



I see the evolving *Eden* story as a good worked example that **Church is a multi layered reality**. Consider how church is being expressed through *Eden*. I observe it works at various levels; youth **cells** are seen as crucial where young people who are making responses through schools work are disciplined and prayed with by acceptable role models - the young adults who now live on their estates. Informal community is being established through the teams of 30 people living on estates, though these are not to the exclusion of **congregational** membership, worship and teaching through the partner local churches. The link to the wider movement and wider church comes through the City wide **Celebrations**. These work both evangelistically through culturally credible public

events, but they also provide a sense of being part of a bigger picture - a movement for Manchester. As such, a new way of being church has been planted that fits with a world in which younger people relate at the intimate level to members of a peer group but through the media are connected to a much wider world and its cult figures.

Despite Andy's sincere comment, to me this is profoundly connected to church planting and I am not in the least surprised that it grew out of evangelistic endeavour. Apostolic people will go out on a journey into pioneer territory and cultures and be led into finding of ways of being church that fit, not forcing past forms on them. The more we work with those outside existing churches, that is both tactically what we can expect and theologically what should happen. **It is more accurate to think that the Church is first the consequence of mission before it is the conductor of mission.** I hope the existing churches will not take fright at such a process nor bad mouth *Eden* for doing what needed to be done.

## How does Eden Break Previous Conventions and Succeed?

We think the following are further pieces of the jigsaw. Bob Hopkins has been helpful to me in isolating some of these factors.



**1** *All the team of 30 move to and live on the Local Authority Estate.* This is not new for some clergy but it is a challenge to the laity. I note it is more possible because of the support in numbers, the prospect of working with skilled people in specific youth work and partnership with both a likely local church and a credible regional resource in *The Tribe*. I think there is a possibility of reproducing elements of this pattern in other cities with high proportions of young graduates staying on, large churches that draw them and where house prices are forcing them out of university housing areas.



**2** *The team commit to longer term involvement.* Buying houses on the estates, where they can, indicates this. There is welcome intention to avoid hit and run and experimenting upon local people. My question is whether 20 years will be a more realistic yardstick because until local role models have been established of indigenous leadership and church, which continues the process of mission and regeneration, the task is not complete. **However radical the evangelistic or social engagement approach, unless the resultant form of church is indigenous and contextualised, the overall mission will be ineffective.**



**3** *Eden thinks small and large.*

The full time teams are three or four people to an estate. Even 30 volunteers on an estate of 1000's is a little. Youth cells set a value on the small. *Eden* link this to the Kingdom being likened, by Jesus, to yeast and salt - often invisible and yet with disproportionate results. Even the local churches are, at present, manifestations of the small.

The other kingdom polarity is expressed, in the Gospels, by the great tree in which birds nest, or by the city set on a hill. So *Message 2000* and *Tribe*

concerts are city wide, media visible events. *The Tribe* provide culturally acceptable sowing of the Christian faith through schools concerts. *Planet Life* is a monthly youth celebration at the Apollo Theatre, holding 2650. It offers teaching, evangelistic reaping of contacts brought, prayer and counselling. By its size, profile and energy it also acts as a way in. Even the Bus is an expression of the large. You can misunderstand these factors but you can't miss them.



4 The team don't begin by offering church worship, unlike the classic church planting transplant. This protects them from being seen as patronising or irrelevant and churchy. It also fits with what I have seen and written up in Encounters 1,2 and 6. *Eden* try to build community by working at the youth need. Those who respond are evangelised and disciplined in same culture cells, long before the jump to congregational worship and official church is made. As such they do not appear to be "church planting"; they build on the positive responses by continuing to disciple those who are open, forming them into small group communities as relationships develop. This has the other advantage that if the local congregation can't handle the influx, or the youth can't handle the second transition, there is a genuine alternative - though at the danger of real tension with the said congregation.



5 The team are young and focus primarily on youth in school and estate, acting as role models. There are enough of them to resource a serious youth work and be seen to make a difference. Many mission audits show the leading concern of local residents is "nothing for the youth". **Disaffected bored youth are perceived as causing 80% of the neighbourhood's social problems** and continued destruction of facilities that are attempts at progress. So the team gets very positive reactions from the local community, police, social workers and press. This need would hold good elsewhere.



"Our kids are ob-seen and a herd"

## Comparison with Brazilian Favellas

Stuart Christine has written and taught church planting mainly in Baptist circles in the UK. Before, he worked as a missionary in South America among the urban poor and has since returned. The Hopkins have visited Brazil and noted his maxims of operation. These connect with the puzzle points above. The overarching aim to ensure maximum impact from the use of minimum resources because the latter will be slim.

- 1 Projects must be socially significant to people but not palliative. Working with the disaffected youth of Manchester and so reducing crime certainly fits that bill. Tidying open spaces and gardens in areas of vandalism would not qualify.
- 2 The projects must open the way to evangelism. The schools work does create these links and the community links seem to have sown similar seeds, but this is partly because *Eden* are an evangelistically focussed work.
- 3 They must be cheap and lightweight in terms of human resource and training e.g. not Drug rehabilitation. Jackie Pullinger might demur over the drug issue, but *The Tribe's* work doesn't come in this financial category and importing 30 long term volunteers can't be construed as cheap human resource. However going for volunteers, not loads of paid community workers, is a step in this direction.
- 4 The project must be capable of multiplication for other people to replicate it. The Brazilian example is arranging pre-schools so children otherwise totally unused to any form of education learn how to cope with a future experience of school. Otherwise they don't handle school well, underachieve and remain in the poverty trap. This is neither high tech nor high cost. Mounting 6, soon to be 8, the *Eden* project does show evidence of ability to multiply. I wait to see what comes after the vision of 10 is reached and whether other cities can emulate the pattern.
- 5 The project must mobilise the local church for sustainability. The partnerships with existing local churches and the desire to incorporate converts into them indicates a desire for this. I don't know to what extent the *Edens* that have flourished are because of good teams sent in and to what extent existing local people were mobilized.
- 6 The project recognises different sorts of faith communities will emerge to the church that may have begun the project. This meshes exactly with my own



church planting understanding but is only hesitantly accepted by *Eden*, for fear of the reaction from existing churches. Perhaps this goes back to the founding of *Eden* and adverse, unfounded, fearful rumours as described by Andy Hawthorne on page 93 of *Mad for Jesus*.

### Is the UK harder?

Ross Garner who has studied Base Communities of South America and the UK draws crucial distinctions between the contexts.



Richest  
Rich  
Middle  
Poorer  
Poor



He likens the former social structure to a pyramid. A few wealthy people exercise power at the top and a vast number of poor crowd at the base. However,

amidst the latter are many not lacking ability, but only opportunity, to be leaders. Moreover the lack of social services means that most answers have to be on the basis of self help and where it is discovered it is welcomed and embraced. Extended families are still present, strong and cohesive.

By contrast the UK is more like a diamond. The egalitarian meritocracy linked to universal education and social provision means there is no longer a large undifferentiated base, because the more able have escaped. True, there is an underclass and it is growing, but it is more difficult to work with. Many natural leaders have already left, those in the dependency culture are unmotivated and suspicious, and nuclear family has largely disintegrated.

**The needs of community regeneration and the rediscovery of Christian transformation and community are no less, but the local resources to sustain it are fewer and weaker.** Perhaps that is one justification for the larger numbers involved in *Eden* projects, if only they can stay long enough. This is one mission challenge to our existing larger suburban churches.

## Learning from Monastic Community

My Sheffield colleagues' document *Change and Decay* offered me some intriguing, unattributed words of Bonhoeffer - we are "called to be a visible community, flight into the invisible is a denial of the call". They deemed another quote to be prophetic.

*"The renewal of the church will certainly come from a new type of monasticism, which has in common with the old only the uncompromising nature of a life lived according to the Sermon on the Mount, as a disciple for Christ. I believe that it is high time for men to band together to do this".*

How could that begin? They suggest Ray Simpson, Founder of the Community of Aidan and Hilda, offers a starting point.

*"True Monasticism becomes a separation from everything that divides people – status, manipulation, possessive relationships or use of material things".*

I had been toying with another monastic source.

*"Monastic life may seem utterly out of tune with the spirit of our times, yet if we are entering another Dark Age, it may be to the wisdom of such a way the Church of today needs to turn ... I sense that the renewal of both the Church and Society will come through **the re-emerging of forms of Christian community** that are homes of generous hospitality, places of challenging reconciliation and centres of attentiveness to the living God."* BROTHER SAMUEL SSF: MISSION AND COMMUNITY BFBS 1998



**Eden projects represent one way among others in which groups are seeking to model community based mission.** They have adopted no formal vows of poverty, chastity and obedience yet much of their life looks like that and others sense a call to join them. There is no written rule but corporate prayer suffuses the movement. Their corporate life is spread over many houses in Manchester but they are homes open to unlikely visitors. I did not live among them long enough to know what is the witness of their common life, but I know it will be crucial. A year 8 pupil at Wentworth High said to Hayden Brophy. "I know there's a God - the way you and Mr Atkinson talk about him, there must be".

**George W Lings**  
**May 2002**

## Where could you go from here?

### Strategically...

#### ■ Further sources on *The Eden Projects*

- *The Urban Adventure* 2001 Soul Survivor
- *Mad for Jesus* Andy Hawthorne 2000 Hodder and Stoughton
- *Community Transformation* John Leach Grove Renewal no.8

- #### ■ If you have **connections within diocesan groups**, please think who else needs exposure to these kinds of questions and suggestions. How can these issues help us all get closer to good practice?

### Practically...

- #### ■ For whatever reason if you want **further copies**, those can be ordered from Claire Dalpra by note, phone or email - see *next page*.
- #### ■ Is the **first issue you've read?** You may want to collect the previous issues listed on the back cover. All individual copies are £3.

### About us...

In the early part of the 1990's **Church Army** reviewed its strategy, the outcome of which was the seminal 'People to People' strategy document first published in 1993. The decision to establish the **Sheffield Centre** was spelt out in this document, with the aim

- #### ■ To inspire and mobilise the **Church** in its task of evangelism.

### The Sheffield Centre has the following functions:

- Research into church planting and evangelism
- Extensive study and library facilities through the Training College
- Specialist training in church planting and evangelism for those in full time **Christian ministry**

## The Sheffield Centre - developing Church Planting & Evangelism



### The Sheffield Centre can offer the wider Church

- #### ■ Specialist research, consultancy and publishing on **Church Planting**, the fruits of which are made available through *Encounters on the Edge*

*The Director: Revd George Lings.*

*Research Assistant and PA: Claire Dalpra*

- #### ■ Practical hands on experience in **Evangelism for young people** through **First Contact** and **Word on the Web** initiatives

*National Youth Projects Co-ordinator: Captain David Booker*

*Evangelist with the Sheffield Centre: Alison Booker*

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We are a team supporting the evolving mission of the Church of England.