

Taking Our Context Seriously as We Attempt to Plant New Churches

We should not plant the same type of church in every situation. How do we listen carefully in a given context so that the church that develops reflects the unique character of its community or place? How do we take the “space” that we inhabit sufficiently seriously that “space” becomes the “place” in which God breathes his life into our activity? How does housing or neighbourhood become creative, life giving community?

Martin Robinson is Principal and Chief Executive of Springdale College: Together in Mission. Martin was born in India of missionary parents and then brought up in Scotland where his father was a church planter. When Martin was in his early twenties he trained for the ministry, and his first church was in the inner city of Birmingham. This multi-ethnic congregation was engaged in church planting, and Martin together with his wife Lynda led one of the new church plants. After thirteen years in local ministry, Martin went to work for the Bible Society in the UK in a variety of roles. In a period he was the Director of Mission and Theology. Martin has written many books on the broad theme of mission, including *Faith of the Believer* and *Invading Secular Space*. In 2002 Martin became national director of Together in Mission. In 2008 he became Principal of Springdale College. These two organizations (Together in Mission and Springdale College) became one organization in 2009 and will soon take the name ForMission.

I. The Church is Not the Issue

- a. For those of us in church (especially leadership) the church occupies our waking thoughts and dreams
- b. Mission preceded the church
- c. Mission helps us to re-imagine the church
- d. How the church engages in mission is the critical issue

II. A Circle of Accountability

- a. Having a clear picture of who we are going to be accountable for helps us to imagine mission
- b. Geography matters to a local church
- c. People groups also matter

- d. Who are we trying to reach?
- e. Equipping for personal witness is part of the mission of the church but not the central focus

III. Measuring Ourselves by the Mission

- a. Defining the task
- b. The perils of measuring ourselves against ourselves
- c. The mission drives our methods

IV. Changing the Conversation

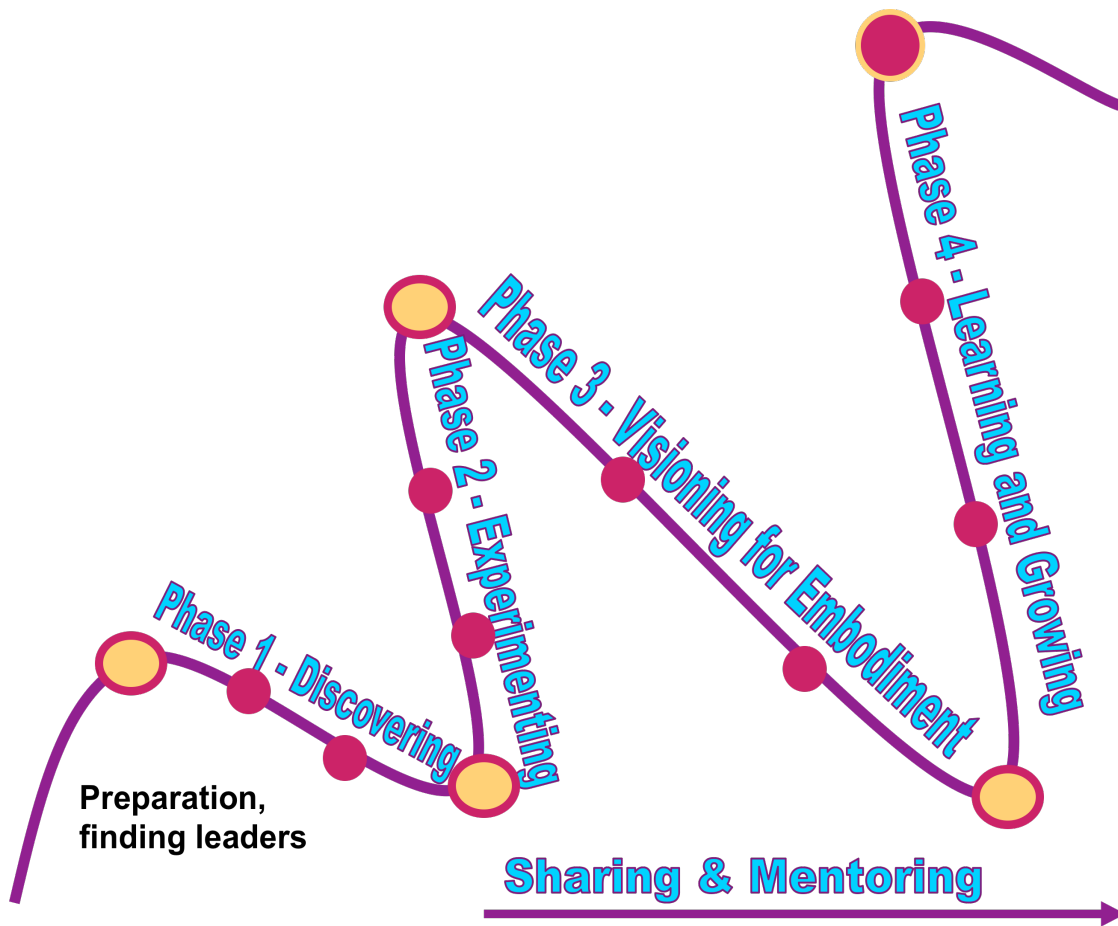
- a. Our neighbourhood is not there to serve the church
- b. Conversation begins with listening and with service
- c. In time we have permission to speak

V. The People of God Have the Answers for the People of God

- a. We are here now
- b. We have the resources we need for this moment
- c. There is huge creativity within the people of God

VI. Missional Experiment

- a. Launch an experiment
- b. Review, evaluate and learn
- c. Changing one thing changes everything
- d. Adaption and change is more like the sailing ship than the ocean liner



VII. The Church Matters to God

- a. God does not have a plan "B"

- b. The church is not just an evangelistic tool
- c. The church is the living embodiment of all that we preach
- d. The Christian life produces community and without community there is no gospel
- e. The church is not the issue but it is the “hermeneutic of the gospel”

Suggested Readings:

Inge, J. *A Christian Theology of Place*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

Kiefert, P. *We Are Here Now: A New Missional Era*. (Eagle: Allelon, 2006).

Roxburgh, A. J. *Missional: Joining God in the Neighbourhood*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

Schreiter, R.J. *Constructing Local Theologies*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985).

Sedmak, C. *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for the Artisans of a New Humanity*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002).

Swinton, J. and Mowat, H. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. (London: SCM, 2006).

Van Gelder, C. + Zscheile, D.J. *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).