



# Church On the Edge

## Breaking out of the gravitational pull of Christendom

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*After many years of hard work an inventor discovered the art of making fire, so he took his tools to the snow clad northern mountains, and initiated the local tribe into the art and advantages of making fire. The locals became absorbed in this new thing, so much so that it did not occur to them to thank the inventor. The inventor was one of those rare human beings who didn't need to be revered, such was his greatness, all the inventor sought was the satisfaction of knowing that someone had benefited from his discovery.*

*The next tribe he went to was just as eager to learn, but the local priests were jealous of the strangers hold on the people so had the inventor assassinated. To cover up their crime they had a portrait painted of the inventor, and set it on the main alter of the temple, they even wrote a liturgy so his name would be revered and remembered, they enshrined the fire making tools in casket and it was said that they healing to all who laid hands on them with faith.*

*The priests came together and compiled a book on the life of the inventor, this holy book told of the inventors loving kindness and it was offered as an example for others to emulate, and his deeds were so eulogized and his superhuman nature made it an article of faith. The priests ensured it was handed down the generations, and the liturgy was kept, they ruthlessly punished people who questioned or deviated from the doctrines. Caught up as they were in these religious tasks the people completely forgot the art of making fire.*



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Church on the edge set out as an experiment to see what the emerging church and missional youth work could learn from another. It was a partnership and piloted in three areas.

# Beyond the lid



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How do we journey  
in mission with  
young people?

What may  
Donovan's new  
place look like?

What can youth  
work & emerging  
church learn from  
each other?

What might  
a missional approach  
look like?

What does Tacking  
look like in reality?

How do we  
collapse the gap  
between church  
and mission?

How do we grow  
church from  
scratch?

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We were asking a number of questions, both missional and ecclesiological in nature and looking to answer these through action research



# Action Research Approach

- Builds on work already done through Meet Them where they're at and Off the Beaten Track
- Grows from the FYT heritage of kingdom centred missional youth work with young people

“God is about a big purpose in and for the whole of creation. The church has been called into life to be both the means of this mission and a foretaste of where God is inviting all creation to go. Just as its Lord is a mission-shaped God, so the community of God's people exists, not for themselves but for the sake of the work. Mission is therefore not a program or project some people in the Church do from time to time (as in “mission trip”, “mission budget” and so on); the church's very nature is to be God's missionary people...”

Roxburgh A and Romanuk F *The missional leader - equipping your church to reach a changed world*. Jossey Bass 2006 page xv

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It was about trying to put into practice in a supported, accountable but no holds barred an approach to mission that hadn't really been tried in a western context

# What is Church?

- Church is Mystery (Eph 5 v 31 and 32)
- Described analogically e.g. body, vine, etc
- Images suggest '*attitude and a course of action*'
- John 10 v10

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Part of the problem in helping us move forward is in our thinking about Church. We have a fairly static and fixed idea about what is Church. I would also question the authenticity of our views and concepts of Church based some of the following.

Church is Mystery (Eph 5 v 31 and 32) BUT we can't cope with this kind of uncertainty we need things pinned down we need to know what is and what isn't church. Even Dulles in Models of church starts with this point but goes on to give definition?

Described analogically e.g. body, vine, etc Jesus and in the letters use similes and metaphor the common thing amongst these images is that .....

Images suggest '*attitude and a course of action*' They often talk about process and outcome but we have this static idea about church Hence Planting rather than growing

John 10 v10. For me this is the key scripture we need to focus on as we seek to be missionaries to the world around us.

# Tacking towards the City

- Tacking – a zigzagging process to enable a sailing vessel to progress forward into the wind
- Tacking - helping young people and society become more fully human, by a process of purposeful, deliberate and informal interactions

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Tacking was a key concept underlying the project



# Tacking towards the city

- The city on the hill is lit by the ethics of Christ
- The journey helps you recognise the light
- You may loose sight of the city from time to time and can only see the distant glow
- You are always moving even when alone but at some point you will need to travel with others

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Our aim was to be and grow church with young people on the streets



# Tacking with Christ



**Personal  
Development**

**Group  
Development**

**Societal  
Development**

**Spiritual  
Development**

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As Jesus tacked his way to the cross and engaged people he did so in many ways but the common themes I pulled out were that his interactions were about

**Personal Development** - The growth of the individual, moving towards becoming more Christ-like and fully human. Becoming okay with questions and doubts, accepting different viewpoints but still maintaining relationships with people.

**Group Development** - The growth of the group, becoming friends and community, developing openness and acceptance of one another, and a willingness to stay part of the group even though you may disagree.

**Societal Development** - Being prepared to challenge the accepted, working towards a more equal and fair society. In order for this area to be effective conscientisation must take place in the personal development area.

**Spiritual Development** - developing an awareness of Christ in others and the world around you. Perhaps pointing this out and using the awareness to facilitate the developmental areas above.



# Be and Grow Church

- A Contacting Community
- A Growing Community
- A Connecting Community
- An Exploring Community
- A Practicing Community

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Building on the work of Meet them where they're at we wanted the work to be framed to keep progressing and measurable so developed a five stage process

**A contacting community** – is about the initial approaches made towards the young people, the idea of going to them (incarnation), but also includes the management committee or structure that enables the process to happen.

Critical Questions may include: What structures work and release this sort of project to happen? What initial approaches to young people work? What shape does the project need, balancing needs of young people in the community with ethos of growing church, are the two compatible? How/when do you introduce the concept?

**A growing community** – is about the growing relationship between the young people and the workers, and between the young people themselves. It is about spending time with young people, building relationships and securing trust.

Critical Questions may include: What helps or hinders the relationship process? How/when do you introduce the concept? Where does ambiguity<sup>[1]</sup> fit into the process? The role of groups and risk?

**A connected community** – This stage is not about the young people committing to Christ but about being willing to commit to one another to go on a journey of discovery together as to what church may mean. There is a sense in which in part we are looking for young people to become action researchers and ask if this process in itself is transformative, in a similar way to the disciples being prepared to journey with Jesus before they knew who he was.

Critical Questions may include: What might resources might help build a sense of commitment? How we continue to work if young people do not want to? Can we mirror a rite of passage pre commitment to Christ what might this look like?

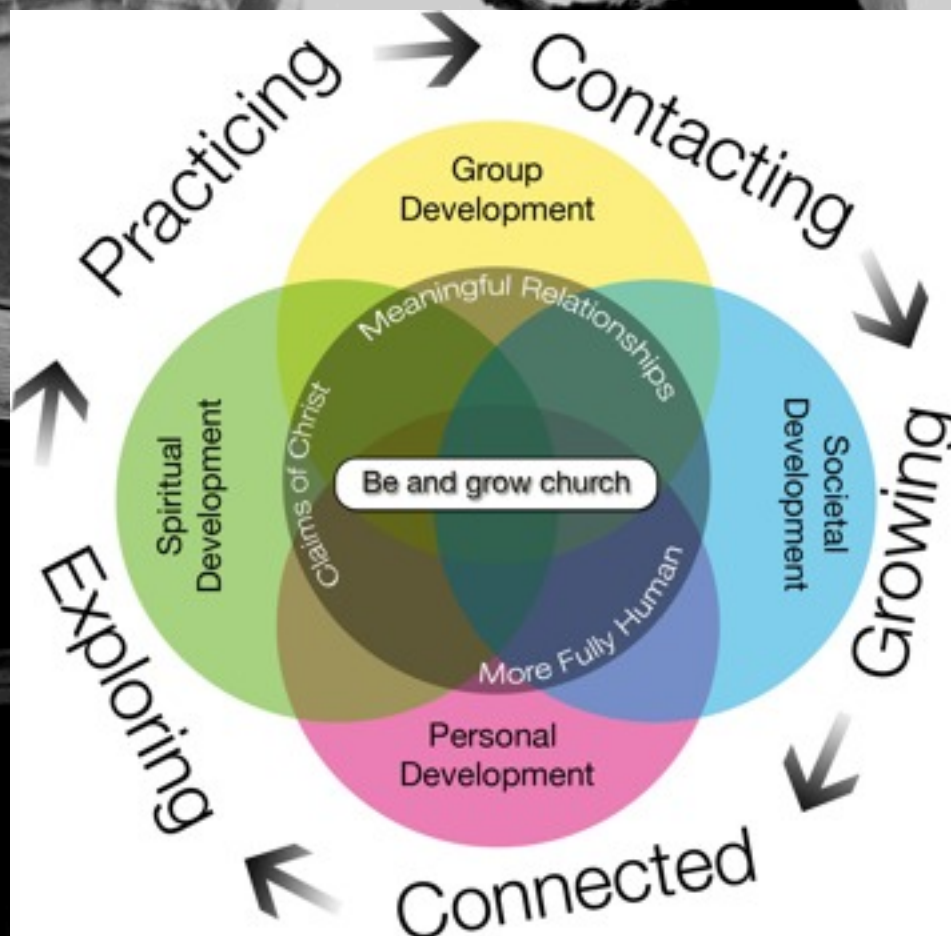
**An exploring community** – is the process of navigating and journeying together, exploring what Christ might mean to them, what concepts of church are relevant to them, work on the sacraments etc and an exploration of what church might look like in their context. It is about joining our story, Gods story and their story together.

Critical Questions may include: Is the exploration transformative, what does this look like? What are the young peoples takes on issues like the sacraments? How would they communicate the story?

**A Practicing community** where the group begins to practice what they have discovered over the previous stages.

Critical Questions may include: Has this approach collapsed gaps between mission and church? Is this relevant to young people not involved in the other stages of the process? How is it connected to tradition? How can it be replicated – is it temporary or group specific? Is it a cycle or a closed process?

# Drawing the strands together



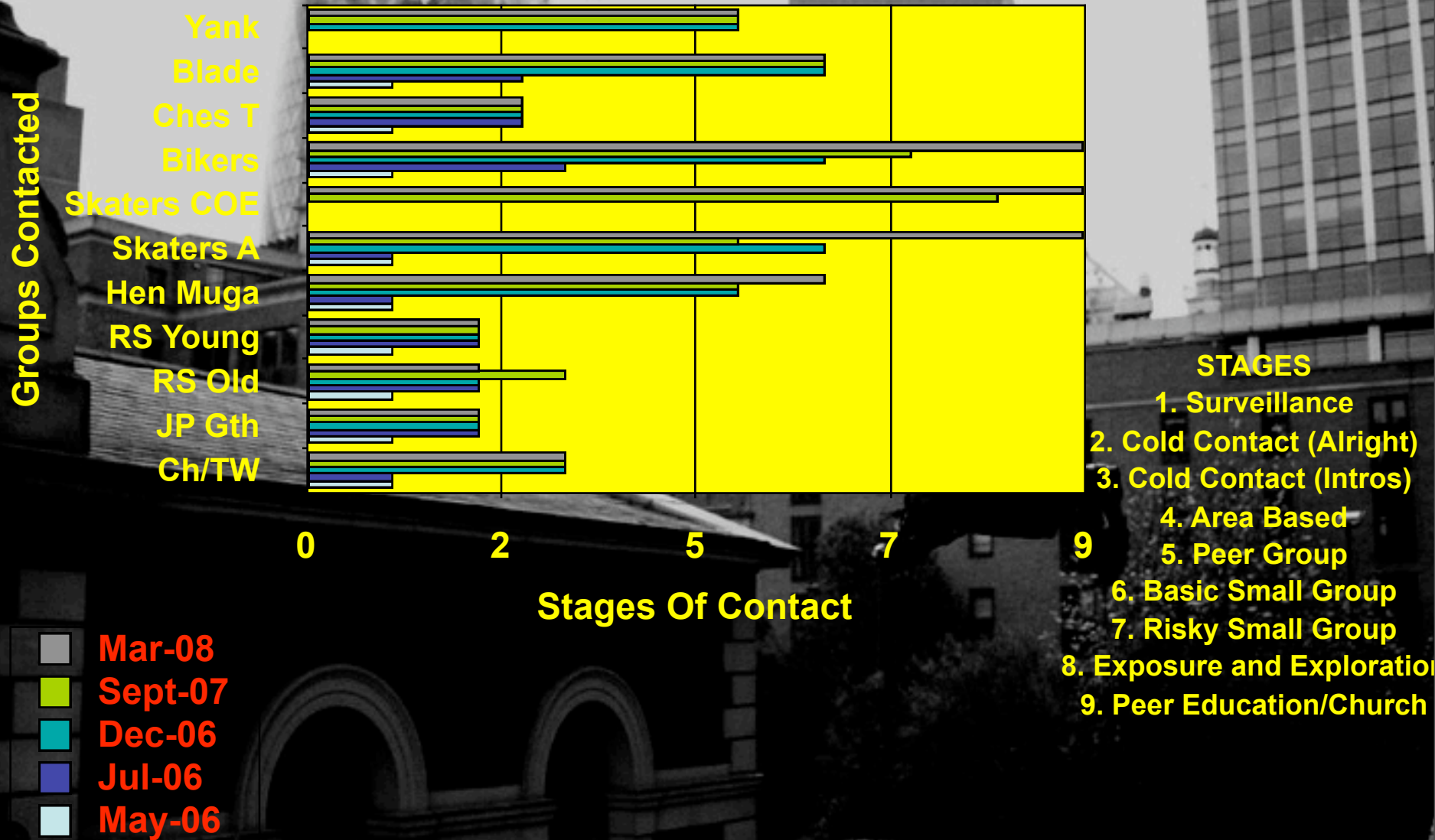
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We needed to see the process wholistically and not differentiate progress from outcome



# Chard Detached Project



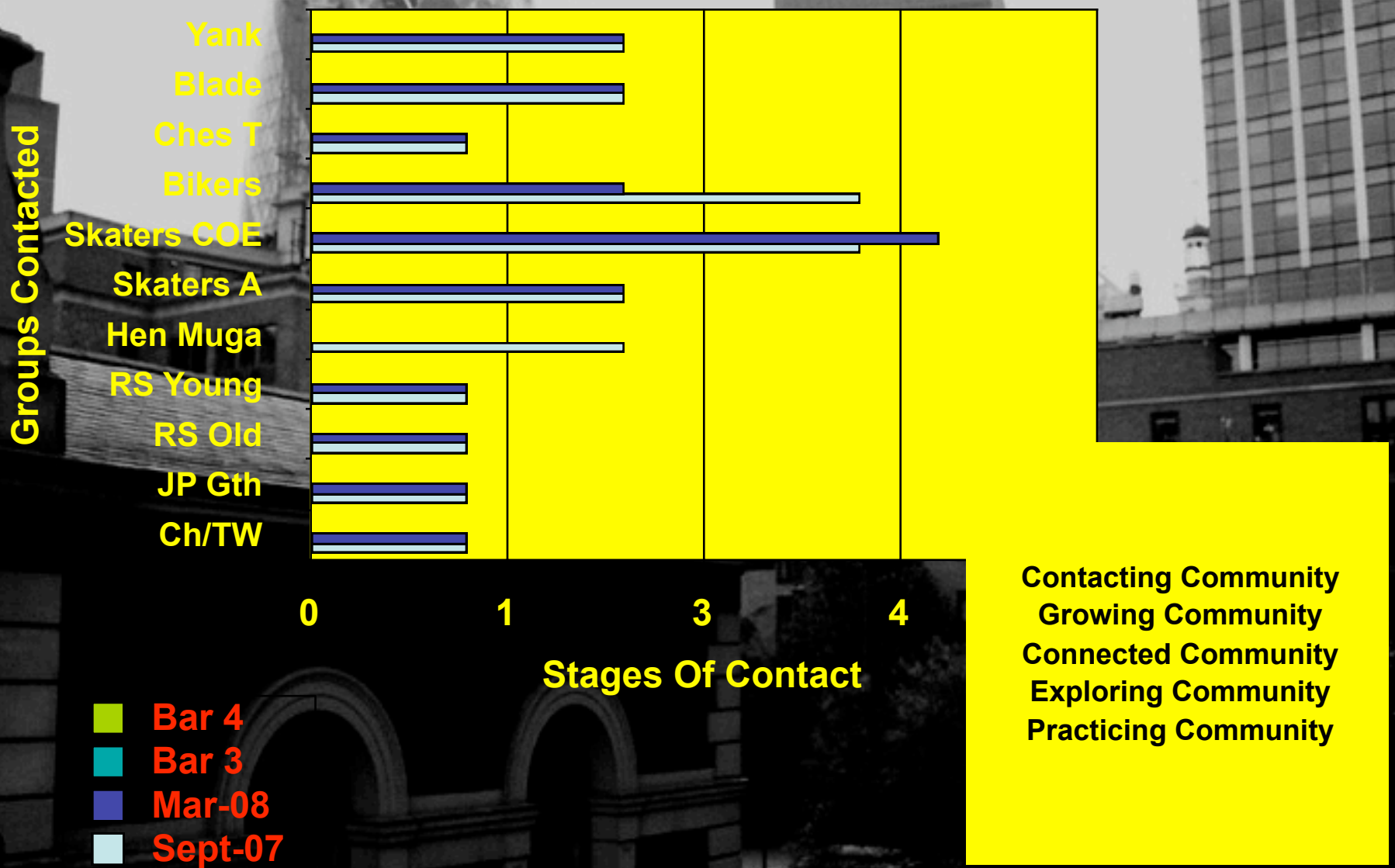
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As mentioned it draws on the detached work in Meet them where at

In detached work we work to nine stages (as the first three are about cold contact)

# Chard Detached Project



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If you take the COE stages and apply a similar way it would be like this

# Finding a new language



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Flow as a name for God that came from some work I am doing with a group of young people in Somerset. The premise of the work is explore what missionary work in our post Christian country may look like, to find out what God is doing locally and by what name she is known, and to get in on that work, **rather** than going and saying I have God, I know what God looks like and by what name he is called, and I want to tell you about him. We discovered the word as we questioned a group of skaters about how they felt when they skated. The response to “is it a spiritual experience?” was “you are just lost in the moment and you just flow!”

My response was I think that maybe God but you don’t have a language to describe it, which started a journey to discover Flow, through conversations, pilgrimage, provocations and re-contextualised bible study. This is when we take a bible story and rework into Flow language, (there are few around the room if you want to have a read) in the beginning was Flow and Flow was God and Flow was with God, we also did the trick of great worth, and a retelling of Abraham and Isaac. The key was we told the stories but we don’t interpret them or explain, just ask questions to help unlock the meaning.

As we have gone on the journey we have increasingly recognised that both our approach to mission is shaped by our approach to spirituality and our direct encounters are shaped by our spirituality, and it is these elements we will be exploring today.



# Finding God in our communities

- Flow
- The spark of life
- What is it for the young people in the various contact groups?

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# Mission Spirituality

- Powerlessness
- Tacking
- Intentionality
- Non dualistic
- Heretical imperative

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When you seek to get beyond the lenses that we usually see mission and and engage in mission that is shaped by spirituality of powerlessness our common approach is to return to source. Jesus Christ, in this process we must take care not to fall into a kind of fundamental idolatry that focussed over on the person of Christ at the expense of a Trinitarian theology otherwise we reduce mission to a formula, coming to faith as an ABC. The Spirit is the person of God present in the world, and it is he that needs to be discovered or we need to be embraced by.

Therefore five key words came to shape or underpin some of our approach

Powerless - Trying not to take in too much capital to the group, but you need task to grow the community but this task is set together as much as possible

Tacking – *already explained*

Intentionally church - *introduced early on*

Non dualistic - *missio – dei*

The Heretical imperative - *deny the god we know which cant be G-D to journey with G-d to a new place*

# Flow – Mission Spirituality

## Mission and Christian Mysticism

- God rid me of God
- God is Transcendent because He is imminent
- The unspeakable is very thing we must not stop speaking of

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In How not to speak of God Pete Rollins explores some of the mystic tradition and for me mission and the Christian mystic tradition have always been closely aligned so here I want to explore some of the implications for mission/us when we embrace a mission spirituality shaped by this and how that that fuels the kind of mission I am engaged with through Church on the edge

Meister Eckhart God rid me of God – the God we know cant be God because God is always more, so what does it mean to engage in mission with the unknown God, where is always more?

If we reduce theology to a formula we see God as transcendent- beyond and then God as imminent - close, almost as if the only way to get our heads around it is a formula that says god is sometimes transcendent and withdrawn and sometimes imminent and close, but what kind of God is this – the mystic tradition teaches that God is imminent because she is transcendent, God is in all, and so close we cant see – God is hyper-real

The unspeakable is very thing we must not stop speaking of – desire is not born in the absence of God but in the presence of God, so we speak of God not to tell others so much as to discover the hyper-reality of God for ourselves, religion is the response to the God event, and this God event is a missionary event, where we are embraced by the Father, who sends the Son, and where the Spirit is left to engage us in the ongoing embrace. God is a missionary God – missio-dei and as such if we truly desire God our mission is not so much as to find him as to reveal him to others but by embracing God in others so we reveal more of the hyper real God to ourselves and help others see the trancent God that is imminent.



# BEING EFFECTIVE



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We make contact with around 40 people currently but have been in touch with around 120 over the life of the project, Our core group is a group of SKBMX. The first thing we did was make a video with the yp about the lack of lights at the skate park.  
The first trip we did was a skate safari to build relationships and we got chatting and I asked what does it feel like FLOW  
We then developed the residential which was a skate pilgrimage to explore Flow

## SKATE AND BIKE PILGRIMAGE 2007

Circle where you are in YOUR understanding of what flow is?

If you are clueless about what you think flow is, *highlight 1* if you get it and think you understand what flow really is all about *highlight 2*. If you somewhere in between, maybe because you talked about with Richard or Carol or together *highlight* the number that best describes your understanding at the moment?



NAME:

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At the start of the residential we asked the yp to grade where they were.

Told Ab and Flow

Explain response



# Changing Spaces



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YOUNG people awarded ASBO  
Meet monthly for M and Ms  
Still meet on the streets

# What about?

- Worship
- The bible
- Ongoing discipleship



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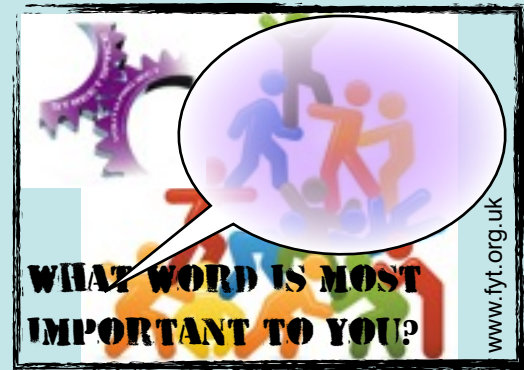
The work with the flow group culminated in the arrival of the ramps and community open day





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# Pulse Rate research



- Adventure
- Riding
- Family and Friends
- Vishnu
- Money

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# THE ADVENTURER

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## THE GREATEST FEMALE RIDER EVER

Charlie was a BMXer who loved riding, and even when she had started out on a scooter loved the adventure of riding close to the edge and pushing new tricks. She was quickly developing a reputation as an excellent rider, so in order to make the most of her growing profile she decided to set up a shop locally....

..... and an online brand of clothes and equipment. Her technical skills grew which meant she could design new pedals and equipment that really enhanced riding. She even invested in new technology such as new alloys, that could be used in frames and was soon making frames that were lighter and stronger than anything else on the market. She made sure that everyone working for her got a fair wage and only used ethical suppliers where possible. Charlie was quickly raking it in and the money didn't corrupt her, she gave a portion to those who needed it including over 80k to a local skate park and always tried her best to be honest in business.

The thing she loved about having money was that she could chase the adventure, traveling to loads of places around the country and abroad. She flew around the world and rode in well know places that were just a distant dream to many, even jumping the great wall of China. On returning from her travels she paid attention to business and things continued to grow, but she was never quite satisfied and always longed for something else.

At about the same time a man was traveling around the area, who also had

a growing reputation. People weren't quite sure what to call him, he wasn't a skater or biker, some people called him The Well Digger, as he once helped people find some water and dig a well, some people called him The Builder for similar reasons, others called him Sufi - someone who was spiritually enlightened, and at peace with themselves, to others he was the Teller, still others just said he really had the X Factor. The problem was he never fitted into any one box. People who had heard his stories, or spent time with him, could never quite sum him up in one word or label him this or that. They said he had healed the sick, and helped the poor, built houses and you never knew what was going to happen next, and although he too was poor he was rich in a different way.

The group that traveled around with him were known as "the adventurers", as he set them challenges, and always asked questions that made them think or act in a different way. As a group they never knew where they were going next or what they were going to have to eat the next day, but something always turned up, and anyway what better way to keep the adventure real. Even though Charlie had been on many adventures, and always pushed her



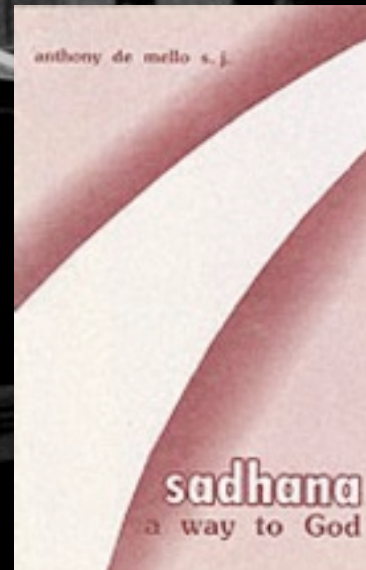
riding to the next level, she always felt something was missing. Something needed to change she told herself, and so went to find this man that couldn't be put in a box. On finding him, and not being the shy type, she explained how she loved the adventure and how she had tried to live an ethical life, and asked "what must I do to join the adventurers and journey with you?" The Man replied "go and sell all your possessions, your business, your bikes and inventions and give the money to the poor, then come and join us!" Charlie went away disappointed.



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# More resources



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