



regeneration

The youth church that grew up ... into something no one could have expected

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James and Ruth Poch are both ordained and started out as Methodist ministers. In 2000 they were tasked with establishing a youth ministry among the 13 churches in the circuit they worked in. After much trial and error, regeneration was founded in 2004.

Over the years its members grew up and many stayed after leaving school and reaching adulthood. This has been the case at many youth churches, to the point that Beth Keith in her Authentic Faith research

identified 'youth church grown up' as one of 5 distinctive types of young adult church.

However, what is unusual at regeneration is that many other groups of people started attending through the years: vulnerable adults, large numbers of young adults and (drum roll) ... middle-aged people!

The result is that regeneration is now incredibly diverse, with features rarely seen in a typical parish church - a wide range of ages and life experiences, with particularly high numbers of 18-30s.

This case study of regeneration highlights:

- The importance of **being open to who God may be calling you to**
- How **discipleship and mentoring** has been integral to the spiritual and numerical growth at regen
- **Relational mission** being particularly effective in bringing new people along to Sunday gathering

Introducing regeneration

Where: Gidea Park, a suburb of Romford, Essex

Denomination: Independent, formerly Methodist (until 2014)

Date started: 2004

Target group: Youth, young parents, and increasingly middle-aged and older people

Number of people involved: 110 on average across 2 Sunday gatherings (4.30pm and 6.30pm)

Staffing / funding: 2 full time staff: James and Ruth Poch, both ordained. Funding comes from member giving.

Premises: Gidea Park Methodist Church, rented

Other points of note: An independent charity, formally under the umbrella of the Methodist Church. In 2015 regeneration won 'most engaging small church website' at the Premier Digital Awards.

Website: www.regen.church



Mission at regeneration



In terms of reaching new people, members inviting friends along has been the way in which most attenders have been introduced to regeneration.

The church runs a weekly outreach in Romford where the team prays before heading out into the town centre to meet people and try to start conversations about faith. There is also a football team run by the church competing in a local church league, a Friday night youth hangout, and regeneration runs various

events throughout the year aimed at outreach.

regeneration very much aims to be a church for everyone, relevant for all people and appropriate to 21st century culture. Family underpins much of the mission of the church - James and Ruth have a passion for seeing whole families come to faith in Christ, as was the case in the early New Testament churches. James says:

“We encourage people to be praying for their families and their friends.”

James’ and Ruth’s son Ben (himself a young adult) is an integral part of the regeneration team, helping to run much of the church’s outreach and speaking at Sunday gatherings.

James identifies discipleship as the most important factor in leading young people to faith at regeneration. It has a mentoring programme which has been identified by many young adults as key in their journey of faith.

However, before regeneration commit to mentoring a young person they ask that they make a commitment themselves, to regularly attending Sunday church and a midweek Bible study.

regeneration also nurtures accountability among its members by regularly asking people to get two or three people they know and trust to lovingly suggest areas of their faith life that may need work. In James’ words:

“There is nothing like the Church. Where else can you go to find such loving and honest support to be the best person you can possibly be?”



Evidence of growth

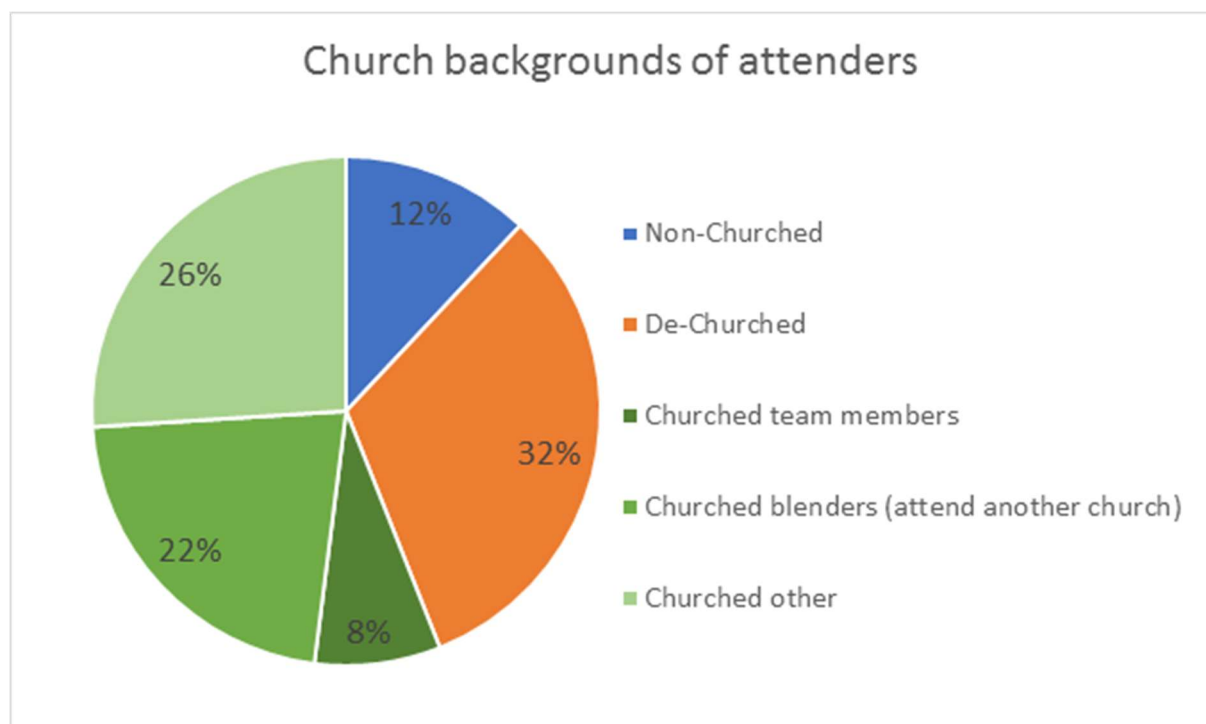
Numbers at regeneration have fluctuated somewhat over time, though the church has grown from a handful of team and youth in 2003 to a congregation of around 110 today across two gatherings. At one point attendances were averaging 150 people.

James has observed a high turnover of people, which is perhaps not surprising given the core age groups of youth and young adults as well as the London location. 15 people have been baptised in the past 3 years, while approximately 20 have come to faith in the same period.

In terms of church backgrounds, 12% of attenders surveyed were non-churched, 32% de-churched and 56% existing churchgoers.

Of existing churchgoers, 39% are blenders (people that attend more than one church), perhaps facilitated by the afternoon and evening meeting times, 25% moved to the area and were looking for a new church, 14% were team members, 14% transferred due to personal preference, while 7% transferred for family reasons or due to feeling a sense of God's call.

For a further explanation of the categories in the pie chart above, please see appendix 2 of our main findings report, available from the **Mission with young adults** home page.



38% of attenders surveyed were male, 62% female. The age profile is varied - 50% of attenders are aged 18-30, with a number of middle-aged and older adults as well. The congregation is also ethnically diverse - just over ¾ of attenders are white (78%, including Swiss, Dutch, Canadian and South African people), 14% black and 8% mixed race.

How have people come to faith?

“We had one young man, he was an atheist, who came to our church for a few years. He would invite his friends along... One became a Christian and is still with us.” James Poch

When atheists are doing evangelism for you, something must be going right. James has no doubt that this is evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in regeneration. Over the years he has had many comments from people coming into the building that the Spirit is present.

“We get comments like this is a really friendly place, it’s warm... [people experience] the power of the presence of God, which is wonderful because they don’t even know or have read anything in the Bible about people being overcome by the Holy Spirit.”

Charlotte's story

Charlotte is a young adult who works for Havering Borough Council and has been coming to regeneration for about a year. She went to a Church of England school so had some exposure to the Christian faith, but had never attended a church.

She was invited along by a friend: “In year 12 my friend Shanie started coming here... I went to uni and dropped out after 5 months after anxiety struggles. Shanie kept on trying to make me come here, and I kept on saying no, I’m not interested. And then in July [2016] I said okay, I’ll try it... I was hooked and I’ve come every week since.”



Charlotte was baptised in December 2016 and helped on a Scripture Union camp this summer. She identified regeneration's mentoring scheme as being vital in her development of faith, and regeneration has helped develop 'holy habits' of praying and worshipping on her way to and from work. regeneration has also provided pastoral support:

"I struggled with fear and anxiety. I've got prayer for that and I'm feeling in a much better place about it."

Change of lifestyle

Another young adult I spoke to told me of his history of drug use and dealing.

Having encountered God and being convicted of the need to change his lifestyle outside of church, he met a regeneration staff member while he was on his way to create some graffiti art. He was then introduced to regeneration and has been coming ever since.

Sarah's story



Sarah's story is one of coming to faith at regeneration as a teenager and staying around since.

"Everyone is non-Christian in my family ... so I didn't really have an understanding of what church was and I never really gave it any thought... When I was about 15 or 16 my friends invited me when I was at school... When I came to regeneration I felt a family atmosphere... That was really attractive to see and made me want to keep coming back... [and explore] what's that love behind it?"

She came to faith on a weekend away with regeneration and the intimate community and power of testimony played a big part in this: "It happened when we went away to a residential... all the talks were really personal, everyone was sharing a lot of personal testimonies..."

"Hearing those stories made me want to have my own story of actually having Jesus in my life."

She has now been a Christian for 5 years and emphasises the role of discipleship in the life of the church, the mentoring programme and the teaching of life skills as essential in her journey of living out the Christian life.

Steve's story

It's not just young adults that have come to faith through regeneration. Steve is an example of a middle-aged person who has found a family at regeneration.

He shared a moving testimony during the gathering on the Sunday I visited of how he was struggling for work and in a difficult place when he spent 3 weeks painting and redecorating the hall and corridors of the Methodist church in which regeneration meets.

This brought him into contact with the church community of regeneration and he has been overwhelmed by the love and support he found here.



As well as supporting him spiritually, his work at regeneration has now led to more work opportunities, and at the time of writing he had been provided with a full working schedule for the next 6 weeks ... an incredible blessing.

He has since brought other family members along.

Conclusions

Embracing diversity

Having started with a clear remit on reaching youth, many other groups of people have started coming to regen over the years. The result is a diverse church family, a dynamic that everyone involved sees positively. James' advice to potential leaders is:

"Don't be too narrowly focused. If God sends you people to work with, then those are the people to work with."

Relational mission

"We see what Jesus did in the Bible, and we do the same."

James is adamant regeneration haven't discovered a magic formula to mission and discipleship and it isn't specific to their suburban London context. The relational mission conducted at regeneration (with its emphasis on inviting friends along to Sunday gatherings) can be applied almost anywhere.



Mentoring and discipleship

James firmly believes that discipleship, and in particular regeneration's approach to mentoring, is the most important factor in leading young adults to faith. The weekly discipleship group at regeneration is open to the whole church, and committed young adults are invited to take part in their one-to-one mentoring programme.

The downside of this approach



While there aren't many signs to suggest this has happened, it is possible that as the age profile is now older than initially expected that some of the youthful edginess that would have initially appealed to young adults may be lost. This may be an issue for the leadership to be aware of.

Doing intergenerational worship well is a challenge for the wider Church. Engaging youth (particularly younger youth) and young adults, along with some older people, is far from easy.

To find out more

For more about regeneration, visit

www.regen.church

Leader James Poch has released a book entitled *Holy Grit* which draws on stories of discipleship from regen. It is available [here](#).