

On behalf of Fresh Expressions Canada, thank you very much for the invitation to be here today. My name is Zack Ingles. I'm a lay leader in the Anglican Church, who for the past decade has been partnering with and pioneering ministries with parishes, dioceses and denominations across Canada.

During the day, I manage a day-shelter for the homeless in downtown Montreal, that was founded on the core Christian values of relationship and loving service; innovating in an often rigidly structured social service system. And in my spare time I'm part of 2 teams leading Fresh Expressions communities in Montreal. I'm also the content and media animator for Fresh Expressions Canada.

If you're familiar with the Fresh Expressions movement and what we are about, I would ask you to forget everything you know about us for the time being. And if you've never heard of us, then you have a head start.

In the simplest of terms, The Fresh Expressions movement seeks to orient / re-orient, equip / re-equip, and support practitioners in cultivating Christian communities that are deeply rooted in their local contexts.

We do this in a few different ways:

- We reach out to pioneers to hear their stories of starting something fresh, and pass along those learnings to our wider network.
- We provide training opportunities for church leaders, lay persons, and really anyone that will listen to us. Notable program include our "ReImagine Church" seminar (available for free at freshexpressions.ca) and our most recent venture: "The Missional Leadership Cohort"
- We work with practitioners from all denominations, and all experience levels, to equip and sharpen their skills to recognize, identify, and respond to missional opportunities in their midst.
- We also aid established ministries to transition from heritage expression to fresh expression, or to bring harmony to a blended expression; where the two can coexist alongside one another.

So let's dive in! We're talking about leadership at this gathering. And we don't have a ton of time. So we are going to skip right to the good stuff. If you remember nothing else from me today, remember this:

- When we empower those we disciple to forge their own paths, rather than trying to keep them moving in our preferred or prescribed direction, we open ourselves to the chaotic leading of the Holy Spirit and protect ourselves from the temptation of preservationism.
- Or, in slightly less academic language, when you allow a new, lesser experienced driver to take the wheel, you may just be surprised with the shortcuts and new routes they discover.

The medium I prefer to use when talking about the Fresh Expressions is story-telling. I do this intentionally because when we begin unpacking what it looks like to start something fresh, it is vital to understand context; so we aren't gripped by fear, doubt or even resentment. Or conversely, so that we don't see every successful fresh expression as a saviour ministry. There aren't any one-size-fits-all solutions. Until we try stuff out in the real world, we have no idea what's going to happen.

Context is everything.

I want to share a story with you about an experience I had as a leader planting a new ministry in a new church. This was an experience where I learned that listening for opportunities and saying yes, before considering all of the consequences, allows for more of Holy Spirit and less of Zack.

What I hope you learn from this story is that: Drawing from a limited, or often non-existent, pool of resources (which I imagine many of us find ourselves confronted with regularly) requires an out-of-the box approach. That we can't expect to use conventional tools in unconventional situations. This will serve as a real world example of the qualities of a fresh expressions pioneer v.s. a much more typical church leader.

So several years ago, I was part of a small church renewal/plant in Ontario. They hired me on to plant several of their ministries; one of which was music. The ask seemed simple enough: start a contemporary, evangelical style worship team to cover the musical needs of the community. The problem was, it was an Anglican Church... and Anglicans don't generally do that sort of thing; let alone attract the kind of musicians that perhaps a more charismatic denomination would. So there I was, ready to go, with no idea where to begin.

So I began praying, a lot. I prayed that God would send me great and talented musicians that would serve their church and bring **MY** vision for this ministry to life. I prayed this prayer for months. And I got nothing.

- What do you do when you need people, but don't have people? I wasn't trained for this. There we supposed to be people... An unconventional problem, requires an unconventional solution.

So I was out for coffee with one of the students I was pastoring and telling them about the vision I had for this particular ministry. And I was sharing my frustration of not having the people I needed to make it happen... And you know what they said to me? "I could learn an instrument, if you would think that would help."

Let's press pause for a moment: I had spent months looking for people to build this thing with and I didn't even notice the people right in front of me, because they didn't meet the criteria I thought I needed to make it happen. So now this student put this offer out to me and everything inside of me was kicking and screaming to respond "No their not good enough" or "I don't have the energy to do this." But, for some reason the only word I was able to get out in that moment was: "OK"

This began a long process of mentorship with this particular student and many others to come. I would spend weeks doing music lessons with them, helping them with the fundamentals of whatever instrument they were learning. We'd talk about what it meant to serve in a team and lead in a congregation. And within a few weeks I'd usually have them on stage leading with me, sometimes with knowledge of just 1 drum beat or 4 guitar chords. So, we'd build the entire set around that one beat or those few chords. Was it the high caliber musicianship I felt I deserved as a professional? No. But, it was a valuable learning experience on multiple levels.

- For me: it was a humbling experience. I had my head so high in the clouds of **MY** own ideals, I was missing the opportunities God had placed right in front of me. I needed to learn that it is rare that things go according to **MY** plans and that if I'm not careful to pay attention to how the Holy Spirit may be working, I may completely miss the mark.

- For the new team member: This was a moment where a leader called out potential in them. Sometimes, without even knowing if the talent was there. They were invested in from ground zero; this included hours of practice, relationship building, being told that they could do it, and that their contribution was important.
- For the rest of the community: (and I'd like to emphasize this) Having an **under**developed leader on stage, leading from a place of vulnerability (even making mistakes occasionally) communicates what a church values; hearts over hands.

This is something I have been firmly convicted in: I will always favour a lesser experienced leader with a sincere heart to serve over an over talented person seeking a platform. Having a homeless man in the choir singing most of his notes flat will communicate more of what your church is about than having a killer band perfectly nailing the chorus of "How Great Is Our God" every Sunday.

It's infectious. I started to take the opportunity to tell stories of how different members of the music team came to be on stage; to point out what may not be so obvious. "Did you know that person hadn't touched a guitar a few weeks ago?" "Isn't amazing how they saw a need and rose to the occasion, without having any prior experience?" And the more the rest of the community knew what was going on, the more they too began to feel that they could offer to do things or even pitch brand new ideas, despite their experience levels.

Which of God's chosen leaders had the appropriate qualifications before being asked to lead? None. God continually calls the weak, the under-qualified and vulnerable to be at the forefront of kingdom building opportunities. And it's our role as leaders, to be attentive to the undiscovered potential sitting in our church pews... This is the ICNU principal. Jesus didn't ask for the disciples CV's before recruiting. He simply said "Come, I see in you the potential for something great."

This experience was a three-fold discipleship opportunity. I was able to disciple the team member, they were able to disciple me and we both were able to disciple the congregation. Everyone was discipling everyone. And the catalyst was using an out-of-the-box solution to solve an out-of-the-box problem.

- I will add a footnote here to say that there were some risks involved in this. For example: I once had a church warden approach me after a service, in which I had given a couple (lesser experienced) students the opportunity to lead the entire worship service. And you know what he said? "I get what you're going for. But, we have a certain expectation of how music happens and what it sounds like. And these students were sometimes difficult to follow and they made mistakes..." Hmmm

The goal of our gatherings isn't perfection. It's inclusion. We are not putting on a production, we're inviting people to a family dinner where we celebrate those with obvious talents, like dad who slaved away in the kitchen all day preparing a feast. And we celebrate the folks like our niece, who baked a cake for everyone, but mixed up the sugar with the salt.

Maybe your community is just waiting for permission; for someone to just say "OK" with no strings attached.

The primary difference in leadership in a Fresh Expression when compared to a Heritage Expression is not a question of "What?" it's a question of "Why?" It's not about the praxis, it's about the perspective.

The temptation, as I alluded to previously, is to look at the newest and flashiest ministry in your area and covet it. How can I get what they have? The easy answer is to copy the things we see at the surface, rather than studying their context; which is a much more labour intensive process. This is not a question of what successful ministries are doing. It's a question of why they chose to do those particular things instead of something else. Perspective.

The most successful ministry plants I have seen all start with a common question: "What does this community need?" And by community, I don't mean just the immediate church congregation. I mean your entire neighbourhood, town or city.

Pioneers begin with a needs assessment; looking at things like demographics surveys for the neighbourhood, talking to local politicians and law enforcement about their concerns and hopes for the community, and most importantly getting out and talking to the people you are trying to reach. Some of the most foundational questions about the needs of a particular community can be answered on the street corner or in a coffee shop...

"Excuse me, I'm part of a church (or I'm part of a community group) and I'm spending some time getting to know the neighbourhood and asking people: "What are some of the greatest needs in this area?" You will be surprised, encouraged, and challenged with the responses you receive. And they will be valuable learnings for your current and future ministry projects.

You see friends, the sobering truth is that we have put the majority of our eggs into a one-size-fits-all basket. Maybe your community doesn't need another church. Maybe they need a homeless shelter, or a community centre, or a bible study on the soccer pitch. And if your community truly and honestly does need a church, then be a church so deeply rooted in that community, meeting the needs of the immediate congregation and the community beyond.

In addition to prioritizing our "Why's" over our "What's" another important characteristic of leadership in a Fresh Expression is lateral structure. Do you remember what I said earlier about the one thing I hoped you would remember from today?

"When we empower those we disciple to forge their own paths, rather than trying to keep them moving in our preferred or prescribed direction, we open ourselves to the chaotic leading of the Holy Spirit and protect ourselves from the temptation of preservationism."

One of the most difficult things for a highly educated expert (which includes most of us) in charge of an organization is to surrender control. **WE** have ideas and visions that **WE** want to make happen. And this has generally been the approach of church leadership for as far back as we can remember; top-down. The one with the most seniority, education, and privilege, directs those around them. And in many cases, this kind of leadership is effective.

But, when we examine new expressions of church, ones that are effectively rooted in their contexts, we see another dimension to their leadership:

- Involvement and ownership of the ministry by the participants. The people that are most visibly directing and running things are the same people who are participating. Lay persons at the forefront and formal leaders supporting from behind.

You see, accessibility at its core is less about welcoming people and providing them the road map to what you're doing, and more about giving the newest, the youngest, the most marginalized, and the **under-privileged** the same amount of seniority and influence as veteran members.

- What if we gave the person who comes to church for the first time this Sunday to the ability to shape what the service next week looks like? What would change? What would stay the same? How would it impact the community? And what message would it communicate to this new person about who Jesus is and who His church is?

I'll be the first to admit this is difficult. Our church structures are often designed in stark contrast with these ideas. There is a lot of unlearning and reorienting that needs to happen on the part of the leader. But, these are some key characteristics of a Fresh Expressions pioneer:

Their perspective is vast and they continually prioritize people over ideas, preferences, and traditions. They lead from behind; empowering those participating to drive and direct. The disciples are discipling each other.

The call of a Fresh Expressions pioneer is to:

- **Listen** to the people they wish to reach and disciple
- **Identify** their needs and the needs of the wider community
- **Empower** them to address those needs for one another

When we empower those we disciple to forge their own paths, rather than trying to keep them moving in our preferred or prescribed direction, we open ourselves to the chaotic leading of the Holy Spirit and protect ourselves from the temptation of preservationism.

May you be bold in cultivating the attitudes of a Fresh Expressions pioneer. May you take risks and make mistakes for the sake of the people you wish to reach. And may we open ourselves to that which is infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

I wish we could spend more time diving deeper into stories of communities and leaders who embody these qualities. And I would encourage you, that if this conversation has left you unsettled or wanting more, lean into that feeling. The Holy Spirit could be trying to tell you something.

Our team would love to continue this conversation with you. Reach out to us through our website or on social media. We'd love to hear your thoughts, ideas, and maybe even stories of trying something fresh. We can even connect you with our training opportunities or maybe even bring one to your area.

Thank you!

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Content & Media Animator

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