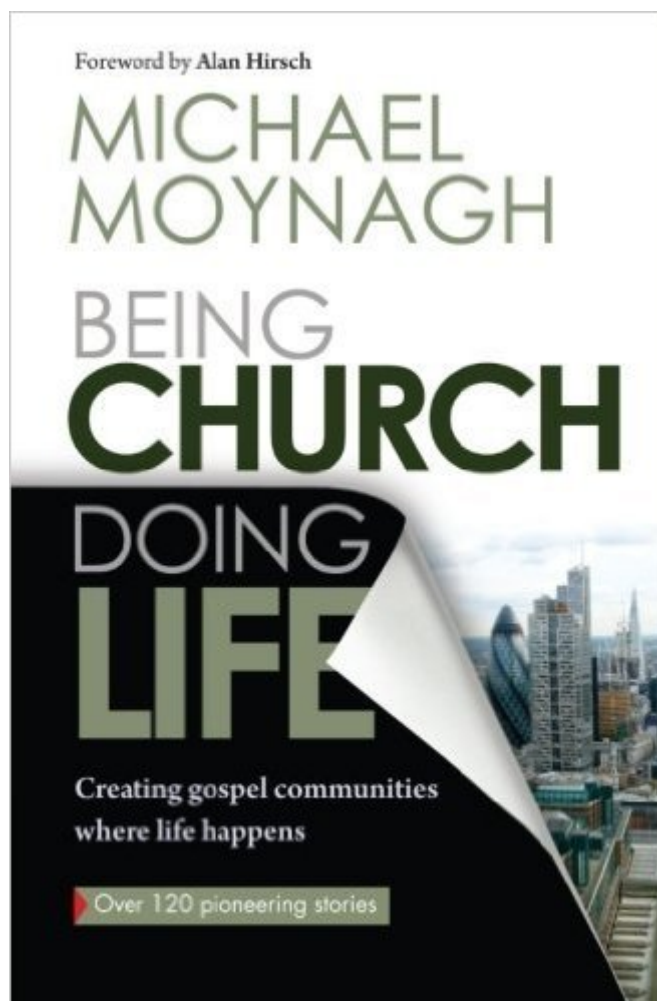


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# Being Church, Doing Life: Creating Gospel Communities Where Life Happens



## Synopsis

Church is now a fluid concept, no longer identifiable by buildings and congregations on Sunday mornings. There is an increasing interest in new forms of church that address the different ways to meet the needs of specific neighborhoods and people groups. In the UK, these new forms of church have been pioneered by the national Fresh Expressions movement, a remarkable initiative that has attracted widespread attention around the world. Author Michael Moynagh gathers his experience as a member of Fresh Expressions and distills it into practical and comprehensive advice on how to start and grow new churches—“however small”—in every context of life. Based on the work in his seminal textbook *Church for Every Context (SCM)*, this inspiring introduction to contextual church emphasizes practical aspects, telling many of the great stories that have emerged through practitioners. It will enthuse and help church leaders and individuals to start and develop these communities, and advise them on how to help them grow to maturity and become sustainable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I turned to this book looking for a text to help make pioneering leadership and organic church planting accessible to more people. It is ideal for this purpose. Michael Moynagh is a researcher and advocate for Fresh Expressions UK. His previous books analyse how the world is changing and how church is changing to be more relevant and holistic in a post-Christendom world. This latest volume continues these themes, but focusing on fostering grassroots witnessing communities in all sorts of spaces and places. The key theme of the book is how Christians can witness as a gospel communities where life happens—rather than as gathered churches on the one hand or individual

Christians on the other. Moynagh encourages people to start with who they are, and their natural networks of who they do life with. Recent research on a quarter of the dioceses of the Church of England shows a fresh expressions of church are 15% of the churches with 10% of attendance, mostly started in the last 10 years and growing. According to their leaders, a quarter are churched background, a third are de-churched and two fifths unchurched. These communities have often started by listening to their context and beginning with serving people in need and gathering a community around this missional service, rather than starting a worship service to attract people. That is, they often begin with worship in action more than worship in song. The Fresh Expressions movement does not jettison tradition or advocate ignoring existing churches, but wants to see a variety of new churches offering different pathways and signposts for people to explore faith.

First there was missional. Then there was the emergent resurgent resurgence, organic church, liquid church, free range church, new monasticism, the new parish and the New Kids. We are always on the hunt for the latest way to be church in ways that engage neighborhoods and culture. Michael Moynagh conducts research at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford for Fresh Expressions UK. He is an advocate of the fresh expressions of church (UK speak for missional?). He examines witnessing communities in the UK and around the globe. With over 120 examples of Fresh Expression Witnessing Communities, his book, *Being Church and Doing Life*, explores the creative ways that Christians have sought to connect the gospel to everyday life. Moynagh's book is divided into three parts. Part one explores the reasons why have communities in life (i.e. churches that meet in pubs, laundry mats, etc.). Part two explores the tools necessary for developing witness communities (practices, disciplines, and approaches). Part three explores the tools (organization, leadership, networks and structures) for the wider church. Each section (and chapter) are full of stories of on the ground practitioners who are reaching out in creative ways. Alan Hirsch (Author of *The Forgotten Ways*, *The Shaping of Things to Come*). This is very much a book written with the missional impulse and a desire to participate in God's Kingdom coming. The stories of what other churches (witnessing communities) are doing is the best part of this book. It is always exciting to find out what churches are doing. This is an idea book for brainstorming what church could look like in my context. Of course these witnessing communities are highly contextualized so are not necessarily reproducible. Still I appreciate some clues to what's possible.

In *Being Church, Doing Life*, Michael Moynagh pursues the answer to this question: what does it look like when we separate church as a worshipping community from church as a cultural activity? Because let's face this up front: in many places, especially Moynagh's United Kingdom and my United States (the Southern part!), church is endemic to culture. It's just there. We have churches, we have churches everywhere. And there are cultural constructs connected to the idea. Yet decades of cultural evolution have resulted in a cultural church that is not quite the same as what a worshipping community would look like. So, how do we sort out the differences? By analyzing examples, primarily drawn from the UK but some from the US, Moynagh presents many non-traditional looks at worshipping community structured around the normal beats of life. These ideas are naturally inspiring, and should challenge us to think outside of the box. I like his concept of developing witnessing community alongside Christian community. This is a great slice into how I have been asking the question for several years: is the one hour we meet on Sunday morning intended to strengthen the believer or reach the nonbeliever? It is difficult to do both at the same time with any faithfulness or completion. Moynagh here emphasizes the development of the reach out aspect of community. I would suggest that this hinges on an assumption that people will move from reach-out community into Christian community where deeper questions and different problems are addressed; after all, some issues do not surface until one is actually trying to follow Jesus. In this, I think there is a clear risk that someone will take Moynagh's book as if it is the only path for all churches to follow.

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