

## expressions: *the dvd* - 2

### Transcript - chapter 2

*Dialogue and time-codes for chapter 2.*

#### 2: A new harvest?

02:00:08:12 Narrator

When a townie like me comes to countryside like this, it's easy to believe that life here hasn't changed that much. A village pub at the edge of the green, cricket on a Saturday afternoon and the church in the heart of the community. But the reality is quite different. In one Somerset village a small, but faithful congregation has managed to grow a fresh expression of church and just in time.

*'When a townie like me comes to countryside like this, it's easy to believe that life here hasn't changed that much.'*

02:00:37:24 Margaret Armstrong

It's a very rural community set in the Brendon Hills. The countryside around is absolutely beautiful. The village is tiny. The population is 40. The church is the only public building left in the village, was lovingly being kept open by the two church wardens and their wives who'd been caring for it for a long time. And sadly nobody else in the village supported it at all and at most of the services they were the only congregation. So it was in a sorry way. And also financially it was in the red, it couldn't pay its way. It was having to draw on its last little bits of reserves to pay its bills, so it was going nowhere. The end of the my first year here, the diocese sent a couple of diocesan officers to discuss the process of closure with the two church wardens and myself. And then right at the end of the discussion I was asked if I had any comments I would like to make. Up until this point there had not been a willingness to accept change and the church only had Book of Common

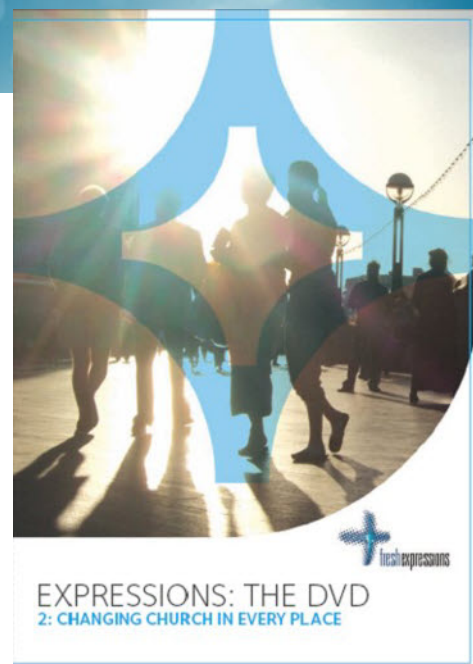
Prayer services once a month and nobody was coming. And so this was the moment at which I was able to engage the church wardens with the idea that perhaps to move away from the traditional type of service to something quite different might be a possibility and might be something that would reengage the village with its church.

02:02:11:20 Margaret Armstrong

Things have changed enormously. Everybody has come on board. They've been willing try something different and they've done so with great enthusiasm. We've worked out a pattern of services that celebrate the rural location, the countryside. So we picked on a rogation service for the Spring, going outside and blessing the village and the crops. The pet service when they all bring their pets and this year I think we had 17 dogs, two chickens and a cat. And in the Summer we have the clypping service, which is the service of thanksgiving for our church and a blessing for it. The word clypping means to hug, so we all go outside and join hands and hug our church and say prayers for the church and then we turn round and face outwards and say prayers and a blessing for our village community.

02:03:04:18 Margaret Armstrong

One of the services we have during the year is an All Saints service and this year we decided we would celebrate all the saints of Tolland, which is all the baptised and think about how each of us is called to live out our sainthood in our everyday lives. Everybody's names have been on little models that they've stuck... We've made our own stained glass window and of course they've lit their baptism candle to remind themselves they carry the light of Christ in the world as a saint of God in the world.



02:03:31:08 Male

The services are really innovative. They're fun. They're enjoyable. They're somewhat different; very informal and that's what people seem to like.

02:03:39:20 Female

I thoroughly enjoy the services. It's great fun and it's lovely to see lots more people from the village coming to the services now. Margaret has made it great fun to be here.

02:03:50:10 Margaret Armstrong

We've tried to engage with people to come and join in by trying to meet them where they are. That's being by not being churchy, but by choosing services that are relevant to their lives in the countryside. And drawing them in, in a way that's not threatening.

02:04:06:21 Male

The first time we came to church really was out of curiosity more than anything and to meet a few more people. But it's been really our centre of the village, an opportunity to regularly get to meet people, see how they are, catch up with people. I think probably the last time I went to church was at

school. And so as I say we came along to see what it was like and I think the relevance to us here is the fact it is the centre of the community. The services are fun. They're informative because they do reflect the rural nature of this community. And now we are regular churchgoers.

02:04:39:17 **Margaret Armstrong**

I've had lots of conversations with people that they wouldn't have recognised as being spiritual at all before, but now are beginning to see that they are. And just simply managing the churchyard for wildlife and making a record of the wildflowers as they come out and displaying it in the church has helped them connect with the natural world and the glory of God revealed in it. And then the conversations flow. I think when you have a very small community you have to be aware of not overburdening people with responsibilities and cares. It means that actually when we do have a service everybody is here. Rather than if you have a lot more services there are three or four each time. So it focuses people's attention. It means that when you do meet, everybody is there and everybody is encouraging each other. We now regularly have 75 percent plus of our total village population attending church regularly. Sometimes I get really excited by it because almost everybody in the community is engaged in some way, or touched by the ministry of the church now.

02:05:44:15 **Male**

The church is the heart of this community. It's a very small community. It's only 20 odd houses. But there is no village hall. There is nothing else. There is no pub. And it's right. It's been here a 1,000 years. We're beginning to use it again for what it was designed for.

02:06:00:11 **Female**

Before people would move into the village and we hardly got to know them. Through the church now we've got to know people as they move in and people are very keen to come to church, so it's been a dramatic change.

02:06:14:07 **Margaret Armstrong**

We started with the spiritual life of the church and the community and that's what we've worked on. I think a lot of people now are aware that their spiritual life is part of everyday life rather than something set apart in a box separate that just the super holy do on Sundays. Most people in this village are now actively involved in coming and sharing and loving and caring for each other and for their church and worshipping together when we have a service. And that's changed the whole community life because the community now are involved in caring and worshipping with each other.

02:07:02:09 **Narrator**

Just along the coast from the North Yorkshire town of Whitby with its ancient Abbey and long maritime history is the tiny village of Fylingthorpe. Here the Methodist church and its minister realised there was a need to try a new way of being church aimed at those who had stopped coming long ago, or in fact had never been at all.

02:07:24:02 **Janet Whelan**

Initially we thought it might be good to try and do café church for young adults. The majority of people that actually came, although this was in Whitby, came from this village of Fylingthorpe, or the next village of Robin Hood's Bay. One of them said 'could we meet in Fylingthorpe Methodist church because it would be nearer and can we bring our children?' And we decided to focus it for all ages, so not only could they bring the children, but the children's grandparents could come as well if

they wanted to. Usually at the Gathering we start by singing and then we have a quieter time. We do some sort of Bible work. On some occasions I have used godly play, which is about getting down on the floor and using material to tell the story.

02:08:17:24 **Janet Whelan**

I wonder what this could be.

02:08:19:18 **Child**

A mouse.

02:08:21:04 **Janet Whelan**

Could be a...

02:08:21:14 **Child**

What I really like about the gathering is the songs we do and we sometimes act things out, which is great.

02:08:29:11 **Janet Whelan**

We have a prayer time, which is interactive. We've had bubble prayers and party popper prayers and putting pebbles in water. It's about talking to God in different sorts of circumstances. And then we tend to finish with another song and put the kettle on and have fellowship over food.

02:08:48:12 **Female**

It's fun. It's fun for the children. They really enjoy coming. They're learning new things all the time and my middle one especially is really interested in coming. He loves music.

02:08:59:04 **Female**

Do not be afraid...

02:09:00:20 **Janet Whelan**

In some ways it took me a little while to actually put it in the category of fresh expression. One of the things that was different was that it was midweek and early evening, which suited some people a lot better than Sundays. And it was very informal. In the countryside

I think people are sometimes reluctant to get involved in things that they don't know about. But a lot of the drawing in of people has been by word of mouth. I do know that there are some who attend who are not able to attend easily on a Sunday. I think perhaps for others the fact that it is more informal than worship and they're aware that the children don't have to sit still and be quiet and if they want to wander and play around it doesn't matter. I think that's something that can make them feel more comfortable.

02:09:56:19 Female

At school I was confirmed and then it sort of faded out as I got older and got more involved with going out and things like that, but then once the children came along that's when it started coming back. I don't always have them every weekend and Connor and Roland do rugby on a Sunday as well, so the timing's not great on a Sunday for us and a weekday is a good idea after school; it's lovely.

02:10:19:07 Janet Whelan

I think it could develop into a mature church, but I think anything like that particularly in this sort of community will take time. I would like to see the Gathering developing. I would like to see other people coming in who would be willing to lead because I think always you need people with new ideas, so that things don't get stale. I would like to think that there was something midweek in years to come, but because we don't know how the world will change in years to come, it might be that it's something very different to what the Gathering is now. And I think we have to keep our eyes open and ears open to what people feel that they need and be willing to go along with that.

02:11:23:09 Narrator

Down in rural Hampshire a fresh expression of church has taken root and is probably unique. Now the congregation don't meet in the local church or even the village hall. They meet in the grounds of Malshanger House near the village of Oakley.

02:11:39:14 Peter Irwin-Clark

The Warham Trust is a collection of Christians who come to us fortnightly as a way of exploring how we can do church in a different way. We are attracting people who are not excited by church. Most of them would have a faith of some sort. We are a network church. We don't identify community geographically. We meet on the Malshanger Estate and we meet actually in the Club House where there used to be a Country Club, which folded. And we also have the old carpenter's hut and we have the Summer House, so we can put different small groups in each. On a typical Sunday morning, we'll have people arriving from 8.30 onwards to set up and to pray. And then at 9.45 the congregation start arriving. And they have bacon butties and a really good cup of coffee. So at 10.00 o'clock they all come through and we have the first 25 minutes or so all age worship setting the theme and then for 40 minutes or so thereafter people have a choice of four or five different workshops. And then after that 40 minutes they all come back for communion, back in the Club House.

02:12:49:13 Male

It's very congenial. Everybody sits round as you can see round the table. Got comfortable chairs. You can put your bits and pieces on the table. It's a lot more practical.

02:12:57:19 Female

This church is really special because I can bring my kids here. They love it.

It's more modern. We're not sitting in pews and it's just a new friendly way of introducing young people and other people to the church cause it's a church with a difference.

02:13:13:08 CHATTER

02:13:17:04 Peter Irwin-Clark

People are finding it really helpful to be given a choice. I think in contemporary society you can't any longer say if you want a relationship with God you have to do it in this way, at this time, in this place. I think it's very important for people living in the country to be able to er, have the same capacity for choice. Now on the one hand we don't want to suck people away at all from their local parish churches, which need all the support they can get. On the other hand I think giving people the opportunity for breaking out of a rut or giving people the opportunity for people who don't like traditional church services, means that today everybody is mobile. So there is no reason in a rural setting why people shouldn't come. They would travel 25 minutes to go to have lunch with somebody, so why not travel 25 minutes and come and join us and they can bring their friends who they couldn't persuade to come to a normal service on the basis that there is something quite different going on here.

02:14:16:06 Female

In a rural area like this most of the churches are very small. There's often quite a large number of people in the older generation. I find that a church like this can help me grow my faith by the fact that as we meet together in small groups as part of the service you can get to know people. And often it's different people each week, but you're meeting with them, you're studying the Bible or looking at creative worship in a very small group. So you build up relationships. It's very easy to go to someone for prayer if you need it, but also it's large enough that there are

good Bible teachers and we can have the word explained to us and grow through hearing the word as well as through fellowship and praying together.

02:14:53:14 **Peter Irwin-Clark**

Warham has a network of small groups. They haven't developed into a full blown cell church, which was my original vision I think. But they have...., there are a network of women's groups during the day and then a variety of small groups. So we are the hub for a much wider expression of church. We don't want to fall back into the thing of saying you've got to do it this way. This is what the nanny church tells you, you have to do. And if people want to come up to us and wouldn't be going to a local church, then well and good. But I've had a policy of trying to send people back more into their churches and so I'm not running anything in competition with the local church.

02:15:37:01 **Peter Irwin-Clark**

I think I am quite persuaded that every area, every deanery ought to have a service of this sort for people who don't like a traditional church service as it's done. You could get a number of enthusiastic lay and clergy in a particular area saying 'let us go for this together. Let's find an appropriate venue. Let's offer a sort of church that is different from the models that are classically on offer'.

02:16:15:19 **Narrator**

So is there hope for a new spiritual harvest in the countryside? Even though the task is immense, one rector of a string of villages just outside Norwich believes there is.

02:16:28:09 **Sally Gaze**

Here in the Tas Valley benefice, in a group of six churches in the sense we've got six congregations and six PCC's. But they have seven church buildings, medieval church buildings

between them. But also what I suppose is a bit different about the Tas Valley benefice is that we have a cell church, which we refer to as a church without walls cause it doesn't have a building of its own. It meets in people's homes. The cell church sits alongside the other parish churches and really we see it as equivalent to a parish congregation. Our cell church has lots of little groups meeting midweek. Currently seven small groups - involves about another 40, 50 people. In a cell we do everything really that there is in being church. You know we support each other and pray for each other; we learn from the Bible; we worship God and we reach out in mission and witness in serving our local community. So everything that a church would do a cell church does, but it does it in a different way if you like and therefore it sort of suits different people.

02:17:37:22 **Female**

The cell group that I tend here in Tasburgh has been a kind of a mainstay in my life. I have a fellowship. Everyone's extremely supportive. It's a family.

02:17:49:11 **Sally Gaze**

The countryside is an environment that's changed an awful lot over the last few decades. People think of the countryside as a place where people you know in villages, they've lived for generations and all their family are around them, and you know it's dominated by farming. And, really a lot of rural areas aren't much like that anymore. There are large numbers of people who've come into villages - not been there very long - and a much smaller percentage of people are actually involved in working on the land. In a way cell has helped us here to address that sense of need for community that people have. Especially, you know some people who are very isolated, as single parents and so on. It really gives a sort of family feel that perhaps sometimes used to be

there in smaller villages just because of people being neighbours, but it's no longer the case.

02:18:48:23 **Female**

I joined the cell a couple of years ago through Jane. She kept asking me for coffee mornings. And at the time my husband had just been diagnosed with a brain tumour, and there weren't many support networks to help us, so joining the cell just gave us a different network of support and a different network of friends that I knew I could always call on for prayer and just general support to get us through very difficult times really.

02:19:16:23 **Male**

We've been meeting together for about a year or so now as the group that we are. A very mixed group of people It's people from all sorts of backgrounds and as such it's really an absolute delight for me, how it has worked out.

02:19:32:07 **Female**

Me being part of a cell group is very much being part of a community, feeling part of really a family. To me they are like family and you can go along and talk about your problems and other peoples and not be judged and you know it's in confidence.

02:19:47:05 **Sally Gaze**

Cells are different from congregational church in the sense that in a cell that you can be much more intimate and confidential and there is a sort of inbuilt commitment to the other people in your cell. In a congregation you might be perhaps the only person under the age of 35 and you could feel quite isolated in your local village congregation. We had people becoming Christians. They weren't always ready to go into traditional worship. It was sort of like, 'well what is that thing going on up at the altar'? And actually cells because it's just meeting with a few people that you get to know very

well in somebody's house, is a much less threatening environment in which to sort of really learn about faith for the first time. We've really found it's made a huge difference. My dream for this group of villages really is that we'll see more people coming to know Jesus, but not only just coming to know who he is, but really that we'll be following him more closely and enthusiastically together. And Christians that come from all different perspectives, being able to respect each other and enjoy each other's company without having to constrain each other into each other's styles.

02:21:16:22 CUT