

The Mission-shaped Audit



BY

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Do you not say 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you,
open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

John 4:35

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the
name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching
them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Matthew 28:19-20

FOREWORD

CONTENTS

Foreword	Page 2
Introduction	Page 4
The Biblical Basis	Page 8
Mission Context	Page 14
Initial Research	Page 20
The Mission Audit	Page 28
Know Your Church	Page 36
Know Your Community	Page 45
Know Your Gospel	Page 55
What Next?	Page 63
Testimonies	Page 68
Appendices	Page 80

INTRODUCTION

Mission is one of the primary purposes of the church. It is in the fabric of our foundations and is essential for the advancement God's ultimate plan to redeem the whole earth. However, as we look at the church's place in modern western society, and as we reflect on how we have been seemingly pushed to the fringe, looking back in earnest to a time when the voice of the church really meant something, where do we find mission?

By and large we see it where we always have... somewhere else. Our inherited mode of church tells us that the mission field is in Africa, or Asia or South America. Somewhere that needs the money we have, or the education we have. Of course, this in many ways is absolutely true, and overseas mission is indeed one of the great mission fields the Lord calls many of us to explore. After all, Jesus did call us to go "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8b). However, too often that is where our mission eyes stop. We often tend not to look closer to home, despite the fact that it is here that the influence of God is becoming more of an echo than a voice. Remember, Jesus first directed us to our immediate surroundings - "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea" (Acts 1:8a). Go to Mozambique and see the expectation that the church has there to see breakthrough in mission. Go to Peru. Go to China. God's voice is often louder there than in the west, and God's mission is clearer than in the west. Here mission is often ignored, or disregarded, or avoided.

So what are we going to do about this? Well, many are doing something. Let this not be a lament for God's absence when He is at work all the time. There have been many breakthroughs throughout Europe and America, many ways in which mission has become the watchword in the church. Alpha has been one of the driving forces at the forefront of this, as a corporate movement of the church, and many churches across Britain and Europe are reaching out and seeking the Kingdom's growth through this and other ways.

The last 20 years has particularly seen a strong refocus on mission at home, as we observe the shrinking church attendances and influence. This has notably come through many of the institutional structures of the church. In the Anglican Church, where we have concentrated most of our work with *Anglican Church Planting Initiatives*, there have been two significant examples of this. Under the leadership of Archbishop George Carey the Anglican Church was taken through the 'Decade of Evangelism', for which the Springboard initiative was founded to support and promote mission. This initiative produced, among other resources, a precursor to this booklet called 'Discerning Church Vocation', as a helpful process for churches to go through to assess their mission context. Springboard also produced the 'Breaking New Ground' report that centred on church planting as a key strategy to re-evangelise Britain.

Then, since the arrival of Archbishop Rowan Williams, we have had the Mission-shaped Church report encouraging all churches to step out further in mission, and this has been backed up by the creation of the Fresh Expressions initiative, which looks to enable fresh expressions of church for a new post-modern culture to exist within a 'mixed economy' church structure that still builds the traditional whilst also making room for the 'new'. And in all things the Mission-shaped Church report is to be a cornerstone feature, reshaping the heart of the Anglican Church. And this is not restricted to the Anglican Church. The Fresh Expressions team also covers the Methodist church, and other denominations are also increasingly aware of the need to 'step out' more.

So we come to a time now when the concept of needing to be in the harvest field, and ask for the workers (Luke 10:2), is both familiar and pressing, regardless of our church situation. However, it is our observation that although mission is increasingly (and vitally) highlighted, in many cases we are disappointed by the results. Perhaps the outreach event did not attract as many as expected, or the new church plant from your church failed. Whatever the reason, when we in the west reach out in mission we can come away feeling like we have made little or no headway - and it was certainly not the revival that seems to happen as a result of mission elsewhere in the world. In terms

of the harvest field, we live on difficult soil. And yet God has placed us here for His mission to the lost, and so we press on.

And we are right to do so. The problem is so many of us do not have the knowledge or the understanding of the mission context God has called us to, and so we can see that there is a mission field. We may even see that it is ripe for harvest. But we find ourselves without the correct tools, and without the understanding of when to sow and when to reap. We find ourselves 'farming at night' – digging in the dark with our hands, hoping to find the seed that has grown. What we need is better equipment, more knowledge of the land, and greater wisdom to understand the preparation of the soil. This is what this book is looking to provide – a little light to farm by.

It is our conviction that to have this we need to look back at the Master and ask ourselves: what did Jesus do? He is, after all, the light of the world. Look back at John 4:35. Jesus raised his head, opened his eyes and looked at the harvest fields. Properly looked. And by properly looking he could say that they were ripe for harvest. That is what we need to do. If we want to see where the fields are ripe, ready for harvest, then we need to properly look at the ground set aside for us. We need to do some preparation and research, evaluating what it is that we see as we raise our eyes. Find out where the seed is ready, where it needs more growth, where it needs sowing afresh. If we can ask our self these questions, and allow Jesus to shed light on the answer, then we will be in a much better position to step out and to see a breakthrough in mission.

This process of looking at the harvest field, and evaluating what we see is called a Mission Audit. A dictionary definition of this process might be "A thorough investigation, taking stock, for the purposes of mission." In any other work context we are familiar with the process of taking stock of what we have and analysing all the assets and systems and processes of an organisation. Well, mission is the work that Jesus called us to (Matthew 28:19-20), so let us do the same – let us take stock of what Jesus has given us to do, what tools He has provided us with, what systems and processes we use and whether we could be more

effective if we changed. This booklet exists to help you get the total picture for the purposes of planning your mission.

Ultimately this booklet is about preparation. Our aim is to introduce you to the concept of Mission Auditing, and to give you some practical ideas for you to implement in your particular context so that you are better prepared and equipped for the particular aspect of God's mission to the world that He has called you to. We hope that you find this process clear, and that you can begin to open your eyes more, and see the harvest fields that are ripe around you.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS

The idea of doing some research and preparation for the work God has called you to is not a new one. It is a strong feature throughout both the Old and the New Testament. Here are some principles from Proverbs to get us going...

“Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.”
Proverbs 2:11

“My son, preserve sound judgement and discernment, do not let them out of your sight.”

Proverbs 3:21

“He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame.”
Proverbs 18:13

Sometimes it can be easy to believe that true faith is stepping out to where we feel called without question, but we are not showing a lack of faith by looking closer at the harvest field. We are making ourselves more aware of the depth of the call we have, more aware of the importance of the task, more aware of the dependence we will need to place on Jesus if we are to succeed. We are listening properly before we answer. There are many accounts in the Bible that show this to be a biblical principle.

As we begin this journey of preparation, research and auditing, let's see what we can bring to mind ourselves. Take five minutes now. Put this book down, go and boil the kettle. Then pick up a cup of tea and a bible, and see if you can think of any accounts in either Testament where research and looking at the harvest field is entered into. See you in a few minutes...

... Well, what did you find? Let's start with one of the most clear cut examples. *Numbers 13* comes at a point of the Israelites' journey where they have followed Moses, who in turn followed the cloud and fire of the Lord, to the edge of Canaan. They had been through many hard times in getting there, and had seen God work in miraculous ways in order to preserve and provide for them. In all that time they had been clinging on to a hope that Moses had declared when they had left Egypt. Moses had declared the promise that God had made to bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey... the Promised Land. They had been waiting since the times of Abraham to occupy this land, and here they were, in the Desert of Paran, on the verge of stepping into God's promise. All they needed to do was cross the river.

However, God intervened by telling Moses "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan" (verse 2). He calls the Israelites not just to know what it is they have to do, but to *explore* - to gain a fuller understanding of what it is before they weigh in and do it blindly... a similar picture to Jesus looking before declaring the harvest ripe; a similar message to the writer of Proverbs instructing us to listen before answering. Your mission, should you choose to accept it Israel, is to claim the Promised Land. Well, before you just dive in... listen. What does that mean? Moses gave the spies specific things to look for:

"See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwallled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land." (v.18-20)

Moses sent out twelve spies, including Caleb and Joshua, to take stock of the land. He sent them to do a Mission Audit. Forty days later they returned, bearing the fruit of the land and with answers to all his questions. They reported:

"We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.

We even saw descendants of Anak there. The Amelekites live in the Negev; the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the sea and along the Jordan." (v.27-29)

It is at this point that we see the difference between a faith-filled Audit and just a fact-finding activity. A Mission Audit is not to decide whether or not to do mission – that bit has already been decided by God. The Audit is to best inform those that will go. However, ten of the spies saw this only as a fact-finding exercise, and as such did not use their eyes of faith. To them it was simple... bad idea! Only Caleb and Joshua went in with the faith that God had already promised the land, and he returned declaring, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it." (v.30) They were all looking at the same facts, but Caleb and Joshua brought their knowledge that God was sending them out.

This is a key account for us. Not only does it show a clear example of God leading the way into a Mission Audit, it also carries an essential lesson for us. We must focus on the positive and mix faith with the facts. Caleb and Joshua mixed faith with the facts and saw what God could do. The others did not. Caleb and Joshua were positive. The others were not. Indeed even Moses was increasingly negative about the whole thing, and God had instructed him first! Years later, when Moses is recounting this time to the Israelites (Deuteronomy 1:19-25), he had become negative and blamed them for wanting spies to be sent and so getting them stuck for forty years in the desert. We must not forget that it is God who sends us out. It is crucial that all our mission activity, from preparation to action, is based on faith. And where does our faith come from? "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

* * *

There are other examples from the Old Testament. Following in the ways of Moses, Joshua also sends out spies into Canaan, and especially into Jericho, to assess the full picture of the mission God had given

them. This time only two are sent, and this time their research is much more encouraging. They discover from Rahab that they are feared throughout the land, and that there are those that will help them in their mission. This is a good example of a Mission Audit that is undertaken by mixing the facts with faith. They must have come back to Joshua with many of the same reports about the fruit of the land and the strength of the people, but as they had looked harder, and with eyes of faith, they were able to say: "The Lord has surely given the whole land into our hands" (Joshua 2:24).

Gideon is another man who prepares well for his work. His Mission Audit was for the battle against the Midianites (Judges 7) and it had a two-fold preparation. Firstly, as with Moses and Joshua, Gideon takes a spy with him into the enemy's camp to size up the opposition. And he goes in faith, so that even though the facts are that there are more men than could be counted - they were "thick as locusts" in the land - he comes away focussing on the dream that he overhears the enemy describing of Gideon winning the battle. He had already heard God tell him that he would be encouraged by the trip so he knew that God would have the victory. Secondly, he also assessed the army that he had - the tools for the mission - again by faith, so that he allowed God to show him who were the soldiers for this task. His Audit informed not only the action, but also the team, so that he was as well prepared as possible for the task to which God had called him.

Nehemiah was intentional about researching the state of the Jewish remnant that had escaped the exile, and his response gives us another important lesson that we need to be ready to engage with as we do our own Mission Audit. Nehemiah saw the need for repentance. His research revealed to him how desperate the situation was for those left behind, and he recognised how it was Israel's stubbornness and lack of faith that had led to this situation, and how before any new ground could be gained, he would have to admit the part he played in this failure as well as the corporate guilt that Israel bore. And this may well be something that we unearth as we look into our situation. Is there any repentance that you or your church must go through, as you discover more about the mission context you have, because of the role you have

played in creating such a desperate need for mission in your area? This is an important part of the process, which we will unpack further later.

Nehemiah goes on to visit Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2) and to see for himself the reality of the mission context. As soon as he arrives, he continues the Audit by inspecting the physical lay of the land. He discovers the walls broken and the gates burned, and as he looks he begins to get a clearer idea of the work God has summoned him to do. Armed with this understanding of the situation he calls people to his side and builds his team who listen to his words of faith, describing the graciousness of God bringing him to Jerusalem, and determine to rebuild the city. When Nehemiah set out he knew only that his heart was burdened for the mission, and that he needed to repent. It was only as he inspected further that he began to see the work that would best serve the context. He allowed the Mission Audit to inform his faith, his actions and his team and he allowed God to lead the way.

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Did you find any examples from the New Testament? Perhaps this is a little less clear, but the examples are there. Jesus clearly saw the value of preparation, as he sent pairs ahead of him into all the towns he was to visit (Luke 10:1-16). They were to bring the message of “the kingdom of God is near” and to heal the sick. But they were also to discern the response of the town – to do an Audit on how warm people were to Jesus’ message before he himself went there. Jesus instructed them to look for the towns that welcomed them, and once they had travelled they returned and reported back all they had found.

Paul was another mission leader who understood the need to be fully informed before stepping into the mission context he was in. In Acts 17 we see Paul going into Athens, but he does not walk straight into the city-centre and start proclaiming Jesus. Instead he spends his time wandering through the market places, getting to know the people and the culture. He goes into the temple and learns about their religious beliefs. He goes to their library and reads their poets. In short, he immerses himself in their culture. Then he allows that to inform his actions in mission, so that not only does he go to the synagogue to

reason with Jews, but he also meets with the philosophers and the temple leaders and the everyday man, and he uses his new knowledge to lead the discussion. In the temple he discovers they have an 'Unknown God', and he uses this as a way in to share about Jesus. He then goes on to show that the idea of a living God is backed up by their own poets and social thinking. He is able to speak into their situation, because he researched and prepared before stepping out.

Again we see Paul demonstrating this same process as he writes to Titus about Crete. He is discussing the task that Titus has been set on Crete, and Paul is able to describe features of their society as ways in to begin the mission. He even shows knowledge of what the people of that island say about themselves: "Even one of their own prophets has said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.'" (Titus 1:12). Paul could only know this if he had researched the area, audited the mission context.

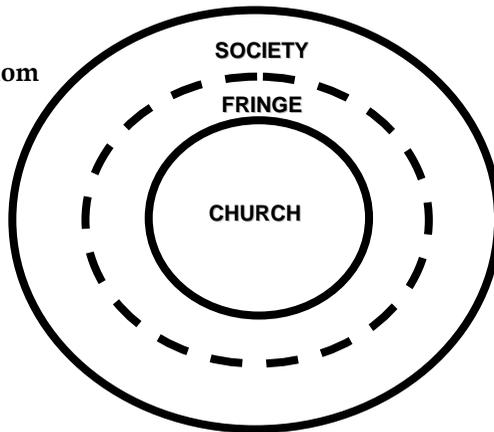
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So, did you get any of those? There may be others that you have found helpful, or have given further depth to the need to look before declaring the harvest ripe, and to listen intently before answering the call to mission. Clearly there is biblical precedent for Mission Auditing, and it is something that God has led people to over the years. Our belief is that "Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8), and therefore this process, that was right so many years ago, continues to be the best way to prepare for mission. So, let's now look deeper into the details of just what makes a Mission Audit.

MISSION CONTEXT

The mission context in the west has changed through the 20th century. What was once known as Christendom virtually no longer exists, and no longer can Christianity claim to be a major player in the influences on society. There was a time when the church was the first port of call when deciding issues concerned with morality, community, justice, way of life, viewing others, and many other areas. But now the church has to force its way into the debate, and is often seen as the bitter older brother, resentful that the new baby is getting all the attention. There was a time when the church was the centre of society, and around the church was the fringe of the church, then the fringe of society, and with each outer layer there was less influence or acceptance (see fig A).

Fig.A:
Christendom
context

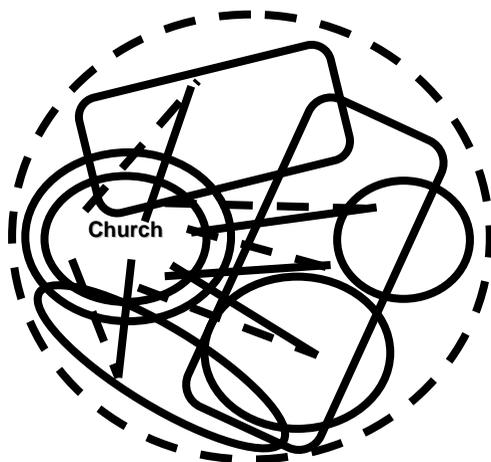


We now find ourselves in a largely post-Christendom society. The church still exists, and it still has its circle of influence, and its fringe as it always did. However, now the church has been pushed to the fringes of society, and people are now looking elsewhere for their standards, example, advice, etc. In our post-Christendom society we find the church is just one of many voices on any given issue. There are other religions, which are increasingly all bracketed together by the

government and marketing so that it is difficult to have a uniquely Christian voice, rather than a generic 'religious' voice; there is the government; there is advertising; the media; pop stars and footballers; your family; political activists; political correctness; and any number of other people getting in on the act.

The given name for this set-up is secular pluralism, and often the best the church can hope for within secular pluralism is to be networked in to each of these areas, and to live as good witnesses to those around us (see fig B). Our task has changed from a primary duty to feed the people that we automatically have coming to church on Sundays, whilst reaching out to the fringes from a position of strength and centrality; to needing to infiltrate the networks and influences of society and begin to grow God's presence there from the edge, whilst still caring for and growing the people we still have.

Fig.B:
Secular
Pluralism



This would be a new challenge enough for the church, if it did not also have the added difficulty that so much of society no longer trusts the institutions, of which the church is seen to be one of the most established and 'stuck in its ways'. We are in the midst of a huge shift, resulting in a huge missional challenge, and we need to be able to

inform ourselves of what this looks like in our context so that we can respond effectively and with renewed strength in our mission.

* * *

This shift in mission context also leads us to look at people's relationship with the church differently. In a Christendom model there were the church members, the fringe of the church (those that attended occasionally, may ascribe to having a faith... but loose evidence in life), and the non-churched, which was a comparatively small group. However, in a post-Christendom, secular pluralist society we have been introduced to another group of people who until the last fifty years or so did not really exist – the de-churched.

These are people who, for whatever reason, have experience of church community, but have turned away from that path. This category itself can be split into two distinct groups: the open de-churched and the closed de-churched. The open de-churched may have left for many reasons, but would still be open to returning given the invitation or new relationship. They may have moved and not found a new church, or their work patterns may have changed, or they may have fallen out with someone at the church, or various other reasons. Who are the open de-churched in your mission context?

The closed de-churched are a different matter. These are people who have been damaged or hurt by church, and so have felt prompted to leave. Again there could be any number of causes for this, such as lack of acceptance, lifestyle choice, arguments, change of clergy, rejection, family breakdown, etc. This is a much harder group of people to build relationship with, and clearly there needs to be a different strategy in mission for these people than the open de-churched, or even the un-churched. Can you recognise the de-churched people in your networks? For a breakdown of the approximate figures, released and published previously in the Mission-shaped Church report, see Fig C.

This observation of the different categories of people we encounter as we begin our Mission Audit should lead us to two conclusions. Firstly, especially in relation to the closed de-churched, there may be a level of

repentance that is necessary before we can actually go into the mission field. Many closed de-churched people find themselves where they are because of the rejection, judgement, failures or lack of love and attention that they have encountered in the church. We need to recognise where we have been the cause of hurt and rejection, and repent. We may also need to take on a bigger, more corporate level of repentance as we consider how little mind we have given to God's mission to the world over the years, so that the result is that so many are far from the church. Surely we cannot ignore all of society's changes because of an insular view that it is the world that has lost touch with us, rather than the other way around.

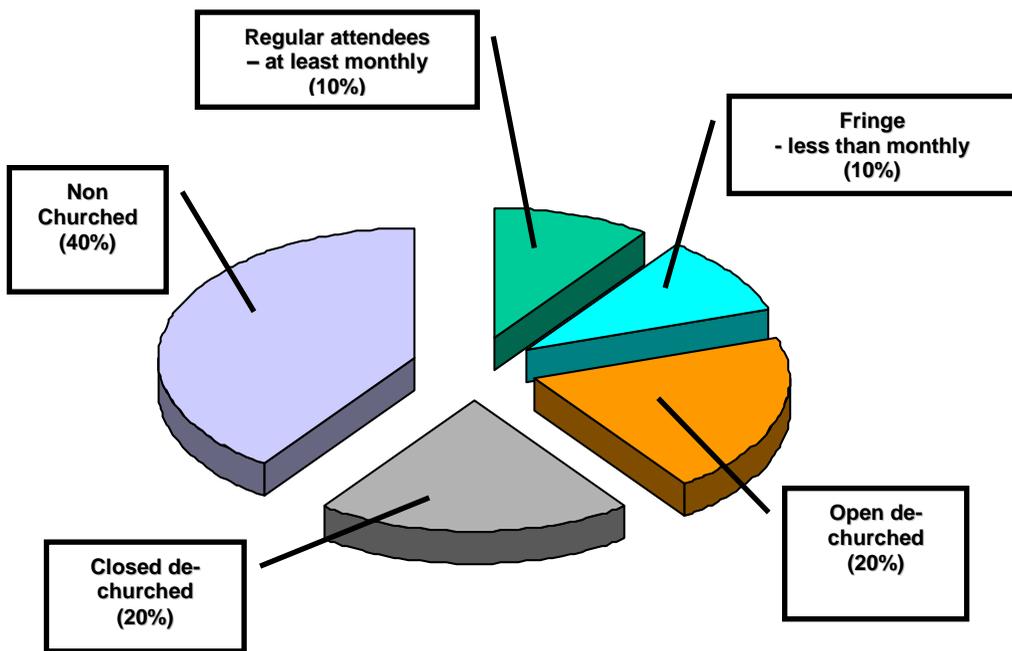
The second conclusion is that as churches we need to move forwards from the inherited mode of church that works only on an 'Attractional Church' model. Simply put this is, "You come to us." Many have already done this over the years, and taken on more of an 'Engaged Church' model, where people are hearing the call to "Go!" but then bring those they find back into the church fold. Initiatives such as Seeker Services, Alpha, and short-term mission outreach have enabled this well. However, what we are seeing grow up more recently is a much more missional model, which comes under the banner of the "Emerging Church." In this case the church sends people out, but does not expect them to return. Instead the people that go stay there and see what expression of church emerges. This is a model that we feel will increasingly be seen as the most effective form of mission, and because it may take a number of different forms (church plants, clusters, cells, house church, mission teams, etc) it is a model that is easily accessible for a variety of church contexts.

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As we look closer at our mission context we also see that society is not always the same neighbourhood based community it has been in the past. This aspect does still exist, and in some cases is still a very strong feature. But alongside this we all are increasingly living in a network based culture. We do have relationships with our neighbours, but often we have closer links with the people at work, or the members of the golf club, or in the clubs in the city, or wherever. Our mission context is

not as simple as it used to be! As we Audit our particular circumstances we must keep our eyes open for the recurring networks in our church family, and allow God to show us where our network fields, as well as our neighbourhood fields, are ripe for harvest.

Fig.C: Different Mission Fields (figures from Mission-shaped Church, 2004)



We also need to be aware of the generations that make up our mission context. To use the lay demographic language, our culture is broadly made up of the Builders (people in their 60s-70s), the Boomers (40s-50s), Generation X (20s-30s) and the Millenials (children and youth). We need to be aware of who is in our church, who is *not* in our church, and what balance makes up the community. This information can be

key to shaping the mission context we see, and will inevitably inspire the action we take.

For a greater level of depth and detail of these groups of society and other statistics that are relevant for our western mission context we would point you in the direction of Mission-shaped Church report. We are seeking here only to give a broad overview to put the need for Mission Auditing into context, and don't need to reproduce details and work that has already been done well elsewhere. In the Appendix section of this book you will find a list of books and resources that we would recommend getting as you go through your Mission Auditing process, of which Mission-shaped Church is one of the most important.

INITIAL RESEARCH

"Open your eyes..."

There is a difference between Initial Research and a full Mission Audit, but it is important that we don't fall into the trap that we can do one at the expense of the other. The process of Initial Research is essential, and failure to do it would mean your Mission Audit was not well enough informed on a basic level. However, to stop at the Initial Research leaves you open to the danger of just having some blank statistics and may not be seen in full context or with the eyes of faith.

What's the Difference?

There are two ways in which Initial Research is different to the full Mission Audit. The first of these is to do with Timing, and the second is to do with the Scope and Purpose.

Timing

As the name clearly indicates, Initial Research precedes the Mission Audit. It is the preliminary process that you must go through before you are well enough informed to move on, and should form the early stages of any review/planning strategy.

Clearly, though, the Mission Audit is also a preliminary stage to mission itself, so perhaps we need to clarify further the difference between one early stage of mission life and another. In Church Planting circles the stages of mission life have been often described through the analogy of the Life Cycle. This is the cycle that all living things go through as they mature and reach a point where the life can be reproduced and handed on. There are eight stages: conception, pregnancy, preparation for birth, birth, infancy, adolescence, maturity and reproduction.

This has been enormously helpful in the Church Planting world as a way of recognising where in the process each new project is, and seeing that there are natural stages that all plants go through before they are

mature and ready to multiply. This has taken away the disappointment that can come from some of the more difficult stages in development (such as adolescence), but more importantly it has shown how much careful preliminary work must go in before the “birth” of the plant so that it is healthy and prepared enough to be born.

Now we are not all called to plant churches, but we are all called to engage in God’s mission to the world. So as we assess where that calling specifically lies on us as an individual, as a church and as the body of Christ, this analogy can be very helpful. In terms of this book we are looking particularly at the first two stages of the Life Cycle, and Initial Research is what we would look at as being the stage of Conception. This is the stage where the vision is first shared between two or more people. It may have been quietly lying dormant in one person’s mind for a while, but it is not until more share the vision that conception takes place. Table A gives an overview of some of the aspects of preparation that should now be being to be considered during Conception.

Table A: Conception (Initial Research)

- Vision Shared between two or more people - begin to write it down (Hab 2:2)
- Initial Research to assess Viability - Prayerfully Discuss
- Begin Establishing Approval from Denomination and other local Churches
- Start Recruiting Team with Opportunity to Test calling
- Identify Possible Leaders
- Start Regular Prayer Support
- Training for the Team
- Review Models, Types & Decide which would be Appropriate

However, the Mission Audit we would suggest is more akin to the stage of Pregnancy, where the vision and initial thoughts are given more substance, and the first signs of life can now begin to be seen. These signs may be quite ‘inward’ initially, as the mission vision grows through the church family and everything is put in place for the eventual “birth” of the mission. Table B gives an overview of some of the considerations and action during the Pregnancy/Mission Audit stage.

Table B: Pregnancy (Mission Audit)

- Leadership and Team Training
- Prayer Development for the area and Team
- Fuller Mission Audit for Strategy Planning
- Initial Evangelism
- Possibly start Home Groups / ‘Just Looking’ groups in area
- Develop Full Church Plan
- Assess timing for the ‘Birth’, Discuss and Pray about the name

The Life Cycle analogy goes on to describe how to think about preparing for the “birth” of the mission vision, and then how to actually allow the work to be born and grow into maturity. We will not go into it all here as we only want to really concentrate on the early stages, and there are other books available to help develop the mission work as it grows. However, we have put some similar tables to Tables A and B in the Appendix section of this book so that you can have a broad overview to get you thinking as and when it becomes appropriate. For the time being, though, it is enough to see that there is a clear difference in the process and timing between the Initial Research and the actual Mission Audit.

Scope and Purpose

There is a difference in depth of scope and purpose between Initial Research and the Mission Audit. Initial Research aims at getting a hold

of general information so that it can put together a broad background. If the Research is for a specific project – even one with a wide remit such as “reach out to our local community” - then it assesses the viability, the model choice and the early planning of the project. In short, it provides the box for the Mission Audit to fit into.

The Mission Audit, however, works from this base and puts together a deeper analysis of the context. The information that is sought is more specific and facts-based, and seeks more to shape and implement engagement in mission. In other words, the Initial Research builds the skeleton and the Mission Audit puts flesh on the bones.

What is Initial Research?

Now we come to the nitty-gritty. When engaging with Initial Research, what are the areas you should be looking into? To our minds there are six areas to research:

i) Population of Target Community: A basic detail, but important to get a good feel of the size of the job God has called you to. This is a crucial area of knowledge for us to begin to pray into the area. It gives us a base from which to pray for guidance, and an idea of the size of the vision we need. For example, it will take a bigger vision, commitment and team to reach out to a parish of 20,000 than a local area of 1,000. What is the size of your mission field?

ii) Some Demographics: Once we have got the population of our mission field we need to look deeper and see how the different areas of that community/network are made up. This begins to give us more precise information to consider, and will widen and clarify our view of what God has set before us. It enables us to see who it is that we are reaching out to in mission. It seems like such a simple thing, but so often the church decides to whom it is going to reach out before it has even checked if those people are in their mission field. We must let our specific mission context drive the vision for reaching out to the world. If your church is in the middle of a council estate, full of un-churched people, it is probably not a wise mission decision to organise big expensive events that you have to charge entry to in order to break even. However, if you are in an area where there are lots of youth and

young adults, in a middle class housing estate, then it may become more appropriate. But we can't make those key decisions and pray into those areas before we know who is around us.

iii) Other Churches: Very important questions...what are the other churches in your area doing in terms of mission? Who are they reaching out to? We are not in the business of competition between churches or stealing other people's ground, and so it may be wise to release the other churches in your area to focus entirely on one mission field, whilst you concentrate on another. That way the churches can work together more effectively in re-evangelising the whole community.

iv) Historic Attendance Trends: What is the attendance trend of your church? Are you in a growing phase, or a declining phase? This should be done with an age breakdown, so that you get an even clearer picture of the trends. So, is there a mixed situation so that perhaps there is growth in the number of youth, but declining families. Or as the age of the congregation increases and they begin to catch the mission-bug, do you see a rise in older congregation members, but increasingly few young adults? Whatever the case, this will impact later decisions for mission. So, you may choose not to do that bingo outreach anymore when you see that, despite the successful elderly growth, you have no teenagers left in the church!

v) Geographic Distribution of Active Members: Where do your members live? This information could have any number of impacts on the later stages of the Mission Audit. You may discover that most of your members all live in one area, coming from the same social background, and so begin to process how you can reach more effectively into the community of that area. On the other hand you may see the same, but come to the conclusion that it means that there is a whole other area of your parish/local area that is being missed, and that you need to try something fresh there. Alternatively, you may discover that your members come from all over the place and there is no cohesive location to work from or to. This could lead you to a greater challenge of how to reach the immediate area of the church instead of attracting from far and wide, or it may reveal a number of

potential networks that members are living and working in, which could themselves become fruitful areas of mission. Remember, increasingly we live in a dispersed, networked post-Christendom society, and so this may be a common discovery. What would Initial Research into this area reveal in your context? What would your initial thoughts be as to how to relate that to your mission context?

vi) Buildings in Relation to Target Community: The question of buildings is always a big one. Sometimes when reaching out in mission it can seem a hindrance to be identified by an institutional building, sometimes it can be a Godsend. What buildings do you use/own? If you are in an old traditional building, will it be appropriate for the youth work? Or will you even have a choice in the matter? We have worked alongside one church in the south of England for a few years now, that has a building that is very prominent in the local community, and the idea that it might be used for anything other than weekly Sunday services causes uproar in the community – mostly from people that never attend! But the building has become a part of the community, and so there are basic physical considerations they need to make in all their movements in mission. On the other hand you may not meet in a traditional church building. This can be a blessing and a release, giving you more flexibility in your mission activity. On the other hand, if you are after a regular venue it can be difficult if you are unable to hire it out at unusual times, or can't afford it. Buildings remain important, and so it is essential that we register what limits and releases our buildings will have.

These are the areas that we feel need to be researched before the Mission Audit can effectively get started, and sadly it is our experience that most churches that enter into intentional mission have not even done the minimum work to see that they are properly prepared. Jesus says to raise your head and look at the harvest fields, but so many of us forget even to open our eyes. There are, of course, plenty of people who have done this well, and we have included in the Testimonies chapter of this book two such stories that we have been a part of, both for Initial Research and the Mission Audit itself.

Also, to help you get started with Initial Research we have included at the end of this chapter some activities and ideas for each of the six areas we have mentioned. We would advise gathering a small team to do this, and the gathering of this team will in itself be an important phase of preparation. It is an opportunity to recognise and release both those that are at the forefront of being enthused by mission (these are likely to be key people in passing their excitement on to the whole church so that the vision can be shared), and also those who are gifted in this area. There are plenty of people who are naturally gifted in gathering information, details, facts, and putting together charts, graphs, and otherwise interpreting data. This is often an untapped resource, but can be so valuable in piecing together the bigger picture. It is also really good to encourage and build up those people, who often don't get the chance to discover some of the valuable ways they help grow the kingdom because of how God has made them.

We would suggest an evening meeting with the team to pray and go through the exercises together, answering what you can; and then splitting up the longer term jobs among the team to research, before coming back to piece together the full results a week or so later. This obviously depends on the size and circumstances of your team, so it may be that your pattern of this process may look different. You may even have a church secretary, or equivalent that can pull together a lot of this information before the first meeting to give a head start. Generally speaking most things are ok - there are numerous ways of doing it. However, it is not until this vital information has been gathered that you will effectively be able to see where God is calling.

Don't forget that at this stage we are still just gathering information, and so you may find that you feel a little lost with what to do with it all, or not know what the findings suggest. The Mission Audit will put flesh on these bones, and will help you to discern how these details are important to your situation and should be interpreted and implemented.

Team Activity: Initial Research

As a team seek to answer/action each of these questions/tasks, based on the six areas of research mentioned in this chapter:

1. If you are in a parish situation, what is the population of your parish? If not, then highlight an area that you consider to be in your community and take a population count for this area. If you are a network church this may cover a wide area.
2. Get some demographic details from your local council to get an overview of the ages in your area. Put it onto a graph. (Council websites are usually a good source for this.)
3. Do the same census for your church. Match these details against the council details on the same graph.
4. Contact the local churches and ask for a low down of the mission activity they are involved in. Share your ideas, and commit to pray for the outreach across the town. If there is an intercession team at your church, this could be a focus for them.
5. Make a graph plotting the trend of recent attendances at your church.
6. Get a map of the local area, and plot the houses of members. Pay particular attention to the patterns of where there are several members in the same area, if there are notable areas with no members, or if you have a scattered member population. If you are a network church, unless it is very scattered, you should still be able to do this, though it may require a wider scale map.

THE MISSION AUDIT

“Look at the fields!”

Once the Initial Research has been done it is time to move on to the Mission Audit itself. As we mentioned in the Introduction, a Mission Audit could be defined as “A thorough investigation, taking stock... for the purpose of mission.” Up to this point we have gathered important information that will form the base of the Audit, but now we must take what we have already discovered and put it into the context of mission, as well as finding out some new revelations along the way.. To do this we will break the process of Mission Audit down into three sections to consider.

What is the Process?

There are three parts to a Mission Audit, all of which must be considered honestly and completely. These three parts are: Getting to know your church, getting to know your community and getting to know your gospel. They will be explained in fuller detail through the next three chapters. As these chapters will show, there are three levels to each of these parts that must be audited, and also three methods that we can use.

Three Levels

As we consider each part of the Mission Audit we need to be thinking about three levels that make up the whole picture of each aspect. In each case – church, community and gospel – it is important to consider the *physical* realities, the *social* dimensions and the *spiritual* implications and circumstances. It may be that initially this seems easier and more appropriate for some areas than for others, and that particularly the gospel part is difficult to assess. However, the further you consider these three levels amongst a team, the more natural and valuable a process it will become.

The *physical* realities include going into greater detail with the findings of the Initial Research, such as church building, locality, etc. They also

include what are the key physical features of the local area. For example, a church based next to a lake has a different range of mission activities available than a church based in the town centre of an urban priority area.

The *social* dimensions relate both to the make up of the church – who do you have, and who do you not have – but also the make up of the people you would reach, and the key features of society where you are based. So, to continue the example set before, the lakeside church might be in a rural context with a social village-centred community, whereas the town centre church would be urban, and probably facing all sorts of different and often harder social issues... not least of which, poverty.

Then there is the *spiritual* context, which is by no means as straight forward as it might seem, even within the church, as it requires a sense of discernment as you peel back the spiritual layers to be found in the community and in the church. As we continue to look at these two different church examples, let's imagine a possible spiritual set-up to get the picture. It may be that the rural lakeside church assesses the spiritual make up of the community and finds that there are a lot of de-churched people, who all place a high regard for Christian values and traditions, but have lost sight of the life Jesus called us all to. However, in assessing the church they discover that the congregation is made up of many people that attend because of tradition, and not because they have had a life changing experience of Jesus. In contrast, the urban church finds that within the church there is a high percentage of Spirit-filled Christians that are keen to step out in mission. But in the community there is a low number of de-churched, other than the closed de-churched, so there are few expectations of church tradition or responsibility, save the negative; at the same time there are an increasing number of other faiths represented, alongside a greater sense of vague spirituality being explored amongst particularly the younger generations.

Clearly the way that the rural church reaches out to the community will be very different to the urban church, as the contexts are so very different physically, socially and spiritually. Each level has a unique

and significant impact on how the gospel should be introduced to the particular mission field you have.

Three Methods

In addition to the three levels that must be considered as each of the church, community and gospel are assessed, there are three methods that are involved in fully engaging in the Mission Audit: *Observation*, *Conversation* and *Investigation*.

Let us look first at *Observation*. This involves looking at each of the three levels carefully and asking yourself, "What do I see?" So, in terms of the physical level, what are the key features that will make a difference? What could the barriers/opportunities for mission be? In terms of the social level, what are the ways that society works in your context? Where are the openings, and where are the networks? In terms of the spiritual level, where are people open/closed to the gospel, and what effect does the mix of religions and spiritual awareness have on how people relate to the church? You may have other questions.

The method of *Conversation* is important so that the Mission Audit both takes into consideration the perspectives of the people within and without the church, and also gives the vision for mission a chance to be honed and clarified by fresh ideas and input. It is also the main way that others will catch the vision for mission, as you converse with them. In terms of the physical level of the Audit, it is important to speak to both the church family and the community to get an idea of what impact issues such as your use of buildings would have; or what physical aspects of the neighbourhood/network you are in would people like to see developed and used? In terms of the social levels, it will be difficult to discover enough about the context either in our out of the church, without talking to people, if you want to be in any way well enough equipped for effective observation or investigation. And in terms of the spiritual level, conversation again is perhaps the most effective way of opening people up and building relationships to the level where you can really begin to discern their spirituality.

Investigation is essential if you are to truly peel back the layers and discover some crucial facts. Observation and Conversation give many

insights, but both are subjective. Investigation allows you to put the subjectivity into context, building some definite facts around the Audit as a whole. This method includes looking at demographics, forming questionnaires, looking into history or searching local records... anything that can give substance to the insights you are looking for. For the physical level this may involve questionnaires for the church or community asking how the position/building of the church impacts their view of the church; for the social level it may involve looking at church records to see how the church has related to society and social issues in the past, and with what degree of success; to unearth the spiritual level you may look at census reports for the area to discover what spiritual background people subscribe to. These are just a few pointers, and in the next three chapters we will go into more detail about what each of these methods might look like in practise.

Before we move on, an important point to note: this is not a “pick and mix” process, where you take part in the aspects that appeal most to you, and avoid what seems uncomfortable or a tall order. Each part, each level and each method of the Mission Audit is an essential part of the process. They must all be in place in order to build enough of a rounded view of the mission field to assess how you are going to step out. It won't always be easy, but it will always be valuable.

Two Key Principles

All in all this is a process that is much more than just a fact-finding exercise, it is a mission shaping process, and in addition to the above practicalities there are two key principles to a Mission Audit. The first is to do with *Purpose*. A Mission Audit is the beginning of mission, and in particular it is to prepare the workers/team. There are too many stories of people that hear the call of God to step out in mission, but they do so blindly. They have not yet looked properly at the fields, not yet fully understood what they are stepping into. The consequence is often that people struggle as there are elements of their preparation that were not in place and they find themselves ill equipped for the task. Or maybe the person/team becomes disillusioned as the work gets tough, or they get burnt out. Now God is good, and He takes all our offerings and grows all our seeds, and so we can still often look and see fruit from our labour, and praise God for His grace! But imagine

how much more we could do if we were better prepared, if we knew more of what we were stepping into, knew more of where we would need to rely on God for strength and wisdom. Instead of reaching out in the dark, we could be shedding light on the mission and we would see more opportunities, more growth, more fruit, more encouragement, more salvation.

The second principle is to do with *Expectation*. Right from the beginning of mission, even in the Auditing process, we ought to expect key contacts. Jesus described his way of “doing mission” in Matthew 10, Luke 9, Luke 10, and in each case he highlighted the key contact – the “man of peace.” As soon as we step out into the mission field we should be looking for the People of Peace that God has set around us. They will be the people that serve us, and in the context of the Mission Audit they may serve us with information, opinions, perspective, as well as their time and interest. Remember that one difference between the Initial Research and the Mission Audit itself, is that people will see what is going on, why it is happening, and will be expected and invited to take part. This means that much of the Mission Audit takes place in the mission field – it is part of the mission activity, and so we will meet People of Peace, and they may well be the doorways into the mission field that we are ultimately looking for as we step out.

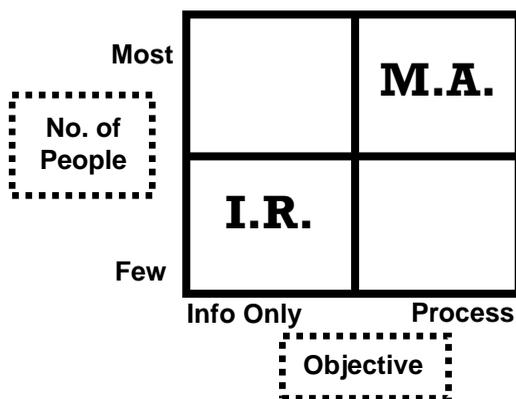
Involve Everyone

Unlike the Initial Research, where the team may be small, the Mission Audit will involve everyone. Depending on your precise situation, your definition of “everyone” may be slightly different, but on the whole it will mean the whole church. The Mission Audit is about discerning the process needed, and for this to happen there is a degree where none can escape the responsibility. The main contributors may well be a mission team that is specifically formed, and will contain many of the church family members who feel called to be missionaries or to support the mission work of the church. However, the rest of the church will also have to take ownership of the vision and process as it will affect them. It may determine how services are run, or how their leaders’ time is taken up. It should affect the challenges that are communicated to the church, and hopefully it will affect the number of people who become members of the church.

There is no way the whole church won't be impacted, and it is important to make this clear, and to give everyone the opportunity to get on board (see Fig D for a visual of this difference between Initial Research and Mission Auditing). This way you not only have church support, but you have access to more gifts and a wider perspective, and the church can be released to the work that God has pulled them all together to do.

There are no members of the church who are not gifted in just the ways God wants for your mission context, so there is no-one that cannot have a fundamental effect on the success of God's mission to your mission context, and perhaps the best example of the work that all can do during the Audit, is to begin to recognise who are the People of Peace. This may be the most vital piece of investigation (crossing the boundaries between "Know your Church" and "Know your Community") that can be done, as it gives an overview of all the doorways into mission that God has put at the church's doorstep.

Fig D: From Initial Research (I.R.) to Mission Audit (M.A.)



This all being said, it does not mean that you should feel that you cannot reach out for help from others who have more experience. The workers will be there in the church, but it may be a good idea to bring people in to help see them, or to give a fresh perspective as to how the

Mission Audit could run in your context. This might be another church you know of that has been through a similar process, or a consultant from an organisation (such as ACPI - see Appendix for contact details).

Timing

In the last chapter we gave you a rough idea as to how long the process of Initial Research should take. It is slightly less simple to be able to put a mark on how long to spend in the Mission Audit, as it will depend so much on just how deep you are challenged to go, and how time consuming it is to discover certain details that are specific to your context. It will also depend on the make up of your team – if you have an efficient team of introvert people, then it may take less discussion to know what to do than if you had an over enthusiastic team of extrovert processors!

That being said, there are some basic guidelines we can give you concerning the timing of your Mission Audit:

1. It is a good principle to follow each part one after the other, rather than trying to set up teams to do all at once. Not only is this a clearer process, and easier to keep hold of, it ensures that all of your team know all of the information all of the time, thereby giving a stronger sense of walking the path together and a greater cohesion in prayer. It also means that your findings in one area can inform and give context to the beginnings of the next part. So you know your knowledge of your church gives context to your finding out about your community, and together this awareness gives perspective to begin to shape your gospel.
2. Don't rush any stage. It is important that each part is 'Audited' thoroughly if you are to get the most out of it. It can be easy to highlight in your mind the most valuable aspects of the Audit, and to press through the others to get to them, but this would be a mistake. Try and see each aspect as of equal value and take the necessary time at an easy pace. It is more important to get it right, than get it quick.
3. Decide how many team meetings and how frequent they will be at the beginning, so that everyone knows what they are committing to.

The frequency will depend on your team, but common advice would be that one evening meeting a week should suffice. These meetings could then be broken down into feedback; observations and reflections; and plans for what is to be done before the next meeting. The team could then split into smaller groups through the intermittent time to each take a small section of the observation/conversation/investigation that is to be done.

4. Any meetings that you invite the public to for the purposes of Conversation, or letting the community know what you are thinking, should be planned well in advance. Give people a few months notice, and remind them nearer the time. A Saturday morning (9.30am-12.30pm) is likely to provide the most time for a community meeting, but you may find that an evening meeting (e.g. 7.30-9.30pm) would be the most suitable for your team, and for people's availability. The same can be said of any PCC or whole church meetings you hold through the process.

5. Try to make your overall aim to put together a plan for mission for the next five years – give yourself a hoped-for goal to pray for, and stages along the way that you feel you can use as markers for progress.

6. Expect the whole process to take several weeks. Nothing can be decided in one meeting, and people have many commitments to juggle as well as a Mission Audit being added to them. On average, it would not be unreasonable to expect the process to cover the length of two meetings per part (church, community and gospel), and an extra one or two meetings to put it all together and decide where this leads the church into mission.

KNOW YOUR CHURCH

The Harvest Force

We are now going to look into greater detail at the three parts of a Mission Audit and, having given you the principles and theory of the three levels and methods, we will look at some examples of what a Mission Audit might actually look like as it is undertaken.

What are you looking for?

There are several things that you will be looking for as you undertake this part of the Mission Audit. The first thing is the membership of the church/team. Look back to your Initial Research – whom do you have? This will give you an idea of which groups of people you are attracting and growing, and which you are not. Getting an understanding of the membership will spark off the first areas of awareness as to what strengths you have and can use, and what areas you will need to reach out to in mission. For example, if a quick look at the Initial Research reveals that you have nobody in their twenties in your church, you may have an indication as to the people you need to learn how to reach.

Alternatively, if you are a small team looking to plant a new church, then knowing your members has a different edge. So if you find the same thing – nobody in their twenties in your team – then this may reveal that trying to attract people in their twenties to your church may not be the best mission choice to make. It may show that in actuality you have a team that is really well suited to reaching out to the older people in the community, and is able to readily meet them at their level as they share the same life experiences. This will obviously have a big impact on shaping the style, outreach and expectations of your mission.

On the other hand, knowing your members is not just about shaping the people you reach. It can also shape the way you reach them. Look at the personalities, gifts, ministries of the church/team. Who do you have? If you have a team full of extrovert evangelists, this will obviously allow quite a different approach in mission than if you have

a team of introvert, pastors! It is crucial to assess how God has shaped the team, just right for His plan, and to allow this to shape the mission. Spend time with the team looking at identity in Christ, spiritual gifts (Romans 12, 1 Peter 5, 1 Cor.12), etc.), ministries (Ephesians 4). Encourage one another in this – build one another up by sharing what you see in others... often people will not see their strongest gifts in themselves! Look into the Bible and see how people with similar gifts reached out in mission, such as Philip the Evangelist looking for opportunities to share with anyone and everyone, or Peter using his prophetic gifts to see the opportunity with Cornelius. And then begin to share ideas as to what a mission outreach based on your particular gifts, characteristics etc, would look like.

The second thing you will need to know is who are the leaders you have? This does not mean ‘who are on staff?’ or ‘who are the most experienced members of the congregation?’ In many cases these people will be on your eventual list, but the question is bigger than that. Who are the members of your church who are in any way involved in leadership, or could be? Who are the cell leaders, the worship leaders, the main people in the ministry team/prayer groups? Who has helped at Alpha? Who are the children’s workers? Who has the ability to gather people around them, and the enthusiasm to lead them? It is quite common to think that you are leader-light, when in actual fact there is enormous leadership potential throughout the church... it’s just that they have never been released into that role before. Maybe they haven’t even had the chance to find out they are leaders yet. Perhaps upon doing this you observe that you have lots of potential leaders, but few actually with the necessary experience to know it, or to be able to lead with vision and confidence. In which case, why not think about pairing them up in accountability relationships with more experienced leaders, or even suggesting they spend time ‘apprenticing’ with leaders that share a similar mission focus? Be creative in your approach, and raise leaders... the more the better!

However, knowing your church in terms of understanding the strengths of the mission force is only part of the job. It is also important to understand how that mission force will fare in the mission field. Therefore, the third thing to look at is what is the relationship between

the church and the potential target groups you identify. What are the natural networks that your church members move in? What is their predominant social background? This is a key question if, as is common, your church context is largely middle class, but you can see from the Initial Research that one of the major mission needs lies in the poorer areas of town, or the council estates, etc. If you are going to engage in cross-cultural mission it is vital that you are prepared for it in advance, and don't just go in blindly so that you stick out like a sore thumb and end up promoting how Jesus shows your differences, rather than your points of contact.

What kind of standing does your church have in the community you are a part of? This could be to do with the building (remember, a central part of the Audit is to look at the physical aspects... we will come more to this in a minute). For example, we have already told the story of a church in the south of England that had to consider all its outreach in the context that the building was seen as an important traditional feature of the local community... and so any mission outreach would be constantly impacted by the community's attitude towards what they considered the "proper function of our church." This is likely to be a recognisable situation to some degree for lots of church leaders, unless you happen to be in a church planting context.

However, it also may be a social or a spiritual question: Does your church stick out as being distant from the social circles of the community? Is there a mismatch between what your church considers important to invest in and what the community feels is important, so that there are few times when the church connects with the community? Is the only voice that the community hears from the church a critical or a judgemental one? Or does your church have really good relationship with your target group? As you consider these things you will gradually get a clearer picture of how your church context will effect the way you engage with the community.

* * *

So, having posed a few questions for us to be asking ourselves in a Mission Audit, let's go into a bit more detail as to how this could look

as we look at Knowing Our Church on all three levels that we have explained last chapter:

Physical

Let us start with the first method of the Audit – *Observation*. When you look at your church context, its building, its people, what physical constraints, advantages, other features can you see? Where in the town is your church situated. If it is in the centre of town then it has a position of prominence, and most people will be aware of its presence. This raises interesting questions. Why, if people can see you are there, and presumably have access to pass your notice boards to see what activities you are putting on, do people not come? Do people carry assumptions about the church, because of the shell they see from the outside? As they walk past, do you see them as too busy to raise their heads to notice you? Does this suggest a more network, work-oriented culture?

If, on the other hand, you are based on the edge of town, this also prompts questions. Are you too out of the way for people to consider you a part of the community? Does this actually bring an advantage of anonymity as people carry fewer assumptions as to what you must be like? There are all sorts of other questions you may think of, but we just want to highlight how important the locality of the building might be.

Let's look away from the building, and towards the people. Where do they live? Are you made up from a small, condensed area or from right across the local area? This is crucial as it gives a good indication as to where the 'people of peace' connected to your church, through its members, will be found. Remember that Jesus' number one mission advice was to look for people of peace, so it is vital that as part of the Mission Audit you try to unearth where many of these people are... this will give you the first concrete indications as to where to concentrate you're your energy and attention. Other questions: Does the parish boundary really seem that relevant to those you have already gathered? What is the mix of gifts in the church? A team that has a lot of evangelists will generate a very different mission context than a team full of pastors, for example. What does the mix of people God has drawn together tell you about the way you should reach out?

The second method is to engage in *Conversation*. Talk to the church, not just about the vision and need for mission, but also about who they are, where their people of peace are. Include the whole church in the Mission Audit process by getting them to share their hopes and fears, getting them to discuss and share ideas. This is also a time to get people's feedback on past attempts to reach out, or ongoing ones such as Alpha. There is no telling how valuable this process will be, as you discover not only what the church thinks, but also release people to catch the vision for themselves and to discover more about what their part could be, or what gifts they could bring. This is an opportunity to bring unity into the mission force, as well as new understanding.

Thirdly we look to do a bit of *Investigation*. How has mission worked in the church in the past – what were the keys to success or failure? Get some of the initial core mission team to get together some statistics of church membership and attendance in accordance with these times of outreach and see what difference was made. You could ask your church to go through some of the Team assessing questionnaires, such as Belbin, or look into the LifeShapes resources and use the Five-Fold Ministries questionnaire that forms part of the Pentagon (which can be found in the Appendix section of *The Passionate Church*). There will be other methods of investigation that can highlight the gifts that God has brought together, and the individual personalities you have. Again, there will be other ideas you can come up with, and other areas you will want to investigate. This is just to suggest one or two ideas to get the ball rolling.

Social

In undertaking the *Observation* method of this level, what do you observe are the social features of your church? This may begin with your taking into account the social make-up of where the church is situated. Are you in an area that could be recognised as any class? Is it a deprived area, or a wealthy area? As you walk around the place what cars do you see? Do the houses all have new double-glazed windows? If you walked around on a Sunday morning, would you see the cars in their driveways, so you knew that people were in on a Sunday to come to church (if only they felt they could or wanted to), or are most of the

people out – playing Sunday league football, taking their kids to dance club – or even at home, but the curtains are drawn... clearly not up for early morning church. What would this tell you about the times you met as church?

As you look at the people in your church, what do you see? Is there a high level of enthusiasm in the worship, in the way people mingle, in the way they live out their Christian lives? Do you see cliques that dominate the church community, or are there natural social groups that have sprung up – be that age based, work based, or whatever? Would these groups be effective as intentionally missional cells or teams? What other observations can you make, and lessons can you learn, as you look at the social trends of your church?

Conversation is perhaps the most natural of the three methods when thinking about the social level. As you talk to people, what would they highlight as the areas where they have the most mission opportunity? How do people think they could best reach out to their work colleagues, or friends, or family? What resourcing would they like to have? What sort of presence should the church be trying to have? You could use this to take an informal census of the networks and neighbourhoods the church is connected to – what is the social perspective of each member of the church, what sort of area do they live in, etc? This could easily be done by a couple of your team producing a questionnaire that the church members fill in and return, and again, could form valuable understanding of where the harvest fields are most ready for reaping.

Investigation could take the form of a questionnaire, as suggested above, or could follow on from this and observation by picking out a small number of individuals that would be prepared to be interviewed and so go into greater detail with them about their thoughts and ideas, as well as their social context. Investigation could also involve looking at church records for an overview of the social trends of the church over the past 10-15 years, and in any areas of particular growth in the church's history that might have been highlighted in the Initial Research phase. Alternatively you might look at the records of marriages, baptisms, etc at your church in the past: has your church

traditionally reached out to the community successfully in this way, or has it been mostly 'in house' celebrations? Even small details like this will give an indication as to how you will be received as a church by the community.

Spiritual

As you look at your church, what are the spiritual *Observations* you can make, and what can you learn from them? For example, if there are two churches, and one has a long history of contemplative prayer and meditation on the word, whereas the other is a charismatic, 'freeform' church, then clearly there will be radical differences, not only in how the vision is communicated, but also how mission should be embraced. For example, a charismatic church environment can be quite threatening to someone who is new to the concept of the Holy Spirit, and perhaps does not yet believe He exists (in which case, what must they think generates the joy, the crying, the hands in the air, the manifestations?) Whereas, a more contemplative church can feel exclusive and confusing, with a whole culture of its own (when do I stand? Why sing that bit? What do you mean... wait on God's presence?)

What do you see as you look at the spiritual level of the church? Will there be a resistance to the idea of reaching out in mission, rather than expecting 'them to come here?' Has the church used spirituality in the past to separate itself from non-Christians? Or does the church have a good standing in the community, where they have had an impact on things such as social justice, remembrance days, prayerful presence or festivals like Christmas and Easter?

When engaging in *Conversation* with the church, talk to people about their spiritual perspective of what mission would be for, and focus on what Jesus called us to do as mission. This could be done through cells, or home groups, or the church could break down into smaller groups on a Sunday to discuss this. It would also be valuable to talk about how the church feel they would respond to spiritual challenges in the context of mission. This would begin to help you discern where the levels of confidence and readiness for mission were, or whether there was greater need for training before further decisions are made; and

again, it is a good opportunity to allow people to catch the vision for themselves.

Investigation might follow very naturally from conversation, as you could talk to the older members of the church to discuss how the church was an example of spirituality in the past, and what impact this had on both the church and, more importantly, the community. It might also include looking at old census reports (obtainable from the local library), in conjunction with old parish records, to see if the proportion of people identifying themselves as Christians in the area was reflected in the church attendance figures of that time, and comparing that to recent figures. Would this show that increasingly there are larger numbers of people that claim to be Christian without an understanding of what the spiritual nature of that statement means? Or would it show that the church has never quite been able to communicate effectively how a spiritual life with Jesus is much more important than a cultural association with Him?

Through the use of all three methods you should be able to put together a good overview of the spiritual context of the church, and how this will have a direct influence on how the community already sees the church, and how it could see it with different mission initiatives.

The same can be said for all the levels that are explored in getting to Know Your Church. To get the most out of this process you should not feel bound by the ideas or suggestions that we have put in place., but should feel free to be creative and bring as many of your ideas (as a whole church/mission team) as possible... the more this Audit is shaped by you, the more authentic it will be for your context. However, to get you started we have included some Team Exercises to do at the end of this chapter, which we hope will give a clear way into this process. Once you have explored these exercises as thoroughly as you can, it is time to move on to the next part of the Mission Audit – Know Your Community.

Team Activity: Know Your Church

Physical

1. Mark your church clearly on a map of the area (perhaps the same one used to plot members), and get the initial mission team to share and to write on the map key physical features about your church that would impact mission.
2. Discuss with the church (through cells, etc) about 'people of peace' and get people to highlight who their people of peace are – add them to your map (in a diff. colour), or gather their names into networks if appropriate.
3. Get a copy of The Passionate Church, by Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad. Introduce the Five-fold Ministries teaching (Eph.4) and get the church to fill in the questionnaire, which can be found in the Appendix of that book.

Social

1. Discuss with leadership team/mission team... who are the leaders within your church?
2. Go on a prayer walk, asking God to show you and your team some of the key factors in the social level of your outreach – look for such things as: cars, curtains, litter, people out and about... ask God for discernment into what you see.
3. Put together a questionnaire for the church, in order to investigate the social circles of your members – what are their networks, do they know their neighbours, where do they live, etc.

Spiritual

1. How does your church have a current spiritual impact on the community/network you want to reach? Is that a positive/negative/neutral impact?
2. Talk to people about their spiritual perspective of what mission would be for, and focus on what Jesus called us to do as mission (e.g. Luke 9,10; Matt 10,28). This could be done through cells, or home groups, or the church could break down into smaller groups on a Sunday to discuss this.
3. Talk to the older members of the church – what has the church done in the past to have an impact on the spiritual level of society. How did it work?

KNOW YOUR COMMUNITY

The Harvest Field

It is important to begin this part of the Mission Audit with the results, findings and challenges that the Know Your Church part has raised fresh in your minds. This will form a valuable context in your mind as you now explore the community or communities you are in, and will help you to think on your feet and ask important questions and have key ideas and revelations along the way.

It is also important right at the start of this chapter to clarify what we mean by community. This is a word that frequently carries a geographic assumption with it, but this is not necessarily what we are pointing towards. In many cases it may well be that the community you are targeting as the focus of your mission is a geographic area, especially if you are in a parish context, or are a church that has any kind of local remit. However, it may be that you observe that your church actually gathers together mostly in networks that are not geographically centred, such as sports teams, or a pub at the other end of town (out of your area), or surfers that meet wherever the waves are good enough! These are as much communities as any geographical area, and it is important to see this as society increasingly gathers naturally into networks rather than neighbourhoods. In many places – especially urban areas – people take less time to know their neighbours, and more time to know their colleagues or in making friends at clubs, parties, work do’s, etc. If you are in a church context that seeks to reach a network rather than a neighbourhood, this is still a community, and so this chapter is still a vital part of your Mission Audit.

Ok, now that that is clear, let us get down to detail. Knowing Your Community is obviously absolutely crucial to any mission engagement. There is no sense in reaching out to a community you know nothing about... it will just leave you looking separate from the very people you are trying to engage with. And yet this is what so much of the church has done in this country in recent years. We have stood out like

a sore thumb in our society and expected people to come to us... we have lost sight of who serves whom, and that God's mission to the world is more relevant than ever to us in the west. However, this is not the first issue to address.

The Big Question

Before we can gain an understanding about the community we want to reach out to, we first need to know what that community is. This is where it is useful to come to this part of the Audit *after* Know Your Church, because we can now use the understanding of our church to help us see where the community/communities for us to engage with are. We can gauge this by considering four criteria:

1. Who do you have, and whom do you *not* have?

This is a two-way question, referring both inward to your church members and outward to their immediate 'people of peace.' Mostly, this question should have been answered as you assessed your church in the last part of the Mission Audit. Do you have a church that is mainly filled with people over 40 and under 14? This circumstance, for example, might suggest that to become a more rounded body, you see the need to reach out to young adults and young families, and so they would become your target community - with everything you do seeking to engage with them. Alternatively you may see that such an imbalance of ages would actually work to your advantage in reaching out to those age brackets, and so you could begin from a strong base of having some understanding of what schools and senior work-place ministry (for example) could look like, and you would have two communities to reach.

This is a transferable principle for all demographics you see in your church... is it a challenge to fill the gaps, or an opportunity to strengthen the ministry you already have? This can only be prayerfully answered. It may end up as a neighbourhood community, as you see either an absence or strength in numbers of people living in any one local area; or it might be a network community, such as a school-based ministry, if you were to discover a large number of mission-minded teachers in your church.

2. What vision do you have?

It is a key feature of successful missional outreach that it is led through strong vision. This is the model that Jesus gave, leading through vision (“The time has come... repent and believe the good news... come, follow me and I’ll make you fishers of men” - Mark 1:15-17) long before he went in to details as to what that would actually entail (“Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those that have leprosy, drive out demons... do not take along any gold or silver... take no bag” - Matt. 10:8-10). Assuming we can’t improve on Jesus, we need to do the same. Who is expressing vision in the church for a community to reach? What is your vision? Take time to pray individually, as a mission team and as a church, for a vision of who to reach. Let God shape your community.

3. Where does history point?

As you look back through the history of the church (again, a thorough Mission Audit will have done this in the last part), what has been the community in the past? Has it always been a parish community, and if so, has that been successful (in a mission sense, rather than a pastoral one). If it has, perhaps your church is well geared to being a parish community of mission. If it has not led to the kingdom growing much, perhaps that is an indication that there is another community waiting to be tapped into. Or there may have been times in the past when the church has reached out specifically to a community (the poor, work colleagues, etc), and that has been really fruitful. Maybe this will give a hint as to where God may lead again. Of course, these continue to be prayerful questions, not solid pointers. God is just as likely to build something new, as develop something established.

4. How long will you wait?

It may be that you identify a potential mission community, perhaps by seeing a notable absence of an age demographic in the church, but find that you do not have the people that could effectively and naturally reach out to that community. For example, you may observe a low number of young adults and discern that this needs to be changed if the church is to have a next generation, and so you are challenged to reach out in mission to this age group. However, it is the same lack of young adults that makes reaching them difficult, as the church is made up of people that do not know how to relate to youth and young adult

culture. This will require in part releasing the few young adults that are in the church, allowing them to get a vision, and also to engage in a cross-cultural mission context. For both circumstances this involves a period of training, so that the church can be equipped in the long term for this community. However, this takes time.

So how long will you wait to invest in a community on the horizon? Are you prepared to resource the training of these people? Another equally important question is what will you do in the meantime? If you have a community on the horizon, who is your community now? Where are the immediate 'people of peace', and how can you best reach them as you train the church in the long term?

What next?

These are questions to consider and pray through as you prepare for the Know Your Community part of the Mission Audit. Take time to do this – this is one of the most important aspects of being prepared for your mission outreach and should not be rushed. Once you have taken time to go through this process, and you know what your community is, then it is time to assess that community. To do this we consider the same levels (physical, social and spiritual) by the same methods (observation, conversation and investigation) as before.

Physical

What are the physical features and issues within your community? Whether a neighbourhood or a network, where are the meeting points of the community in relation to the church? Does the position of the church offer an advantage or disadvantage in engaging with the community? What are the physical dimensions you can tap into? How does the physical aspect of the community help in thinking about what form the mission work should take, or how the church should be made available and accessible to the community to have as a place of belonging?

In asking these questions (and others as you think of them), what are the observations you can make to seek the answers? This is perhaps the most central stage of the Mission Audit, as this is the point where you are most obviously following Jesus' instruction to "Open your eyes

and look at the fields!" (John 4:35). As you identify your particular mission field, what does it look like? Where do you see the community operating and relating to one other? Is it an outdoor culture, or an indoor culture? Are your church members in the same place as the community? If not, how can you get them there? How important are buildings in the community? How important is your building perceived to be in the community? As you ask yourself these questions, be praying and asking God to reveal to you how you can best use the physical level of your community to your missional advantage.

As you make your observations, go and talk to the people of the community. It may be a good idea to produce a questionnaire that you take into the community and invite them to not only inform you, but also influence and shape the way that you will reach out to them. This could contain questions about all three levels - physical, social and spiritual - in order for you to gain as much information all at once as you can. It could end up being quite a revelation to hear the community's perspective on what the church should be doing, and may give many open doors that would otherwise go unseen. Things to discuss about the physical levels of the community might be: Where are the important places for you? How much time do you spend at home? Are there any physical barriers between you and the church? Do you ever notice the church?

Investigation may begin with a questionnaire that crosses over from Conversation, but may go further as you target specific people within the community with these questions. What would the local police see as the physical needs of the community? How are the schools positioned in relation to your church, and what would their input be as to how you could work with the children? You could delve into old church records for ways the church has used the physicality of the community in the past, or investigate the shops in the area to see which were the most successful, and what are the specialist activity shops around. For example, do you have a big fishing shop around? This would be an indication of a physical aspect of the community where people could be found; or are there several restaurants that are successful and long-lasting? This might push you to spend more time in these places to make new contacts in the community.

Social

What do you see when you look at the social dimensions of your community? What do the people do? How do they relate to each other? Do they have a cultural language, or culturally distinctive features? What are the people like? What are their work patterns? What is their financial and social situation like? These are key questions, and to a degree these can be answered through observation. When you are in the high street, pubs, restaurants, or wherever your community meets, what sort of things do you see? What are the observations of others in your church/mission team?

However, the best way to get to know the social areas of the community is to go into them and speak to the people. Get to know them and build relationships, and *listen to them* – their input is absolutely fundamental to the Mission Audit process. Learn the spiritual language and culture and places of meeting first hand. Ask people how you can get involved in the community, and ask God to open doors to meet and eat with people. As well as random people you meet as you walk through the community, it is really valuable to build specific relationships and talk to specific people. We hinted at this with the physical level, but speaking to the people at the heart of the community such as local police, the school teachers, the community workers (if any), the social services, and others, will unearth all sorts of issues to consider, openings into the community, and new insights that could be essential if you are to be best prepared for mission.

In building relationships, as well as conversations generated by the questionnaire task we suggested earlier, you can get a clear picture of what people are like, what their lives are like, what their needs are, where they can be found. All of this is vital knowledge if you are to reach into their lives and offer Jesus to them. For the gospel to be relevant, you need to know who the gospel is being relevant to, and how the gospel can then be presented to highlight its relevance in this area. However, we jump ahead... this will be discussed more in the next chapter.

A lot can be discovered through observation and conversation, but investigation can reveal new nuggets of insight that neither of the others can. As well as the important, more in-depth, conversations that you will already be having, there are all sorts of areas of the social context that can be discovered with a little rooting around. For example, the local council website should have figures on the housing in the area - whether there are housing estates, council estates, if it's mainly detached, terraced, etc. They will also show you whether houses are owned, rented, vacant, etc. There are all sorts of other key bits of data that you can obtain from this kind of site (just do a search on your area/network, etc) that will prove invaluable in searching the social dynamics of your community.

Spiritual

The sorts of things to look for as you seek to observe the spiritual level of your community are the mix of religions and cultures; the number of 'new age' or otherwise spiritual shops; the number of different religious groups that have buildings or some clear presence in the area; the religious festivals being celebrated in the community - from candles in the windows to community celebrations; the way that people reach out and respond to the church or other faiths in times of trouble, such as terrorist attacks, national mourning, etc. Is it people's default reaction to reach out to God, push Him away, or disregard Him? To some degree these questions can all be answered by being observant of the community you are around, or in the case of the last example, by seeing how your church attendance and feel changes when people respond to hardship. What other areas of your community could you look for to assess the spirituality of the mission context?

In conversation with people within the community you will be able to get a much closer up view of just where this spiritual context lies. Talking to people opens up opportunities to find out where people are coming from in terms of their faith, or knowledge of a living God, but also you will be able to listen to people talk about the effect that faith (their own and others') has on them, which will give a clear insight into how big a battle against negativity towards God you are fighting. If there is a resistance to the idea of God in the community, which could come from any number of sources, then you will begin to get an idea of

where this is rooted, and you can use this perspective to pray for wisdom and breakthrough. If there is an assumption that people are Christians because they have inherited a Christendom culture (very common in the west), then you may be challenged to look for opportunities to focus less on the details of the gospel, and more on how it can impact and change lives if it forms the basis of life... but again we stray ahead of ourselves! There is no telling just how much you could discover, how important the relationships would grow into, when you reach out in conversation, talking *and listening* to your community.

In terms of investigation there are a number of avenues you can explore. The first may be to follow on from conversation by arranging specific interviews with the leaders of the other faiths (if any) in your community. This is obviously largely a neighbourhood-based piece of investigation. Another mostly locality focussed source of information is back into the local council records. Again, if you look on the local website you will be able to get figures for the number of religious faiths represented in the community, what percentage of each makes up the community, and what percentage of the community would consider themselves to be Christians. This last detail is especially useful when transposed against the number of people who actually attend church. This could be a detail obtained through a few calls to the local churches. Usually there is a big difference between the numbers, leaving a big question: why do so many that call themselves Christians not go to church? This may take us back into observation of our church, or into conversation with the community, or it may give clear ideas as to how the church can reach out in mission. At the very least it is a point of prayer!

If you are more of a networked community, then there may be specific areas of research that you can think of. For example, if you are working with young adults – or even especially with the clubbing community – then are there faith specific clubs or night-communities? And would there be opportunities to build relationships with them and work alongside them? Or if you are looking at expressing church in the workplace then you could send out an invitation for people to attend a coffee break chat where people had an open forum to give their

opinions on faith, spirituality, etc. A key source of people's spiritual input these days is the television, and so it could also be useful to find out what the spiritual programmes are, and how popular they are within your network. This could be found out through conversation with the community, or investigation with the TV companies. There are too many networks to give examples for each, but the principles remain the same. What are the areas of investigation that you can think of that would reveal something about the spirituality of your community?

This is the key, central part of the Mission Audit, as once you have gone through this you will have taken a good, long look at the mission field you feel called to and seen some of the key areas where the harvest is ripe. You may even have some clear ideas of how mission could work in this context. To help you in this process, as with the last chapter, there are some suggested team activities to get you started on this process. Once you have done this there is one more essential aspect of the Mission Audit to go through: Know Your Gospel.

Team Activity: Know Your Community

What is your community?

1. Look back at some of the statistics you gained in the Know Your Church to see who are the people you have, and do not have in your church. Look also at the history of the church, and see if there are any mission successes in the past. As you do this invite the church to express their mission vision and allow all of these things to prayerfully shape the community you are called to.

Observation

2. Go on a prayer walk with a small team (an evangelist amongst them, if possible!) and ask God to show you where the people are and who are the people to talk to. Then take the plunge and talk to them (hence the evangelist!). Build relationships and learn their perspective.

Conversation

3. Organise meetings with the local police, school teachers, community workers, residents associations, any other key people within your community (network or neighbourhood). Talk about what the community is like, what are the main needs, what would be the opportunities they knew of to work in the community. Build these key relationships and look for key 'people of peace' in these areas, as well as taking their input on board and praying it through.

Investigation

4. Look up your local council website (if you are a neighbourhood mission context) and get as many details, facts, statistics about the area as you can –especially in areas that reveal the social and spiritual dynamics.

5. Buy a TV magazine and look for the spiritual programmes that are broadcast – especially local programmes. This would give cultural things to talk about in opening conversations. You could even call the television companies to get a breakdown of how popular the programme is, particularly getting a breakdown as to how it is received by your community, if it were a particular demographic.

KNOW YOUR GOSPEL

The Harvest Purpose

This part of the Mission Audit can tend to raise a few eyebrows. After all, surely we all know the gospel... it's John 3:16 isn't it? Why make such a big deal about such a clear-cut part of the process? Well we want to stress that this is a big deal, and the answer is not as clear-cut as just John 3:16. In fact, it is the failure to ask this question that has seen many mission contexts misunderstood, and many mission opportunities missed. So, why is this is such an important question? Let us begin this chapter with a couple of quick examples of the problem.

The Australian Gospel

Taking you out of your context often helps you see the issues within your context a little easier, so let's look at an example of how the gospel may need to take a different face in Australia. This is a context that was first raised to our attention by YWAM many years ago. In Australia there is a very high value placed on friendship right through the culture. We can see this just from the various aspects of Australian culture that makes its way onto our TV screens (think of beer adverts, Crocodile Dundee, Neighbours, etc). Consequently, the faithfulness and friendship of God is something that can attract people. However, another feature of the culture is that there is a strong sense of having been sinned against. This has arisen through the way that the country was formed, the way that Aborigines were treated, the way that being sent to Australia was initially a form of punishment. So if you go into an Australian community with all your John 3:16 guns blazing, proclaiming the good news that Jesus died to forgive their sins their response is "Well that's great... but shouldn't you be saying this to those that sinned against us - surely that's who that good news is for?" The focus on forgiveness and sin is not a good way in. It just builds an extra wall to climb over.

However, if you focus on reaching people through the friendship of God, and through the friendship that you can build with them, then

you find a way in. To give a couple of pointers as to how important friendship and faithfulness are, think of The Dog on the Tuckerbox, one of the most popular Australian folk songs, that talks of a dog that faithfully guards his masters' food box; or Crocodile Dundee, who thinks about God as being his best mate. Then, as they engage more and more with the friendship of God they become aware of the holiness of God, and of their own sin and the need for repentance. It is at this time that John 3:16 breaks through. The fullness of the gospel does break through, and it is all completely relevant, but not all of it will provide the doorway into the community.

The St Helens Gospel

A closer to home example is a first hand one for me (Bob) and Mary, my wife, where we spent 14 years in St Helens, Merseyside in the north of England involved in church planting. We quickly discovered that this was very much a non-book culture, where many people could neither read nor write. Generally the prospects for youth growing up were often not good, and unemployment was high. Many people felt as though they had been ground down, and so again, if you open your missional relationship with them talking about sin and forgiveness they won't hear it.

However, if you go in with a message that they are valuable to God, that they have a real significance in their community, in the world, and that God wants to use them through the gifts that He has given, will give, and may not yet even have been discovered, then there is much more of an open door. Again, once this way in has been received, then people begin to understand the importance of forgiveness and grace.

So what is the gospel?

We need to know that the gospel is relevant and it works, but we also need to know that it meets different contexts at different points, depending on their needs and aspirations. The above mission contexts are two quite different examples of how we need to look for the ways in with the gospel... how does the gospel exactly meet the needs of the community you are called to? It is important that we make the time to discern what the gospel that we need to communicate is. We have to

revisit the gospel and ask ourselves, "How does it relate to our specific mission context?"

Physical

Observation: As you look at your church, what are the physical things that could have an effect on the gospel you are able to present? For example, do the stained glass windows tell a particular story that you could concentrate on as a focus for the gospel? Do you see a lot of people in the congregation that have been healed, or who have come through really difficult times with Jesus? Do you see a building that already opens its doors in the week for a mums and toddlers group? Would this be a way in for the gospel to be presented as a parent loving His children? What aspect of the gospel can you see when you look at your church?

As you look at your community, what are the physical things that might reveal the nature of the gospel they need to hear, or the aspect of the gospel that would be an open door in? Do you see an area that has a lot of people on the streets that are homeless, desperate, etc... people that have nobody valuing them? Don't they need to hear about a God that values them intensely? Do you see streets that are dirty and littered? Would this be an opening to communicate a gospel that speaks of God giving them a purpose and life to the full? How does the physical context have an impact on what needs are revealed, and where the gospel can meet people specifically in your community?

Conversation: As you talk to people in your church, what physical things do they highlight that could be openings for the gospel? Do they talk about 'people of peace' that struggle with the idea of Christianity because of negative experiences with the church, or with expectations attached to the building? Do people talk about how the community could be impacted by a gospel that expresses the way God brings new life by the attention made with keeping the church site clean and new, in contrast to messy and unattended streets? What else do they say?

As you talk to the community what do they talk about? Do they highlight similar things to the church, so that you get a clear idea of

how the gospel is affected by physical circumstances? Or do they give quite a different perspective?

Investigation: What can you find out about how the gospel has been impacted by physical opportunities or constraints in the past? Perhaps a way of investigating this would be to go to the other churches in your area – especially if they are in a different type of area, or positioned in a different strategic place – and see what successes and failures they have had in the past with presenting the gospel. Are there any trends that can be attributed to the physical circumstance? Alternatively, if you are part of a network community, investigate whether the gospel has been presented from any perspective in the past, and how the location, building, condition of meeting places, etc, effected (if at all) how this was received.

Social

Observation: Look at your church as it gathers. Can you see any strengths of the gospel that are expressed in the way they mix, or in the social structures of the church? Is there, for example, a high priority given to levels of friendship – having your “Peter, James and John” (accountability), and your “twelve” (small group), and so on. This could be a strong example of the gospel as friends and ‘people of peace’ see the difference that socialising as Jesus did, and meeting Jesus in the type of relationships he modelled, can make. What other aspects of the gospel, from a social perspective, are strengths of your church context?

As you walk through the community, prayer walking or just as you live amongst the people, what aspects of the gospel can you see a need for in the social level? Are there obvious areas of society that need the gospel? For example, are there a lot of homeless people in the streets? Are there a lot of chemists on the high street (this may indicate drug problems in the area)? Is the job centre full? Or do you see lots of people walking through the streets, too busy to look up or talk to others around them? These could all be observations that reveal an aspect of the gospel that would help. Table C (below) gives a list of needs that people may have (it is not exhaustive, and you can probably think of others), and alongside each need is good news that Jesus offers. Do the

social things you see suggest any of these problems? Can you see ways in which the gospel could be presented to meet their needs?

Table C: The Gospel is:

God's Total Answer to Every Need

Lonely	Eternal Friend
Empty	Fullness
Guilt	Forgiveness
Broken	Wholeness
Sick	Healing
Proud	Humbling
Bound	Freedom
Rejected	Sought out
Worthless	Infinitely Valued
Aimless	God's Purpose
Dying	Eternal Life
etc.	etc.

Conversation: Once you have considered your observations, both in and outside the church, how do they tally with the conversations you have had with your church members/mission team, and with the residents, shopkeepers, key workers/people in the community? Are they expressing similar opportunities for the gospel that you have observed? Chances are there will be other openings that you would not be able to see, and would only be unearthed through conversation.

Investigation: Openings for the gospel in a social context might reveal themselves through many of the facts and figures you have already investigated. Looking at council records, in libraries and at census reports will show not only what the spiritual beliefs and opinions of the area are, but also the places where these cultures, faiths and beliefs gather together. You may also be able to discover where some of the

social groups or difficulties are centred. For example, common places for youth to gather, locality of drop-in centre, etc. This will clearly mean that the gospel will look dramatically different in different places, which you might only have discovered the need for through a bit of deeper digging.

Spiritual

Observation: This follows on fairly easily from the social level in that you are looking for the same sorts of things. What are the spiritual needs of your community, and how can Jesus meet those needs? Jesus meets whatever need we present, and so we need to look for the needs in the community, and how we can best communicate and demonstrate that Jesus can meet the need. The way Jesus modelled doing this was through sharing the good news and demonstrating the power. As mentioned earlier, Table C (above) gives examples of needs that we might see in our community, and the ways that the gospel meets these needs. As you look at your community, can you see the needs? Do they give you an insight into the gospel that you should be presenting?

Conversation: As you talk to people in your church what aspects of the gospel have people been impacted by? Is there a common thread of the gospel that has been a way in for many in the church? What aspects of the gospel do your mission team think are important?

As you talk to people in the community what are the needs you perceive? Are there common needs and aspirations that you hear time and time again? What are the key spiritual ways in to the community, and how does the life of Jesus speak into these issues? Again, look at Table C... what is the good news Jesus offers community?

Investigation: Again, the details you have already unearthed for earlier stages of the Mission Audit can be reapplied here. What does your community state it believes? What do they think are the spiritual needs of the community? What do they think the church should be for? How have the community responded to the church or the gospel in the past? Do these insights into your community give you inspiration for how the gospel can be presented? What does your investigation suggest

would be the best way to communicate the life to the full that Jesus invites us all to live?

Once you have gone through these three parts of the Mission Audit you are ready to begin to draw some firm conclusions. However, before we get onto that final stage, there are some more suggested team activities at the end of this chapter to get you going. As with all the other suggested tasks, these are just suggestions, and you should feel free to be creative, add your own ideas and tailor your Audit to your situation.

Team Activity: Know Your Gospel

Observation

1. As you prayer walk through the community (see previous activities), what are the needs you can see? Use Table C to discuss how these observations could be met by the gospel
2. What aspects of the gospel would your building (inc. location, way its built, etc) help to in communicate?

Conversation

3. As you talk to the local police, teachers, shopkeepers, residents of the community, what do they point to as the key needs and aspirations of the community? What good news does the community need?
4. Discuss as a church/mission team what all the information gained in the Mission Audit so far would indicate the way in to the gospel for your community should be.

Investigation

5. Look back in church records, talk to older church members. How has the gospel been received before? What were the points of connection and the points of separation with/from the community?
6. Interview other church leaders in the community... how have they presented the gospel? Can they see any trends of success/failure?

WHAT NEXT?

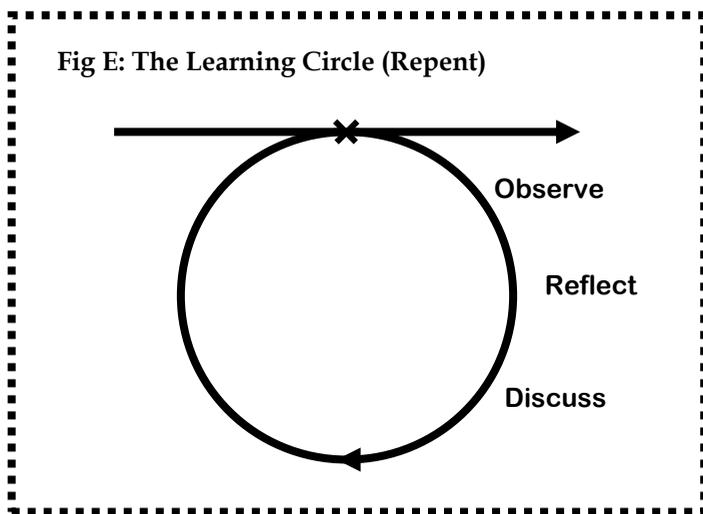
You should now have all the information you require to be in a position to plan your mission outreach. As you have gone through the process you may well already have been getting lots of ideas, and may even have begun to see some fruit as relationships with the community are built and the church begins to get vision. However, even if you have not, you now have an opportunity to stand back and consider all you have observed, talked about and investigated. It is our hope that as you do this you will get as much clearer sense of the community that you are called to, the resources that God has given you to reach them and the particular focus of the gospel that will be the way in to changing people's lives.

However, having the information is all very well, but what should you do with it? One of the strongest ways of processing challenges that we have found is the Learning Circle, as taught by Mike Breen as part of LifeShapes. Mike looks to the primary call of Jesus to live a life of repentance and belief, and goes into detail as to how this can be done. For a fuller account of this teaching, we recommend (not for the first time) that you get hold of *The Passionate Church*. However, the basics of the matter are that when we are faced with a moment in time where God breaks through (the Greek word used in Mark 1 is 'kairos') we are invited into a process of repentance and belief that will propel us on to the next stage of our journey with God. *Repentance* is about changing our mind ('metanoia') and *Belief* is about putting our faith into action ('pistis'). Mike breaks these stages down into smaller chunks, and we have used these to give you a process to follow. Here are a few suggestions to what your next action can be:

Observe

The first response to a 'Kairos moment' is to take a step back and observe what has happened. This is, mostly, the Mission Audit itself. However, there is now the opportunity to stand back from all you have been taking in along the way, and to look at it as a whole. This is not a time for action or ideas or communicating to the church your vision...

this is mainly a time to pray. You could have a meeting as a team where the only objective is to pray and listen to God. Ask Him to give you spiritual eyes to see the context He has called you into. You may want to include some sharing, but this need only be sharing observations – you need feel no pressure to brainstorm ideas or make plans.



Reflect

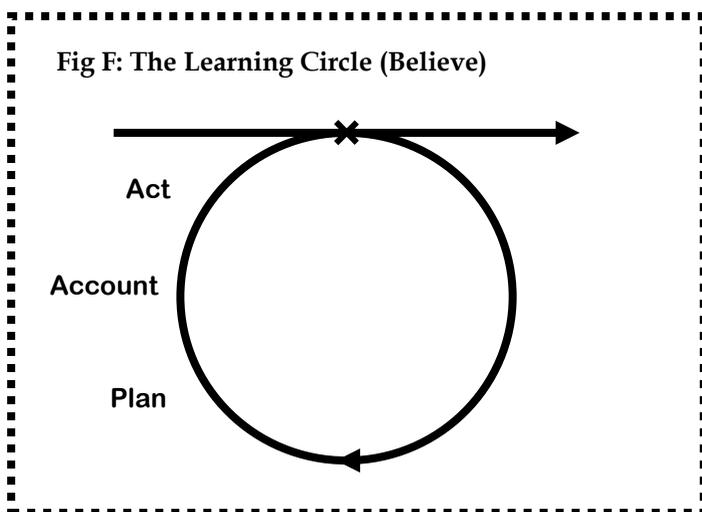
Begin to reflect on what you have learnt... discuss with your team what each of you feels have been the strengths of the Audit, and what you have learnt as individuals. Find out if you are in natural agreement for the community you are a part of, and share what you feel God has been saying to you through this process and now that its done. Take more time to pray individually. This might be mainly expressed in a time where you call the team – maybe the whole church – to pray and listen for God’s guidance, and deliberately not have a meeting for a while to give space for this. At least keep meetings informal... have meals and share the positives.

Discuss

Meet with the mission team more intentionally to share your feedback. Discuss what you feel the Audit has revealed in terms of who your

community are; what the key issues and needs in the community are; how do people respond to the church; what is the good news they need to hear; what ideas do you have about what mission could look like; and so on and so on. Think outwardly about how the gospel could be introduced into the community, and think inwardly about how the church should respond to this call – do changes need to happen, or do people need equipping and training? In all things, continue to think upwardly, in prayer, including God in your discussions and letting Him continue to speak into your context.

This is also the time to really begin communicating with the church as a whole. Set out your vision for mission, if you have not already done so, and get people’s responses – talk to them and let them catch the vision and be a part of the mission shaping process.



Plan

Now is the time to put the plans together. This should be done primarily within the team you have gathered to focus on mission, and then present the plan to the church as a whole. Your plans should be clear and not waffling. Try to leave no room for justifying action when in fact there has only been discussion. What are your aims and

objectives? How will you achieve them? How can you regularly review how this is going? It may help to produce the results of the Mission Audit as a report that the church and the bishop can get hold of, followed by your plan written out so people can see where the plan has come from and what the context is. We are deliberately not giving specific ideas to what the plan should look like, because it should come from your ideas, tailored to your specific mission context.

Account

It is important that you are prepared to be held accountable for the plan you put together. This is not so that people can have opportunity to tell you it's the wrong plan, but simply to make sure that you put the plan into action. It is so easy to dream dreams, but not bring them into reality. Having people that are committed to keeping that reality in check is a vital part to keeping you, the mission team and the church focussed on the heart of mission, and the action of mission.

Mission leaders may also need to be in accountable relationships with those that lead them, in order to keep them focussed on Jesus and to check how they are doing. Do they get burnt out quickly? Do they need more resourcing, training, pastoral support? Setting these relationships up as you begin is important, and can open up lots of room for spiritual growth... both for individuals and the mission projects.

Act

There is no more time to put it off... now is the time to act! Set a time with the church to begin, and make sure you have communicated the vision, the plan and the hopes clearly. If the Mission Audit has been done, the information gained has been prayed through and applied, there is a plan in place, a team and some accountability then you are ready for the birth of your mission.

Final Thought

From here on in the work of the Mission Audit is done, though of course the details and insights gained will always be easily available now to check back on as you progress in the mission God has brought you into.

However, this is still only the stage of pregnancy in the Life Cycle, and the birth is still to come... you will not find yourself with a fully formed mission once this process is done. Instead, you must use this process for giving you the strength and confidence to go through the birth. All the preparations are in place, but you must now set them into action.

Good luck!

TESTIMONIES

Harvest Stories

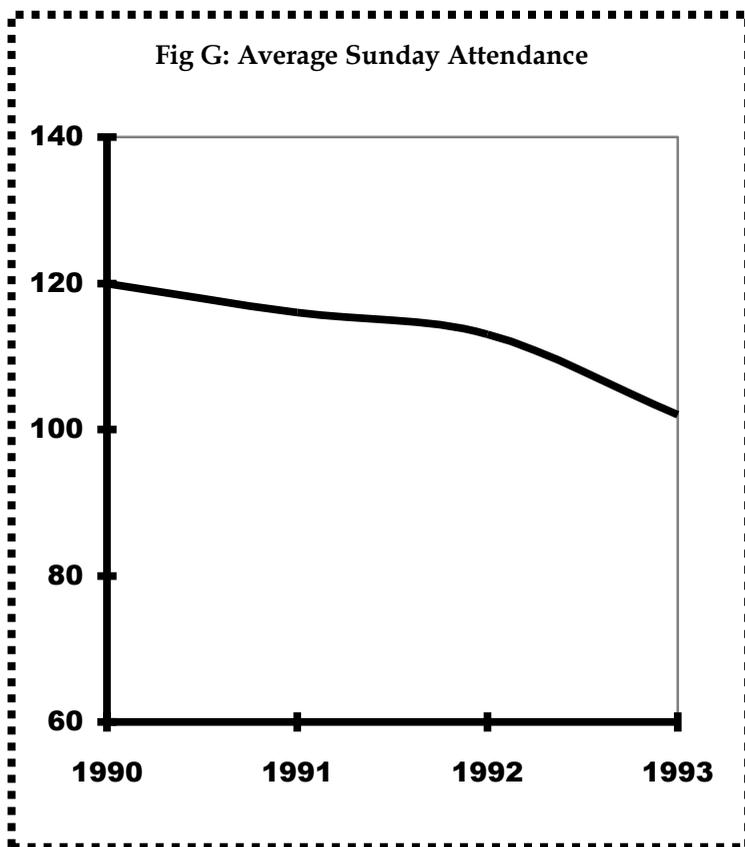
This chapter focuses on two accounts of how a Mission Audit has been applied. One is a long established story that has created positive change in the mission outlook of a church. The other is a recent story that is still ongoing. Hopefully these testimonies will give you a picture of how these principles can be put into practice.

Story 1: St James, Eccleston Park.

This was a church that Mary and I (Bob) were in contact with when we lived in St Helens. The story is from over ten years ago now, but St James remains a really good example to look at as, not only did they go through a very effective Mission Audit, but they are also a church in a very average parish situation... making the success they found very transferable to most church circumstances. Having felt that they needed to have more of a mission focus in the congregation, and to bring new families in, they began the process of a Mission Audit, beginning with Initial Research.

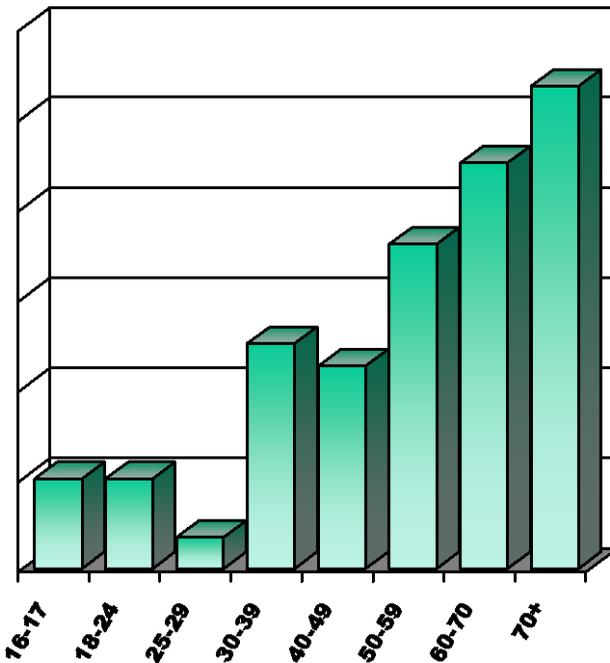
They began this process by getting a population of the area – there were 4,500 people living in the parish. They then got a map of the area and began to plot the households of church members. They put the map up at the back of church and members put a pin by their house when they came in over a period of a few Sundays. Already this was beginning to show areas of the parish they were not getting members from, and so already their mission field was in the process of definition (This could also be done if you have membership lists). Next they added on to the map some of the boundaries they were aware of: the parish boundary, the new housing estate, the council estate that was shared with the neighbouring parish. This further defined their visual idea of where their members were, and more importantly, where they were not. They also discovered that although the council estate was only partly in their parish (and only a small area at that), it actually took up half of the number of residents – clearly a key target!

By this time they were keen to see what the demographics of their church would reveal, and so they looked through the church records and produced a couple of graphs showing average Sunday attendance and age profile, which can be seen in Figs. G and H below.



As you can see, the church had a declining attendance, and an elderly congregation. They had virtually no young adults or young families, and in this respect were very similar to many churches across Britain and Europe these days.

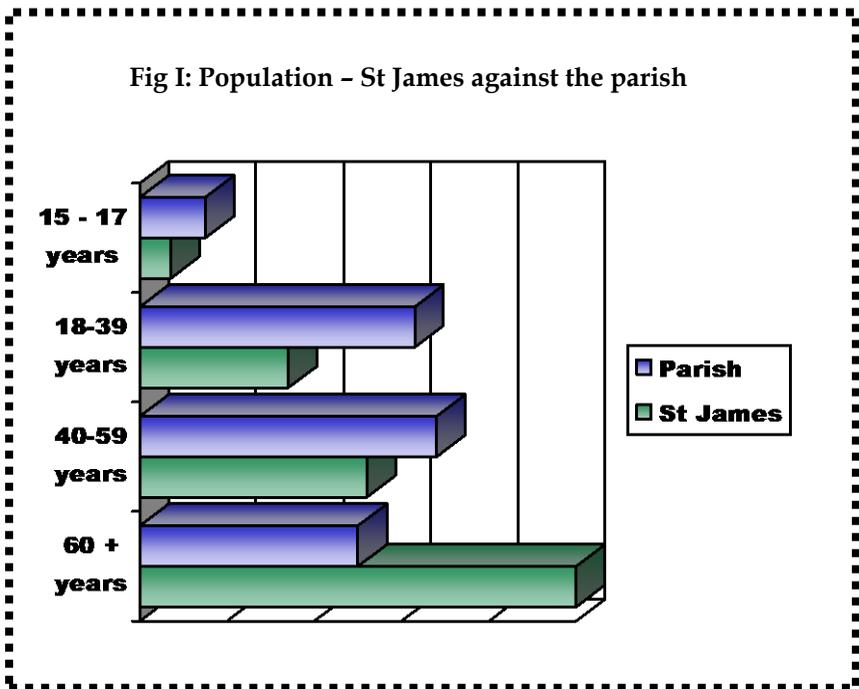
Fig H: St James' Congregation Ages



They also looked at their church building and realised that part of the problem was that it was completely unsuitable for children or young adults to come into. It was an old, traditional building with hard pews, no toilets and no kitchen. As they talked about this as a church, a few also admitted that they would be just as likely to tut at the children as welcome them if they distracted from their usual reverent service!

The last thing they did as their Initial Research was to go to the local library and get hold of the demographic census statistics for the area to see how their church reflected the community they were in. It had occurred to them that one of the reasons they had so few young adults was that they were a part of a retirement zone, meaning it would be much more appropriate to have a mission outreach to the retired.

However, this was not the case. Their findings can be seen in Fig I below, and as you can see there was a much higher proportion of young adults and families in the local area than actually in the church. This was a huge challenge to the church to see that they were missing out on reaching such a large proportion of the local demographic. They also discovered that of the 4,500 residents, about half of them were nominal Catholics, which in itself gave a much clearer view of the mission context. They knew they needed to delve deeper, however, if they were to be fully prepared for mission. So they moved on into their Mission Audit.



As a result of the Initial Research it was felt that there were two very evident mission opportunities: young families (including many from the new housing estate), and the council estate. They had observed

already that they only had one household from the estate attending, and so this was a big 'black hole', especially considering half of the population of the parish were to be found there.

The council estate mission would have been a cross-cultural mission, as it was mainly made up of a different social group to the church members. They also saw that 60% had no car, and the church was 2 ½ miles from the estate, with many young mothers not willing to walk the distance. There were also plenty of other social issues. This was what we would call a pioneer mission opportunity, as there was almost no one there from the church, so it would have been sending in completely new people.

The young families opportunity, however, was on the surface a little simpler. There were plenty of people from the church living in same social area, and they generally had the same background. However, there were very few from the same age range, and so this was going to be a cross generational mission.

As they looked at these two opportunities they began to pray, asking God for guidance and also considering whether they were really prepared to respond to either situation. Initially they felt drawn to the council estate, and so began negotiations with the neighbouring parsh as to what they could do. This was vital, as only part of the estate was in their parish, but whatever they did for some of the estate they had to do for all, so they would need to be a part of a co-operative mission project. To begin with the neighbouring church agreed, but then they started a £250,000 building reordering project and asked for the project to be put on hold for five years.

The St James mission team prayed about this, but felt that this, along with some other prayerful reasons, was a closed door. So, they were left with the young families mission focus, which they felt was the right avenue to follow. They formed a small mission team of 8-12 people (depending on how many people were available at any one time) and began to look closer at the mission field they were called to.

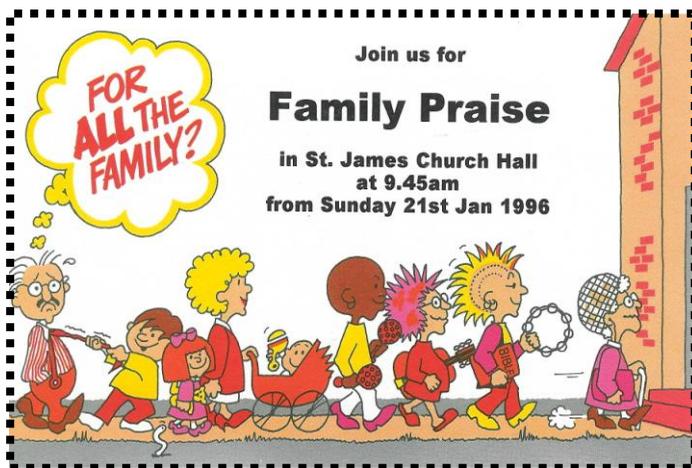
Their Audit came together largely through a questionnaire that they put together and handed out to sample homes in the community. This asked various questions that would give them an idea of who lived in the area, and what their needs and aspirations were. They also asked what people would be hoping to see within their community and what would build community and meet their needs. In conjunction to this they also pooled their observations about the same things and highlighted who were the people they already knew.

The mission team discovered which houses had young families, which had children and how old the children were (largely through responses to the questionnaire), and as they began to get responses and began to learn who the people were and where they lived, they worked as a team to think up and organise activities that would respond to the needs and aspirations they were seeing. These activities were geared towards the people they had met, and to meet the needs they had highlighted, and they were deliberately a range of things to build social contacts and respond to the relationships that were being built and the facts they were finding. Examples of activities were a sports day for children, a family swimming night and a barn dance.

The mission team targeted whom they invited to each activity, so that the evenings were tailor made. They put invites where they knew people they had met and where the kids were. These activities, and the communication of them, gave them ways into building relationships with real people that were never engaged in the church normally. They found out who they were, what made them tick, and were able increasingly to respond to these things.

As relationships continued to be built and the mission team gradually discovered those that were open and ready to start some sort of faith journey, they looked at their church and decided that although the main church building was inappropriate for all the new families they had met, there was a church hall that was a much better venue. It was only small, but it had a kitchen, toilets and was generally family friendly). Having settled with this they decided to build a mission community within the community of families they were meeting that

would be based at the church hall. Shortly after this, Family Praise was born! An example of an invite to Family praise can be seen below.



Within three months of the birth of Family Praise, lots of new homes could be added to their map of members; and two years later there were lots more again – regularly with more than 60 people in a service every Sunday, even through the summer, whilst the traditional service in the main church building happened at same time.

This has continued to go from strength to strength, and this can be largely put down to how they began with a strong knowledge and understanding of the mission field they were called to. They followed the Mission Audit principles, and consequently were well prepared for the mission they undertook.

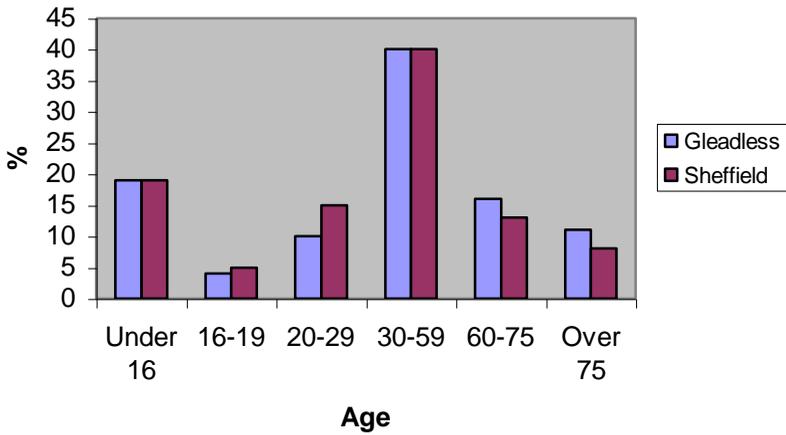
Story 2: A Cluster in the making, Sheffield.

This is an ongoing story that I (Freddy) am involved with in south Sheffield, and is still unfolding as we publish this book. The purpose of telling this story is to show that the same principles work today, and can apply to a different structure and size of church. My wife, Ali, and I are members of St Thomas' Church in Sheffield. This large church in the north of the city is structured into clusters - missionary congregations that are, at their heart, a gathering of Cells around a common mission vision. Over the last year we have lead one of the clusters that reaches out to families in the city, but we are now being called into a new vision for our local community - a suburb of south Sheffield called Gleadless, which is quite a long way from the main church centre in Philadelphia.

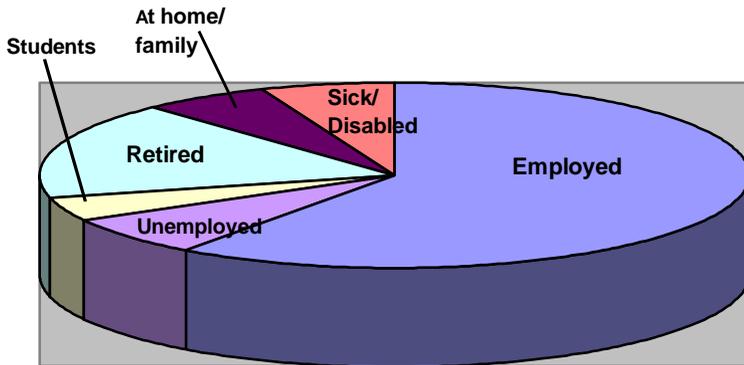
The intention is to do this by starting a small cell of the Christians in the area, which will grow in time and multiply into a Cluster of cells. To do this there needs to be a strong mission outlook, and to get this we are doing a Mission Audit (well, I could hardly write about it unless I believed it enough to do, right?).

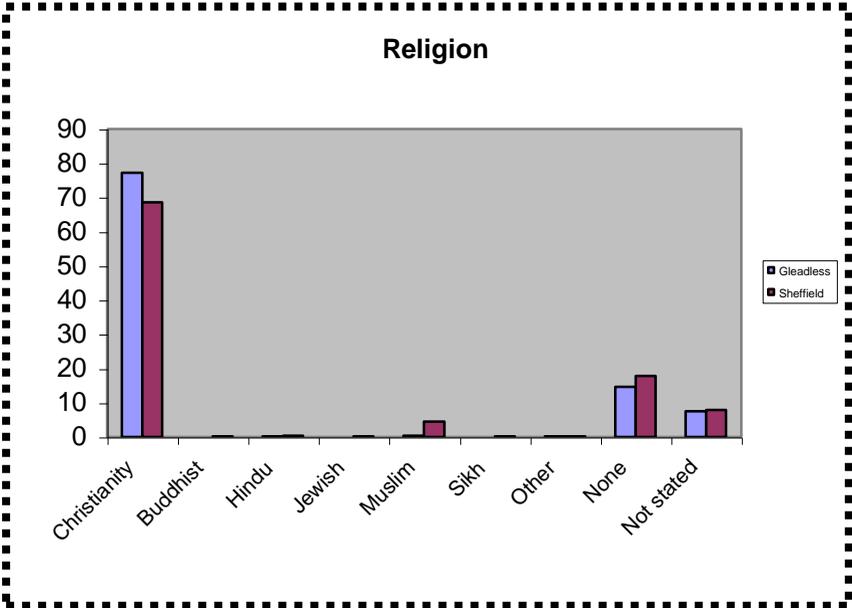
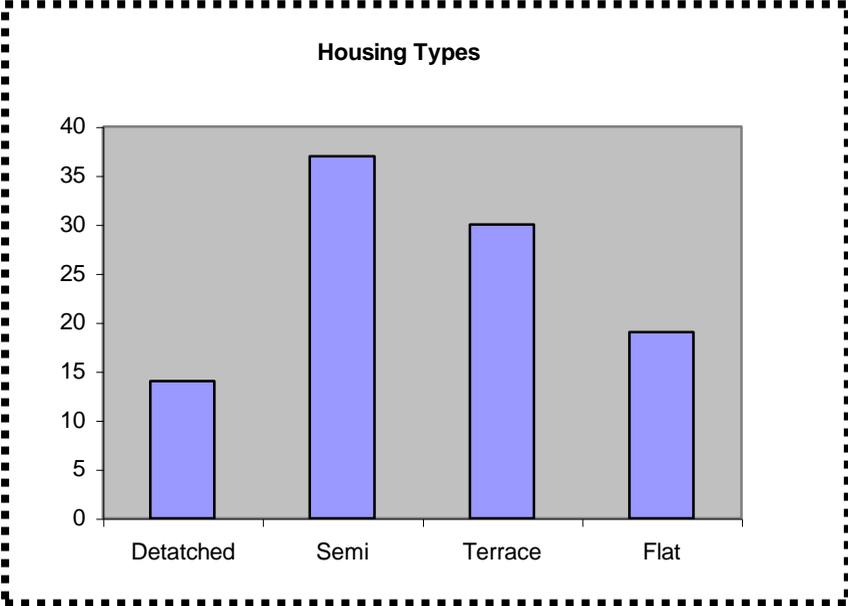
So far we have been through the Initial Research and identified the community we feel called to, which is the local housing estate we live on. In time we expect this to grow throughout the area, but that will only come as the cells grow and new vision for those areas is developed. Below are some examples of the facts we have found out concerning the age breakdown of the area, the employment status, the housing mix, and other details. The detail that is not shown, as we have no graph for it, is that there are four churches in the area, with predominantly an aging membership. These churches are generally based on a traditional format for church, but do not engage very often in mission. Most people in the area, despite considering themselves Christian, do not go to church.

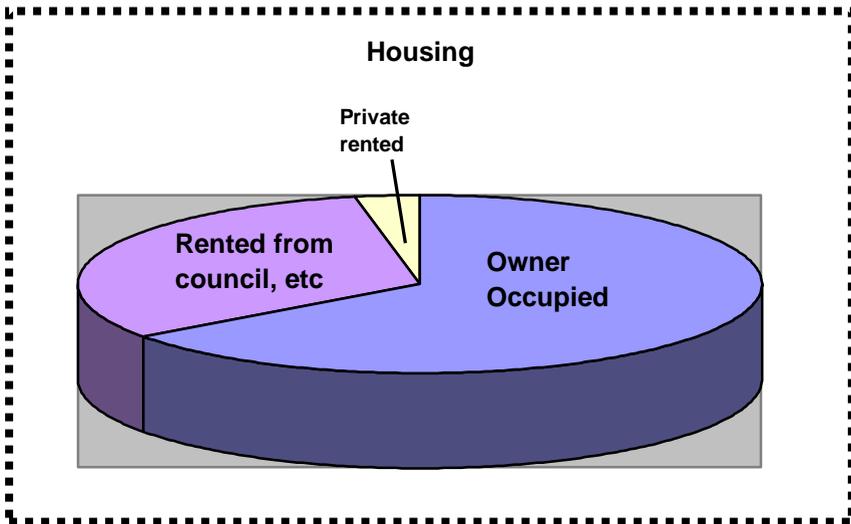
Age Breakdown



Employment Breakdown







What we have discerned about our mission field is that it is made up mainly of people in their 30s-40s that work but are not overly wealthy. They generally have settled for the long term in their housing and have a commitment to the area as their community (which can be seen by the relationships in the pubs and local restaurants). However, there is also a sense that work-based networks are also a key dynamic of the area. Most people work elsewhere in Sheffield, and so their community is seen as a place to return to. The local churches are serving those that are attracted to an inherited church model well, but nobody is reaching out to the un-churched or the de-churched. This, therefore, is our mission field. Already we know quite a lot about the mission field we are called to: age, likely employment status, spiritual perspective, etc. This gives us a strong base from which to begin our Mission Audit.

As we begin the Mission Audit and look at our church, there is in a sense not too much to learn. The team currently stands as three, but looks as though it may grow to seven. The three on board are all young adults, and the other four possible members are two middle aged couples with adult children. What this does tell us, though, are the two groups of people that we will be able to reach out to. If we were a larger team we might look at the ages we are missing, but being so small we have an advantage of immersion into the community with the

age group to which we belong, so that gives us not only our mission field, but also an idea of where in the field the harvest is ripe for us. We are also a team (in terms of Ephesians⁴) of two apostolic teachers and one prophetic teacher. This also helps to shape how we will reach out to the community, as we try and play to our strengths as God has made us.

As we looked at our community we prayer walked the area, and are now going through the process of building relationships with key local people and each of the four local churches. This is the stage of the Mission Audit we are up to as we publish. We have learnt a lot about where people meet, what their interests are (snooker, pub culture, eating out, etc) and we are looking at what are the openings for us to build relationships in these places - e.g. joining the Residents Association, joining the snooker club, meeting regularly at our local pub. The next step is to begin to search for what the needs and aspirations of the community are, and to start some events that we can invite our 'people of peace' to that will target these things.

Also, as we look at the community, we are also thinking about what the gospel is for Gleadless. The needs we have seen are: 1. A sense that community is important, but with such a focus on work people no longer really know how to build community in their local area, so they feel disconnected. 2. People being too busy and stressed out by their working lives. 3. An identity with the church, but not one that impacts daily life, so no knowledge of a living Jesus. 4. A lack of value given to individuals and the area... seen by the amount of litter left in the streets, the run down state of many of the houses, and the number of youth and young people hanging out on the streets with nothing to do if the pubs are full. So far we are only in the early stages of looking into the Gospel for Gleadless, but already we know that we can bring a message of Good News that offers life to full, expressed through people being valued, loving our neighbours, a healthy work/rest balance and a God who is interested in our daily lives.

This is just the beginning... we look forward with great anticipation for what God is going to show us in the full Mission Audit!

APPENDIX I

The Life Cycle

In the Initial Research chapter we referred to the Life Cycle, and where the Mission Audit fits in to these natural stages of the life of, in this case, a mission strategy. We looked at Conception and Pregnancy in the chapter, but said that we would give similar tables for the remaining five stages of life here in the Appendix. We have included these here, but this is not the main thrust of the book so we do not include much detail... just some suggestions as to what you should be thinking of in these times. For fuller teaching on the Life Cycle we recommend reading.....

Preparation for birth

- Work on First Service - Dry Run, Celebration
- Issues of the Building
- Commissioning of the Team
- Developing the Worship & Ministry Style
- Plan Children's Work
- Publicity work to Celebrate the Birth

Infancy

- Shift from Team to Church
- Rapid Growth, Instability as New People Join
- Follow up plans for new converts
- Regular Restatement of the Vision

Adolescence

- Identity Reassessed, New Vision
- Develop Ministries according to Gifts
- Evangelism & Incorporation are High Priorities
- Consider Building Development

Maturity

- Stability in Leadership & Identity
- Mission Mobilised, Outward Looking (Acts 1:8)
- Self Governed, Self Supporting
- Showing Signs of Growth

Reproduction

- Build in Reproduction at every level -
disciples, leaders, churches
- Remove Barriers to Reproduction

APPENDIX II

Resources to Accompany Mission Auditing

Here is a list of useful resources we would point you to for your Mission Audit. In some cases, we have recommended these through this book, and they will help with the suggested tasks. In other cases we feel that they would simply be useful to enhance the understanding we have fleshed out here.

The Passionate Church by Mike Breen & Walt Kallestad (Cook, 2005)

The Passionate Life by Mike Breen & Walt Kallestad (Cook, 2005)

Mission-shaped Church (Church House Publishing, 2004)

Sowing, Reaping, Keeping by Laurence Singlehurst (Crossway Books, 1995)

The Life Cycle of Reproducing Churches, by B. Patrick (Baptist Home Mission Board, New Zealand)

Discerning Church Vocation (Springboard, 2001)

Breaking New Ground (Church House Publishing, 1994)

Useful websites:

www.acpi.org.uk

www.freshexpressions.org.uk

www.stream247.com

To contact ACPI, write to: ACPI, Philadelphia Campus, 6 Gilpin Street, Sheffield. S6 3BL. Phone: 0114-278-9378/Fax: 0114-241-9560
E-mail: admin@acpi.org.uk