutor in Pioneer Mission Training at the Cambridge theological colleges of Ridley Hall and Westcott House.

A word or two about your background, please, David

From 1999 until 2007 I was vicar of the Net Church in Huddersfield. As its name implies this network-style community isn't based on traditional parish boundaries. We started very small, with a vision to reach 'unchurched' people who may not be 'reachable' through more traditional expressions of church life. With formal recognition and support from our local bishop, things flourished. And while the Net Church was developing a whole new Fresh Expressions movement was getting under way.

What attracted you to the job?

I'm sure that when we started

the Net Church some people thought we were weird. Of course, it wasn't long before we were seen as much more mainstream. And because we were maybe a little farther down the road than others, people asked for help and advice.

That was when I began to think about appropriate ways of training a new generation of mould-breaking Fresh Expressions leaders. And then the Church of England made its decision to recognize and deploy Ordained Pioneer Ministers – a historic moment, really, reflecting a recognition of our need to think and act 'outside the box'.

There have to be supplementary types of churches to reach people outside the orbit of

traditional church. This isn't to belittle traditional approaches: I believe strongly in a 'both / and' approach.

Then came the opportunity to work with Ridley College and Westcott House, both training institutions, but from very different traditions – and I jumped at it. As they say, if you want to excite a pioneer, give him or her a brand-new challenge – and it makes sense that those who are training pioneers should be pioneers themselves.

What do you mean by pioneer?

We're still developing our definition: it includes terms such as 'risk taker', 'change agent', 'spiritual entrepreneur', 'networker',

'connector' and 'creative spirit'. In the main we are thinking of people called by God to develop churches that connect with unchurched people beyond the traditional church model – basically, people who are willing to take church to new people and places.

What about the training that you're offering?

Essentially we need to make sure we really are creating training for pioneers and not just providing the same old training and slapping a 'pioneer' label on it. Most people on our courses have been selected specifically to serve as OPMs and the rest have come with real pioneer potential recognized by their dioceses.



The Rev David Male is Tutor in Pioneer Mission Training at Ridley Hall and Westcott House, Cambridge. He is an Associate Missioner with the Fresh Expressions team. He is also the Fresh Expressions Adviser for Ely Diocese. He is married to Heather and they have three children.



Go to the CL website to read an extract from David's new book. Also, check details of a special discount offer, exclusively for CL readers.



Pioneers are spiritual entrepreneurs, risk-takers who seize opportunities, creating something out of nothing.

They are here for two to three years, according to age and experience. Some are full-time and others are part of our 'mixed mode' programme, which combines time at college with time leading their fresh expression. We aim to fire their imaginations and to help them develop a vision for the future. You cannot create a pioneer, but the key is to create the right environment in which their passion for pioneering increases and their sense of calling grows. As part of this we bring in the best thinkers and practitioners working at the moment.

In recent months we've welcomed Elaine Storkey, Dave Beales (DNA network, Colchester), Paul Bayes (CofE's National Mission and Evangelism Adviser), Fuzz Kitto (youth congregations in Sydney, Australia), Maggi Dawn (Chaplain and Fellow, Robinson College, Cambridge) and Ian Mobsby (the Moot church in Westminster).

We stress three Es:

- education – grounding the course in good theology of mission and of the church
- exposure – ensuring time with leading practitioners
- experience – regular placements and attachments.

And all of this is done with other pioneers creating a

supportive and challenging learning environment

And you have a fourth E, don't you?

Definitely! Pioneers are spiritual entrepreneurs, risk-takers who seize opportunities, creating something out of nothing. In terms of creating resources and team building, we have so much to learn from the business world. With this in mind, we've started a link with the Waitrose chain of supermarkets. Students spend forty hours per term shadowing Waitrose managers in the workplace.

We have also linked up with Cambridge University's Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning to further develop the connection between entrepreneurs and pioneering. In June they will be leading a two-day entrepreneurship course for us.

On completing the course, most students will go into curate posts, with the understanding that at least half of their working time will be in pioneering work.

What's encouraging and exciting you at the moment?

It's great that the Church of England is making some major structural changes with the development of Ordained Pioneer Ministers, Lay Pioneer Ministry and Bishop's Mission Orders – these definitely 'freeing

up the structures. And it is great that the pioneering gifts of lay people are being recognized.

Ten years ago, new things were happening despite church structures. Now the structures are supporting innovation. I've taken great encouragement from the fact that Archbishop Rowan's direct support has been very influential. And it's so important that this is not limited to the evangelical area – hence my work in relationship with Westcott House. These developments have to be church-wide or they will wither and die.

As of spring 2008, sixty-four people throughout England are training for Ordained Pioneer Ministry and the first cohort will be ordained at midsummer. The numbers are set to increase. It's worth noting that sixty-four is roughly the size of one theological college.

How should a pioneer think about the church?

They need to understand the traditional church, learn from it and work with it. Pioneers have to work with the institution as it is. In practical, Anglican terms it's essential to know how to liaise and negotiate with the Archdeacon, the Rural Dean – and so on. If people don't understand how to do such things, they are at a serious disadvantage.

Also, it's important to place Fresh Expressions as part of an ongoing movement in church history. To adapt the tradition you need to understand it deeply. For example, if you understand what Anglican liturgy is about, it's easy to adapt it to an 'FX' context.

I guess the biggest challenge of all is to ask what we mean by church. When does a church-related group actually become a church? For example, we've traditionally thought of parent-toddler groups as an expression of a church's outreach. But when and to what extent can such a group become a 'church' itself?

So, with parent-toddler groups we have tended to ask, 'How do we get them into church?' But maybe we should be asking, 'How do we get church into their situation?'

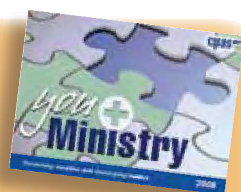
What other developments are keeping you busy?

I'm very excited about the new one-year Mission-shaped Ministry course that has been developed by the Fresh Expressions team. Its aim is to inspire and equip local church people to develop pioneering, fresh expressions work. Church leaders don't take part as solo delegates. The idea is that each church should send a group of people to the course, who have a definite intention to initiate a project. We're launching the course nationwide at numerous centres – no one in England should be more than one hour's drive away from a course. Starting in September 2008 I'll be leading the course for the whole of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk, which will involve Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and house churches.

And my new book is being published in summer 2008: *Church Unplugged: Remodelling church without losing your soul* (Authentic). It is built around ten 'essentials' for a fresh expression to flourish. Couldn't let that go, er, unplugged!

Where next?

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