



Kairos Network Church (West Yorkshire and the Dales Diocese)

A case study by Catherine Ellerby,
freelance writer, in conversation with the
Revd Mark Carey, Pioneer Minister

Summary

In January 2012, Kairos Network Church featured in a Bulletin article, “Resourcing Mission through Innovative Pastoral Arrangements¹”. It was an example showing how a Bishop’s Mission Order put in place in May 2011 marked its transition from a parish church to a fresh expression of church serving the whole deanery of Harrogate.

This case study revisits Kairos, now in its fifth year, to see what has happened since 2012; specifically, it highlights how this new church with a new structure has continued to develop its vision focusing on discipleship and mission and how it has become more confident in its own identity and purpose along the way.

Introduction

The advertisement for Revd Mark Carey’s role offered “a mission shaped opportunity for a pioneering priest”. “*It was the best phrased advert I’d ever seen*” he says.

The position had arisen following decline in the parish of St Mary’s, Low Harrogate with All Saints Harlow Hill. St Mary’s church building had been deemed unsafe to meet in and closed some years earlier; the congregation continued to meet in a school hall and a decision was subsequently made to sell the chapel on Harlow Hill. This was not the end, however and led eventually to a more radical solution as Mark explains:

“I am very thankful that the Bishop and Archdeacon and remaining leadership of St Mary’s had the courage to look on this as less a failure and more an opportunity.”

Appointed in 2008 to the role of Pioneer Minister, Mark continues: “*When I arrived there was a fair amount of demoralisation but there was also a sense of commitment from the small numbers remaining. There was no obvious vision at the time so what was needed was leadership, vision and encouragement. There had previously been attempts at all sorts of different church growth models but no focus. There was prayerfulness, desire for a new thing but no idea what that new thing could look like.....*”

http://www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/UserFiles/File/Resourcing_Mission_Bulletin/Jan_2012/Resourcing_Mission_through_Innovative_Pastoral_Arrangements_January_2012.pdf



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Developing Vision

Despite the lack of any cohesive vision, Mark says that in those early days, there was a desire to do something missional – and alongside that a sense that God can do something with very little. He talks of *“a sense of death and resurrection – that God would bring something out of what had died with the closure of the buildings”*. He admits that this was difficult and challenging but he and the remaining team began to think and talk about the idea of a network and communities as a way forward.

Kairos started as a café style gathering twice a month on Sundays at 10.30 am. These were community orientated, relational and very story based - telling good news stories aimed at raising faith again, while bringing in contemporary worship and re-introducing children’s work.

Meanwhile, Mark continued to work on re-casting the vision, getting people on-board and enthusiastic about change as well as preparing them to be a part of that change as the vision developed. It was clear that lots had been attempted before the churches had closed, but nothing had really worked: *“I had to say, this is what we’re going to do. The church is on its way out – we know everyone is very tired yet everyone wants something to happen.”*

This period wasn’t without difficulties and Mark closed the leadership team he had inherited within a year: *“I sat down and talked with them about what was and what wasn’t working – it was time to step back and see how things were going. There was a certain amount of control which wasn’t helpful and I had to find ways of moving things on sensitively and lovingly.”*

A Network Church

Kairos takes its name from the Greek word which describes a way of talking about time; not chronological everyday time, but the moments when something new happens. In Mark 1 Jesus says *“The (Kairos) time has come. The Kingdom of God is near.”* The message of Jesus is that the time is now.

The new thing which happened at Kairos was the beginning of a Network church, something which Mark says continues to be an on-going work in progress today.

“Our focus is on discipleship and mission. Our aim is to release communities of followers in the mission of Jesus across the Deanery of Harrogate and even beyond. To do this we are seeking to develop a Base and Communities. The Base hosts worship gatherings, trains and supports the release of missional disciples as leaders.

“The Mission-Shaped Communities (MSCs) are seeking to share a life of mission and discipleship. People join in various ways for instance through relationship and invitation, via Alpha or Gatherings. They meet in different ways and at different times each week.

“In practice, they are working out how to live in communities that are church in their own right – like extended families seeking to work out what the mission of Jesus is amongst their network or in their neighbourhood. We are licensed as a Bishop’s Mission Order (BMO) which means we don’t have any boundaries in terms of territory and we seek to gather and scatter in a way that is responsive to the Holy Spirit.”

Mission Shaped Communities

There are nine different MSCs developing, all at different stages. Some are emerging out of other MSCs, others are just starting up. Each has a different vision for mission around the Harrogate area but they share a vision to encourage, to multiply and to enable more people to grow in discipleship. For example,

- Links focuses on a neighbourhood, and members are involved in a community centre. They host Lazy Sunday drop in once a month and meet weekly together.
- Allsorts gathers once a month for Sunday lunch. A multi-generational extended community, it also meets in smaller groups for Discovery Bible Studies.
- Resurrection Bikes² is developing from a charity bike project into a community of men who resurrect bicycles for charity. They meet weekly and are experimenting with ways of praying and worshipping.

“All the MCs are experimenting, while being intentional about being church,” says Mark. “We are continuing to look at how we bless others, find ways into the community - engaging with people and finding simple ways of engaging in the Bible. We are finding it is a low maintenance and high blessing way of working.”

Worship Gatherings

The pattern of gatherings for worship has varied since the church started but Mark says they are trying to reflect and respond to where God is wanting them to go; in particular this reflects an emphasis on the MSCs rather than on increasing opportunities for central gatherings.

The gatherings will shortly reduce from twice-monthly to monthly. A weekly 9am Holy Communion service will continue. Mark explains: *“Everyone is being encouraged to participate in an MSC, though we recognise that some will simply want to remain involved in a gathering. The weekly 9am Communion gives an opportunity for a regular connection point and is a very important part of our development.... We want to demonstrate that we value MSCs alongside the more traditional value we have placed on Sunday services. This means we will seek to prioritise discipleship that is 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. If it’s true that ‘you do what you believe in’, we believe that ‘doing’ MSC has to be something we continue to invest in and shouldn’t be a poor cousin in relation to the Sunday gathering.”*

Growth in numbers and encouraging spiritual maturity

Mark says that: *“It’s our vision to grow, to multiply and to see more growing in discipleship, and we’re seeing growth in many areas, those who are engaging with the MSCs include all ages and all sorts of people, many who have come from the ‘fringe’”.*

This growth is reflected in the numbers. In 2012, 70 people were involved in MSCs rising to 95 in 2014; latest figures show that 161 people are now part of these communities

² Resurrection Bikes: <http://www.resurrectionbikes.org.uk>

either at core or fringe level. Alongside this the number attending the central gatherings remains at around 100. The church has about 25 children and 17 youth, all of whom are involved either in MSCs with their family or at Kairos Kids Tuesday Tea (KKTT), a biweekly discipleship opportunity, or in the Youth MSC called Blaze.

In terms of growing spiritually, 30 people are now involved in “huddles”, discipleship groups which Mark oversees and which he views as a key part of the network’s growth and development. *“Through these leadership groups we are intentionally investing in disciple-making and multiplying the MSCs.”*

Kairos is also developing the wider network of relationships seeking to encourage discipleship and mission in other church contexts. A discipleship year called Step Up³ is growing and developing, enabling more people to be focussed on intentionally investing in their development as disciples in their church contexts. Step Up is a partnership with other churches and this year involves 40 people from seven different churches.

Mark explains:

*“We are hosting regular discipleship and mission days in partnership with 3dm Europe⁴ as well as inviting church leaders into Skype huddles to enable them to have a place of process for the transitions in mission especially to do with missional communities. We love Mike Breen’s book *Developing a Discipling Culture*⁵ and we are enabling other churches and leadership teams to join in the process of learning and training that we have going for our leaders. Three churches have so far brought teams along and others have expressed an interest in participating in the future. 3dm Europe are a mine of information and inspiration along with the Missional Communities website and blog.”*

Staffing and Leadership Structure

The leadership structure has been developed to support the development of discipleship and mission through the MSCs and other key ministry areas and Mark says that they have aimed for a *“fairly flat model because we want to release as many leaders as possible.”*

Mark leads the Resource Base Team which supports and implements the BMO vision and includes a Pioneer Curate along with a number of volunteers and part time staff - two administrators, a children and families’ leader, a Centre of Youth ministry student, two youth leaders, someone supporting the development of Step Up, and a Network and Community development leader.

The MSC leaders are led by Mark and form a different group; both the team and MSCs are supported by Trustees (who are also responsible for governance and running the hall) and a Bishop’s Mission Order vision team. Mark considers that the close relationship between

³ Step Up: <https://stepupteam.wordpress.com> - a year of intensive discipleship, based in and around local church, to people of all ages.

⁴ <https://3dmeurope.com>

⁵ ‘Developing a Discipling Culture’ by Mike Breen ISBN-10: 0982452101 ISBN-13: 978-0982452103

the Bishop and the Bishop's Visitor – who partners with the BMO and reports to the Bishop - has been very important.

In the first few years the church was supported financially through the Church Commissioners and Fresh Expressions, but as a condition of the BMO they are working towards becoming self-sustaining, to allow them to fund the stipend and costs of the pioneer leader. Mark says that the people of Kairos are increasingly giving to support Kairos. However, he acknowledges that at the moment this remains a significant challenge to a church that prioritises discipleship to be able to 'excel in the grace of giving'.

Who comes?

Kairos welcomes people of all ages, recently celebrating a 90th birthday and seeing three babies born into the wider community. There is particular focus on welcoming people with learning difficulties.

Mark says: *“Some of those who come have returned to faith, while others are meeting Jesus for the first time. It's difficult to say with confidence exactly how many people come – we are just getting to the stage when we can count with confidence as we emerge from the early years of transition. People seem to be coming because of our emphasis upon relationship, our community feel.*

“Others are coming through Alpha where they've had an opportunity to have a more overt encounter with faith. Harrogate is a fairly churched area so a lot of people will have had some experience of church but no connection or a relationship with Jesus. We're interested in seeing people go through a process from nominal or de-churched to having an encounter.”

Challenges of doing things in a new way

In a new church doing things in a new way, there have been challenges, many of which Mark admits are on-going: *“Making discipleship and mission the centre of what we do is counter to how many of us have experienced church. That strong church culture is good but it's not the be all and end all. We are developing a culture of discipleship that is at times quite subversive to the other ways we have experienced church.”*

“Sometimes it's been easy to have an expectation of “osmosis” in church and believe that a good sermon is everything and will filter through to people. But we're saying that it's not just about that; we love Sunday worship gatherings but there is more. It's about asking how we live that out. It's about taking Jesus's command, to 'go and make disciples' really seriously and not just stopping there, but going on to 'do everything I've commanded you,' and work out what that really means for people in their lives.”

Some people have not stayed with Kairos and quite a number have enthusiastically joined in but then moved on. Some because what they thought what Kairos was going to be didn't materialise, some because their expectations of church were not being met.

Others weren't able to cope, Mark says, with the exploratory nature of the early years trying to work out what MSCs look like in their context. As a result of this, there has been a lot of movement which, he admits, can be demoralising. Managing relationships disturbances - while keeping hold of the vision - has sometimes been tough.

On the other hand, some of the harder things have brought fruit and encouragement:

“One of the biggest challenges last year,” says Mark, “was the closure overnight of three of our MSCs. They all closed for good reasons but it was nerve racking – a big step of faith. Out of this we saw more communities emerging and the strengthening of existing communities. Sometimes something dies and you’re never quite sure what’s going to emerge. Just when it looks like things are falling apart, God steps in. It’s one of the things that we keep discovering: God is in the business of death and resurrection.”

Lessons learned

Looking back, there are a number of things Mark would have done differently including taking longer to develop the MSCs: *“it really was by grace that we survived the first attempts.”*

Mark says he would also take more time getting alongside leaders in discipleship relationship and spend more time praying and gathering others to pray in the early years especially. *“We did pray,” Mark says, “but not enough!”*

Strengths of the network church model and vision for the future

As a fresh expression of church, Mark says that one of the strengths of this model is the clarity of focus on mission and discipleship that isn’t dependent upon Sunday gatherings.

Another is an ability to be flexible and responsive to the Holy Spirit, *“We have developed a climate of not fearing change and are embracing a discipleship culture.*

“Our vision is to get increasingly competent at releasing communities of missionary disciples – we don’t want to be simply a church with some missional communities we want to be a network of communities over a wide area.”

Having been on the journey from the start, Mark says he is excited about going forward and seeing people growing as intentional disciples of Christ and getting a sense of what God is calling them to do - hearing and obeying. This reflects the very heart of Kairos.

An example of this is seeing how Kairos people are developing a vision themselves. Mark says: *“I’m excited that a Kairos person is developing a vision to serve amongst young people who are self-harming and that others are exploring what it looks like for children to be released as disciples. One couple have started a charity called Lifeline⁶ that is working on housing the homeless people who would otherwise be stuck in Harrogate’s homeless shelter – they have just opened their third house.”*

A New Identity

He has also noticed a shift in the way Kairos sees itself which he feels has been very positive: *“A significant revelation for me over the last year or so has been a conscious movement from defining ourselves by what we aren’t (a parish or inherited church etc.) to identifying with who we are; that is, a network of groups and relationships focused on discipleship and mission. We are a new church, planted in the ashes of the old one.”*

“I believe that Kairos is a good example of how it is possible to work creatively across a deanery and in a diocese when facing a need to close buildings and confront decline. It could have been

⁶ <https://lifelineharrogate.wordpress.com/>

such a negative thing, but actually has proved to be just the right thing to grow a new form and expression of church here in Harrogate.

“The Church should never be seen as one size fits all – there are lots of different ways of being in communion with each other. For me that’s confirmation that there is a massive amount of flexibility in the Church of England – we don’t always have to invent new structures as it’s possible to work within them and work together for mission. It is discipleship which is key, we have to ask ‘What is God saying? And what am I going to do about it?’

Further information

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