



freshexpressions

changing church for
a changing world



7



MEMBER'S HANDOUT
research and mission audit





LEARNING OUTCOME



At the end of this unit you will understand:

- Research as part of a discipline of listening and discernment
- The concept of 'double listening' and the directions involved in 360° or 'total listening'
- The Biblical base for research and its relation to a mission project/fresh expression
- How the gathering of information can inspire and shape vision, confirm vocation, inform strategy and begin mission engagement
- The interplay between analysis and inspiration in research
- The different components of the context, the range of sources of information and the methods of listening
- Initial research - its nature and how to undertake it
- Mission audit - from principles and examples; how to carry it out and link it to preparing the team and making contacts

You will be encouraged to reflect upon and develop application on:

- Who requires information and what will it serve?
- Definition of the communities they are called to (population, geography/people group) and the possibility of mapping
- What stage are we at – initial research or mission audit
- Demographic features of focus community and key features for engagement, including Gospel connections and challenges
- What are the gaps in knowledge – how and who will find out?
- Next steps

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LISTENING, RESEARCH AND FRESH EXPRESSIONS

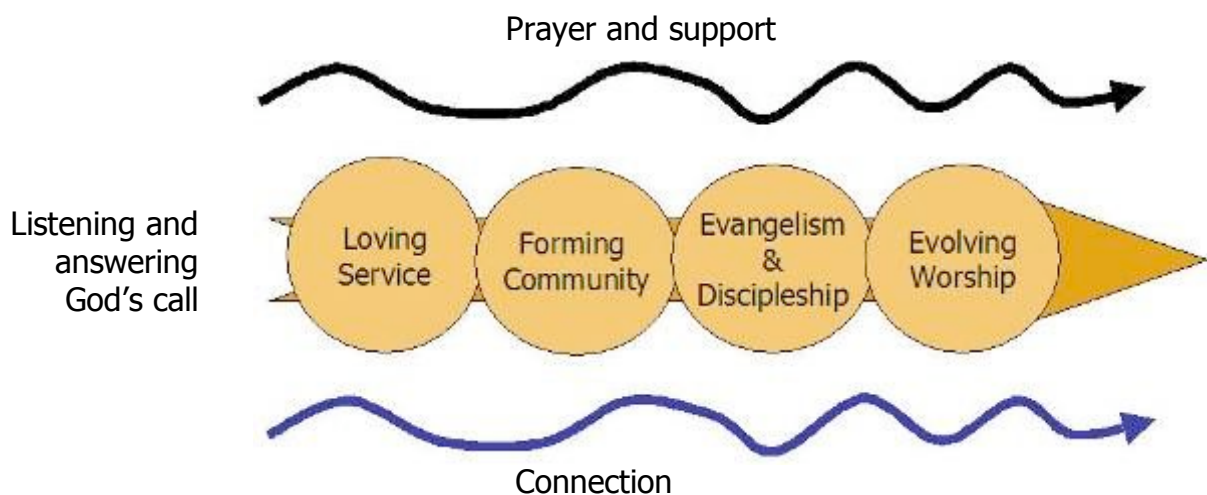
Points from the DVD interviews



Mission-shaped Church report

The report emphasises all that we have been learning so far on this course, that the mission endeavour can be summed up as ... 'Finding out what God is doing and joining in.' It therefore highlighted that discernment in context 'is the process that needs to inform all our planning for mission and fresh expressions' (Mission-shaped Church p24). This discernment can involve all our senses, but 'listening' is the expression used to sum up this research. The first chapter of the report presents the fruit of research with an analysis of current social and cultural trends.

Starting a fresh expression



- It is all listening to God
- Whatever sense we use and in whatever direction we look and listen for our research, it is all ultimately discerning from God

Double listening

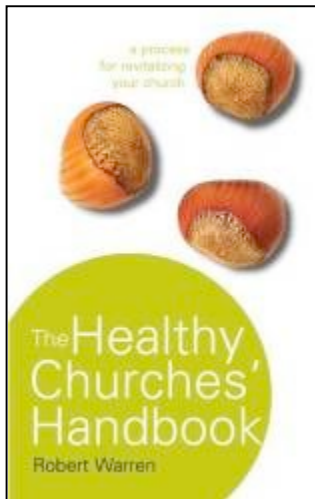
Mission-shaped Church describes the discernment as 'double listening' since it involves researching the context on the one hand, whilst relating these discoveries to all that we should bring as the church in mission (p104-5) ... our inherited tradition of Gospel and church. It helpfully emphasises that listening to the context should be primary if fresh expressions are to be authentically indigenous. This can be seen as listening outwards before listening inwards.

Total listening or 360° listening



- To what is happening in the world and in society
- To what is happening in your own community
- To the people in your group and team and church
- To partners in other churches and in society
- To the Scriptures and the stories of the church down the ages
- To the insights of prayer and reflection and attending to what God is saying

Mission audit materials & healthy church tools



There have been good mission audit tools in the past but most have been focused on the life of the existing congregation and full-scale analysis of all sections of the geographical community around that church. These can help enliven an existing church in mission but we need something more focused for developing a fresh expression.

More recent tools available to help, also tend to have their main focus on the church. This applies to excellent resources like *Natural Church Development*, *Healthy Churches Handbook*, etc - they seek to improve the quality of church by research and analysis - rather than help us reinvent and discover new forms of church to fit the context.

Challenging assumptions

Proverbs on fact finding.

The value of focussing on a particular mission field.



EXERCISE: BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH



What examples can you think of research being used and commended:

In the Old Testament?

In the New Testament?

Conclusion

Research is able to:

- Inspire and shape vision
- Confirm vocation
- Inform strategy and identify Gospel connection
- Begin mission engagement

RESEARCH BY DIFFERENT GROUPS FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES

Church leaders ... to manage and direct mission

- which may include some project study on possible fresh expressions

Fresh expressions teams reaching their own culture

- need to gather together their existing knowledge, to check it for accuracy, and extend it with planned research and engagement
- need to do further work to fill in the gaps that they find
- extend their understanding with significant engagement and extending contacts

Fresh expressions teams engaging cross culturally

- need to do initial research to check out the viability of the project
- need to recognise their values and instincts will often not match the context
- need therefore to do extensive work to learn the culture and context
- need to constantly stay humble and open to gain new insights



THREE GUIDE POSTS FOR LEADERS AND TEAMS

Inspiration

We should look to God to enlighten us in all areas of developing mission understanding and fresh expressions. Revelation can come from prayer, the Bible and other reading, reflection or engagement with people and the context. In each case God may give a general perception or specific word or insight.

Information

Gathering information is central to research and is another channel of God-given discernment. There are two main ways that leaders and teams will build up the information they need:

Analytical approach

This is a pro-active approach to seek out information based on an analysis of the categories required. There are lots of tools to help build up this analytical profile of our context and lots of sources that can be accessed. It's all about inquiry and exploration and again God is in it.

Automatic/instinctive

However, leaders and mission teams are likely to have lots of information on the various mission contexts around them. This comes just from everyday life when insights are built up consciously and subconsciously.



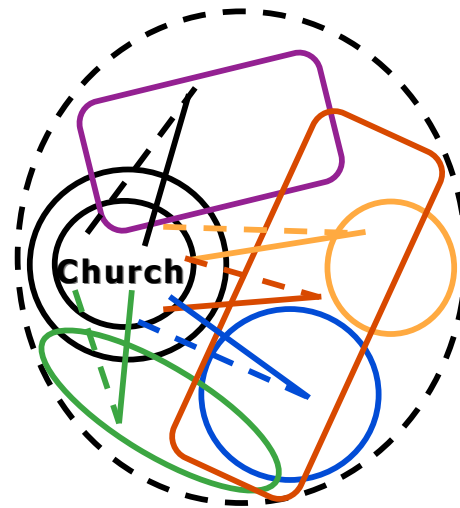
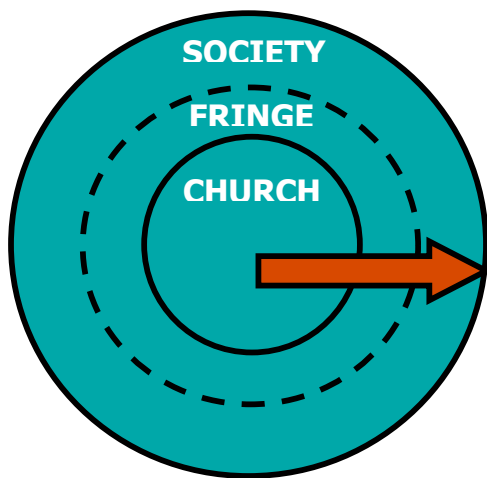
- The more exposure we have had living in or close to a culture or context, the more will be stored away in our memories
- But the lesson of this session is ... don't think that this will give the whole picture. In fact, don't even assume all you have picked up is correct ... lots may be second- or third-hand assumptions.

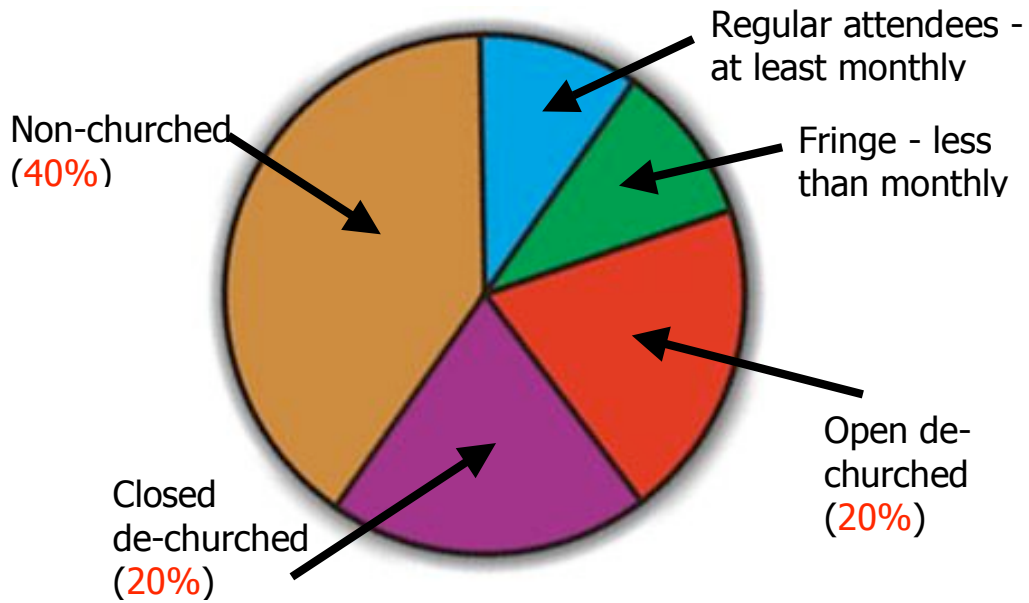
'Gut feeling'/intuitive

Although least reliable. Some people are very intuitive and just get a sensing about things. It's a natural capacity ... and can bring valuable insight to add to a picture of the mission context and its understanding. As with the things we automatically know from picking them up through life experience, gut feelings need testing.

REMINDING OURSELVES OF THE CONTEXT/THE MISSION FIELD - BIG PICTURE

Christendom and Post-Christendom



Church: fringe; de-churched (open & closed); non-churched

Neighbourhood: network

- For research and audit, it's very important to emphasise that geographic neighbourhoods fit how we think ... we can see them, prayer walk them and easily get demographic stats.
- When it's a network, we have to think harder and dig much deeper to uncover how they work. Where are their meeting places, their patterns of relationship and their values?

Fresh expressions that are non-geographic can be of two types. We need to be very clear:



- Is the network just the sum of the relational networks of the team members? If so, they may have no overlap or integration. It can actually be a multiple network, touching as many networks as there are in the team.
- Is the focus a single, distinct social network, such as clubbers, a school (pupils, parents, staff) or café culture? Here all team members focus on the one network and relationships reinforce one another and research is much easier and may indicate common programs are possible.

Generations: builders; boomers; gen X; millennials

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CASE STUDIES: THE POWER OF LISTENING FOR MISSION

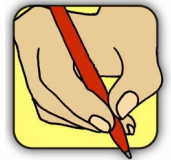


FIVE STAGES OF LISTENING

As we prepare for and start a new mission initiative or a fresh expression it is helpful to identify five stages to the process. However, the discernment and formation gained needs to be kept, referred to regularly and updated as the project develops. It is more about the development of a habit than moving through a particular stage. Listening leads to a confirmed calling and then directs and shapes the outworking of that call for the duration of the project.

- Stage 1: What do you know already?
- Stage 2: Initial research
- Stage 3: Deeper listening (this is much of what was called mission audit)
- Stage 4: Reflection and testing God's call
- Stage 5: Presentation and action

GROUP EXERCISE: Imagine church for ...



Track 1: working on application of these principles to your actual context

These questions may be helpful:

- What draws you to explore beginning a fresh expression?
- What group or community do you think you are called to work with?
- What do you think God is doing already in this community?
- Where are the needs and pains and points of darkness and difficulty?
- What gifts and resources do you bring?
- Who might your partners be (both churches and other agencies)?
- What will be the cost of doing this?
- What will make you shout 'Hallelujah!' in one year and in five years?
- How do you find out more about the community you think you may be called to serve?

Track 2: imagining a particular group or network and then imagining how to grow church in this context. Questions to ask at this point:

1. Give this person a name.
2. Where would this person hang out?
3. What type of music would they listen to?
4. What would they consider 'cool'?
5. What kind of food would they eat?
6. What kind of living quarters?
7. What would they watch on TV?
8. What kind of transport would they possess?
9. What would be their attitude to money, wealth, and possessions?
10. What would be of greatest importance to them?
11. Which way of understanding the Gospel would you use to connect with this person?



STAGE 1: What do you know already?

You are unlikely to start the listening for mission process with no information at all. Among those reviewing the mission possibilities and considering a fresh expression, there will already be a significant store of knowledge and insight.

Gather your team

This may be the church leadership team that is reviewing mission challenges. Or it could be a special project group set up by one church, a group of churches or even a deanery/district mission review group. It's important to recognise that in this case many of the group may not eventually be the actual mission team that undertakes the new initiative.

Alternatively those gathered may be exactly those that are sensing a call to a mission project or fresh expression. They could be in any one of the varied situations in one of the following three broad categories:-

- ***A group of Christians in a particular context. This could be the workplace; a particular social network; an institution such as residential home, school or college; or who find themselves in the same geographic neighbourhood or estate.***
- ***Christians who already lead a church program, such as parent and toddlers, kidz club, youth group, over 60's club, homeless ministry, or neighbourhood watch scheme, who sense a call to develop this into a fresh expression of church.***
- ***A church plant team that is coming together around an emerging vision within a church to plant out into a relatively unreached neighbourhood or social network.***

Shaping the initial vision

Below we have provided a list of questions that could focus a pooling of ideas of the team. These should facilitate a gathering of shared insights and experience. Over one or two get-togethers the group should use these questions to produce a first profile of the project. They may use large sheets of paper as well as a scribe making notes. These could provide the start of a growing body of insights to shape the mission. They should be kept and built upon through the developing process.



- What draws you to explore beginning a fresh expression?
- What group or community do you think you are called to work with?
- What do you think God is doing already in this community?
- Where are the needs and pains and points of darkness and difficulty?
- What gifts and resources do you bring?
- Who might your partners be (both churches and other agencies)?
- What will be the cost of doing this?
- What will make you shout 'Hallelujah!' in one year and in five years?
- How do you find out more about the community you think you may be called to serve?



STAGE 2: Initial research

This stage is about finding out more information about the community you are seeking to serve and in which you sense a call to begin a fresh expression of church.

Stage 2 has the specific aims of getting hold of general information so as to establish a broad background picture. You are trying now to assess the viability, model and early planning of the project. If the results of initial research encourage you to go further then stage 3 takes this starting point to go into much greater depth and engagement with the context. Initial research creates the skeleton, and in-depth listening will put flesh on the bones.

A typical range of aspects for early exploration might be:

- The population (numbers) and nature of chosen communities
- Are they neighbourhood or social network in character? And how do any networks work?
- How do the sub-cultures relate to the Richter & Francis categories – dechurched (open/closed); non-churched
- Some preliminary demographics and other churches present
- Historic attendance trends ... with age breakdown
- Geographic (and social) distribution of active church members (a map)
- Buildings in relation to chosen communities

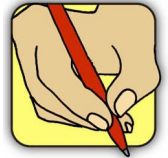
Initial research into a neighbourhood

This is a sort of mission field that easily fits our patterns of thinking and is much easier to engage with. We can see it, walk around it and survey a map. The statistics available in demographic surveys are usually gathered geographically and provide a ready source of information. Here are the sorts of application steps for initial research into a neighbourhood mission field.

Initial research into networks

- Nodes and hubs
- Serving or creating a node or hub
- Connectors

Group exercise:



In your small group with the information you have established from what you already know about the social/cultural context of your cartoon character or your actual situation, explore these questions that would relate to initial research to check this out and find out more on the group:

Where could you get demographic information on this group?
 Can you plot this sub-culture on a map ... or at least their meeting points?
 Is there any literature that would give you insight into their story?
 What would be the mission dynamics of engaging with this group?(Use the questions below.).

- Are you investigating a neighbourhood or network or both?
- Is this progressive or pioneer work?
- If you were the task group is this cross cultural or mission to the same culture?
- Where will you go to discover the basic information?



- What are the concrete five next steps you need to take?
- Are there any difficulties or sticking points?
- How long will this stage take for this network or group?



STAGE 3: Deeper listening

By this stage you will know some outline information about the community you are seeking to serve and where you may hope to establish a fresh expression of church. The next stage is to try to get to know them much better.

How to get to know this community or network better

1 - Three methods

Observation

Investigation

Conversation

- Set-up one to one meetings with key or representative members of the community and talk in depth with them (some suggestions for questions you might ask are given below).
- Stand on the street or meeting place with a DVD camera and interview people who come along, asking them the questions you want to explore.
- Invite one or more small groups to an informal meeting in a relaxed setting. Provide something to eat and drink and a warm welcome. Ask those who come to tell you a little more about their wider community.
- Try to find a way to serve this community by offering a meeting place or some practical help. As you offer this loving service you will more naturally be able to get to know those who come and their concerns. Most of us will only share ourselves with those we are coming to know and trust. This way of serving may well be the beginning of your fresh expression of church.



2 - Three levels

Physical

Social

Spiritual

3 - What do you want to learn?

All the time that you are developing this deeper listening, you want to be linking the insights to how God may want you to see things and how he may challenge you to respond in your mission or fresh expression of church. Here are some deeper questions you may be asking:

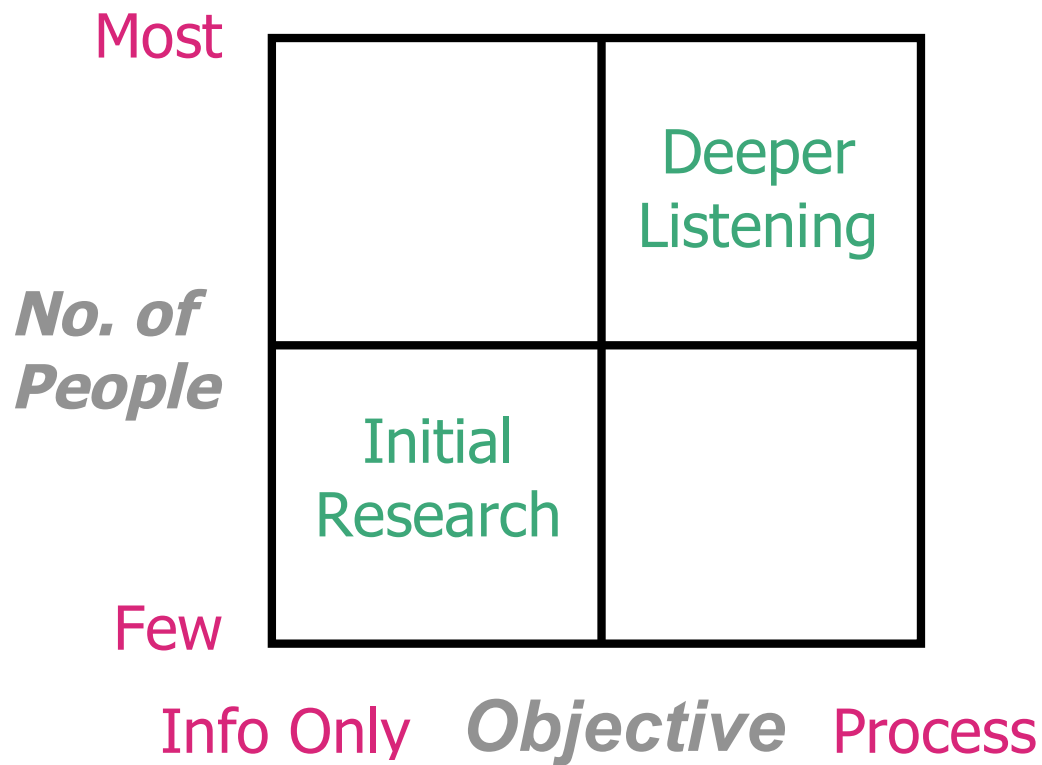
- Are there needs which can be met by offering loving service?
- What are the hardships and difficulties, joys and pleasures in people's lives?
- What do people most value? What do they place a low value on?
- How do people relate to God? Do they ever think of going to church? Do they pray?
- How do they get to know new people?
- As preparation for stage 4, begin to think how the Gospel connects with all you are learning.

4 - Three key principles underlying deeper listening

- The beginning of mission - to prepare the workers/team.
- The beginning of mission - expect key contacts.

Jesus repeatedly sent out his disciples two by two into the mission field. And he always told them to look for and expect communities and people who were open for his mission – those offering a 'welcome' (people of peace – Luke 10: 6). Not only are such contacts potentially open to the Gospel, but they are often the doorway to a whole range of their relationships in the context.

- The beginning of mission - establishing key partnerships



Group exercise



In your groups again, encourage the group to address the six deeper listening questions to the social and cultural setting of their character or the actual situation, so that you begin to imagine what might be involved in going deeper than your initial research... In particular ask:

- Could you take some form of questionnaire to a selection of this group? What sort of questions would it include?
- What sort of meeting could you hold to invite some of these folk to?
- Who might you go to talk to who knows this group inside out?
- What prayer engagement could get you close to this group and their lifestyle?
- How might you begin to get involved in the lives of these people in a way that was authentic?

Concluding stage 3

Again, add all you are learning to the key records you have been building up. This could involve:

- Summarise all your deeper listening information and insight that you have gained about the community you seek to serve.
- Draw the community as a person or family or as an abstract shape.
- Write down your answers to the six questions above under: what do you want to learn?



- Add your new findings to your 'map' of neighbourhood or network in stage 2.
- Go back again to your answers to the nine questions in stage 1 and consider any revisions.
- Plan any more research. Pray together.



STAGE 4: Reflection and testing God's call

A key focus of this stage of listening may involve a quiet day or a team weekend retreat. These give time and space both to be alone and to come together and listen to God.

You may begin such times by reflecting on the in depth picture that you have put together at stage 3. You could hang up the maps and charts you have made or lay them on the floor. In times of listening to God both individually and together, you may reflect again on the answers you have been building up to the original nine questions that you have revised at each stage.

Central to this listening will be a focus on Scripture and the church's tradition. In particular you will face the challenge of 'knowing your Gospel'.

Know your Gospel

Good news for your community

So you need to think hard about how the Gospel is good news for your community. From the picture you have been building up, consider carefully what aspects of the Gospel will people find they can



engage with first and most easily? Which may present the open door? Think together how the team will communicate and demonstrate those promises among your community.

Lonely	Eternal friend
Empty	Fullness
Guilt	Forgiveness
Broken	Wholeness
Sick	Healing
Bound	Freedom
Rejected	Sought Out
Worthless	Infinitely valued
Aimless	God's Purpose
Dying	Eternal Life

Challenges as well as affirmation

You need to spend similar time reflecting on the challenge that the Gospel will bring to the community you seek to serve. Ask yourselves what may bring the most transformation and expression of God's Kingdom here, even if it will be hard. And again, how will you as a team live out these difficult aspects among the community?

Self-centred	God centred
Choice	Obligation
Fickle	Committed
Self-sufficient	Interdependent
Critical	Trusting
Proud	Humble
Cynical	Hopeful
Easy life	Difficult life
Power	Service
Self-indulgent	Self disciplined
Controlled by	Led by the Holy Spirit



Group exercise



Go back to the person or team you have envisaged (either the cartoon or the actual situation) and do this two stage exercise with that group.

- What are your guesses about where a) the Gospel will connect with this person's culture; and b) the Gospel will challenge this person's culture?
- How might you investigate to check your guesses and get a truer answer to these vital questions?

Discernment

This next step involves a process of testing what you think God is saying to you. You will be seeking confirmation both of the insights you have gathered and also of the sense of calling to respond and to serve this community in ways you have begun to identify.

This testing best involves those outside your group or team. Ask a respected Christian friend or minister to listen to what you discern God is saying and give them permission to ask some hard questions. You are looking for some constructive feedback.

- Is there a sense of inner peace and gentle encouragement from God?
- Does the plan make sense to you and to others?
- Will going forward increase faith, hope and love in others and yourself even if it is tough?



- Has something 'come to life' for you, from prayer or the Scriptures?
- Is the glory for God or for you?
- Have you counted the cost of beginning this and seeing it through?
- Have other people outside the group confirmed that this may be right?



STAGE 5: Presentation & action

Feedback to the church

This is now a time of opportunity. You have listened to each other, to God and to the wider community. Now is the moment to share your vision with the wider church and begin to move forward. A good test is whether you can express what you have heard clearly in writing and in conversation.

Wider feedback to the community and partners

Since you have been seeking co-operation from individuals and groups within your chosen community, you may want to honour their help and further build relationships. In a number of cases this has been done by giving a presentation of selected findings that are of general interest. The hubs of social network could be a possibility. One group did this both in homes that they had visited and at a local library.

Moving from listening to action

You may find that the process of listening has led naturally into action as you began to serve a community and draw people together. The booklet *Starting a Fresh Expression* and the material from it in session 6 gives you an outline map of how you need to move forward from here in

community building, making disciples and evolving worship. At each stage of the journey you will need to go on using and building the habits and culture of listening that you have now developed.

This shift from listening to action may require a change of gear which could involve drawing in others to your venture.



However keep all the maps, charts and diagrams that have been at the centre of these stages of listening for mission. You should revisit them regularly when you plan and pray, continuing to refer back to the original nine questions of stage 1.

FURTHER REFLECTION AND APPLICATION

1 - Continue your course journal

Reflect on what has been significant for you and your team in this session, either on your own or in you group, making notes of your answers to the following questions:

- What have you learned about listening and research as part of fresh expressions and mission?
- How can you best take these things forward in your own situation?

2 - Bible study: Luke 2.46

Find time to do an Ignatian style meditation on the story of Jesus in the temple in Luke.

What exactly does Jesus do in the story?

How can you follow his example in your own ministry at the present time?

3 - Practical exercise: listening for mission

The main practical outcome from the session will need to be starting the process of listening for mission outlined in the session.

You may already be part way through that process. Plan how you will undertake the remaining stages over a sensible timescale.

Some additional questions and frameworks are provided at the end of this section.

4 - Further reading



Steven Croft, Freddy Hedley & Bob Hopkins, *Listening for Mission*, CHP, 2006.
Mission-shaped Church report: Chapter 1, CHP, 2004.
Pilgrims Way, The Methodist Church Resourcing Mission Office, 2001.

Further group questions

These questions may help to resource your research and listening. Use them as seems appropriate.

- 1) Have you defined the target community for your church, church plant or fresh expression? Do you know the population numbers?
- 2) What are the demographics of this/these community/communities?
 What distinct social/cultural/generational groups are there?
 Have you accessed the census data for any of the communities?
- 3) Is/are your target community/communities:
 - a) Deep rural; b) Expanded village; c) Town; d) Suburbs; e) City?

What cultural and social differences result?
- 4) Are these contexts predominantly Network or Neighbourhood based?
 What gathering points/activities are there within these target communities?
 Are they different for the different groups you have identified?
- 5) Within your target community, are there:
 - a) Longstanding residents and 'incomers/foreigners'?
 - b) Owners/managers of businesses/farms and workers?
 - c) Those working locally and those who commute?

Do these groups relate naturally together?
- 6) What other churches and community groups are there in your target mission field? Do you know their plans and goals?



- 7) Do you have historic attendance figures for your church with some age breakdown?
- 8) Have you ever done any prayer walking and/or survey work in your target area/context(s) with questionnaires/interviews?
- 9) What do you or your people sense that God has said and/or promised about your church and its context?

APPLICATION TO YOUR PROJECT

- 1) Can your target community/communities be shown on a map? If so get a map and mark on it a) the mission subunits and b) the homes of your active church members. Agree who will do this.
- 2) What gaps in your knowledge have been highlighted by the group questions above? Make a list of them. Agree how you will obtain this information and who will do it.
- 3) What other information would help the development of mission-shaped plans for your church or fresh expression? Decide how to/who will get this.
- 4) Would any of the Community Surveys (Appendix) be applicable/helpful in your context?
- 5) From the above, finalise your research, survey and audit plans, which should include who will be responsible.

Project application - initial research into a neighbourhood	Who's responsible	Time to do	Date done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get a large map of the chosen area. According to your remit plot on it either existing church members or your team members. Plotting both but in different colours can be ideal. Also plot any not-yet-Christians you are in contact with. • Get hold of the latest census report from the library or Internet. Extract key indicators on such things as: population, age breakdown, social and ethnic mix, economic indicators, relationship to faith, etc. Prepare a short report or plot them on a 			



<p>graph.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk the streets and pray as you go. Take note of significant buildings, places, observations and sensations. • What are the key meeting points – the school gate, pub, street corner, where teenagers gather? Plot them on your map. • Discover the story of the area. What has shaped its history? • What is happening in the churches (including your own)? Are they reaching your chosen area at all? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What other strong agencies of community are present that might be partners? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review your answers to the nine questions in stage 1 and update with your new information. 			

Project application – initial research into a network	Who's responsible	Time to do	Date done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to discover the numbers and age profile and social background of those involved in the network. This will probably be an estimate. • Identify the patterns and places of physical or virtual meeting (the hubs & nodes). • Try to establish the methods and content of communication within the network. • Who are the key connectors, workers and opinion-formers within the network? • Who is already working with this community in terms of churches or agencies and what are they doing? • On a large sheet of paper, draw a diagram or some sort of 'map' of everything you have learned. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review your answers to the nine questions in stage 1 and update them with your new information. 			

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research and mission audit