

Catalysing Kingdom Communities

HeartEdge *brings together churches integrating congregation, commerce, culture and compassion in their mission.* **Jonathan Evens**, Associate Vicar for Partnerships at St Martin-in-the-Fields, sets out the vision of HeartEdge and its integration of commerce into its model of mission by drawing together ideas and approaches found in the writings of the Vicar of St Martin's, Revd Dr Sam Wells.

HeartEdge is a growing ecumenical network of kingdom churches and other organisations in the UK and beyond. It's a network seeking to catalyse kingdom communities hearing a call to foster, embody, model and advance the gifts the Spirit brings, gifts of forgiveness, reconciliation, healing and resurrection.

We are seeking to find our way to becoming abundant communities that open space for generosity and cooperation. We believe churches and communities thrive when the gifts of all their members are released and they build one another's assets. Thus is deficit turned to plenitude, threat turned to companionship, and fear turned to

joy. That is the life of the kingdom. We're not trying to make the world more like us; we're wanting to reflect the generosity, grace and glory of God – and to receive the gifts God sends us in the unexpected people who turn out to populate God's kingdom.

We believe that God is giving the church everything it needs for the renewal of its life in the people who



Photo: David Castor

St Martin-in-the-Fields



Photo: The-smoking-skull

St Martin-in-the-Fields Café

find themselves to be on the edge. Wisdom and faith are found in the places of exile and rejection. The rejected are to be sought out because they are the energy and the life-force that will transform us all. If you are looking for where the future church is coming from, look at what the church and society has so blithely rejected. The life of the church is about constantly recognising the sin of how much we have rejected, and celebrating the grace that God gives us back what we once rejected to become the cornerstone of our lives. That's what prophetic ministry means.

Among those who have sometimes been rejected by the Church are those involved in commerce or enterprise – the entrepreneurs and business people. The Church has primarily been funded over the course of its history through either a benefactor or stewardship model of fundraising and has tended to avoid commercial or entrepreneurial activity as somehow unspiritual or worldly.

HeartEdge has been initiated by St Martin-in-the-Fields, a church which, as an experiment in hope, has become a unique configuration of compassion, cultural expression and commerce, rooted in a vibrant congregational life. The people of St Martin's have a story of how success in funding and mission has come out

of adversity, out of near bankruptcy. In the 1980s the church woke up to the fact that the sums didn't add up and the benefactor model on which it had relied was no longer working. The costs of the building and the extensive outreach ministry far exceeded the (albeit significantly under-tapped) potential of congregational stewardship. The answer was to create a commercial enterprise but, as the enterprise developed, we discovered that commercial operations were not simply a necessity; in addition they were a blessing to teach the community the disciplines of sustainable life together.

St Martin-in-the-Fields Limited ('SMITFL') is a company registered in England and Wales which acts as the trading arm of St Martin-in-the-Fields, as well as managing the site and some aspects of church operations. Its principal trading activities include operating two cafés, a shop, concert management, venue hire and event catering and the organisation of exhibitions. The whole of the company's taxable profits is covenanted to the PCC. The Board of SMITFL ensures that trading is profitable, develops new ventures, and oversees the efficient and safe operation of the site.

St Martin's seeks to be a sustainable and hospitable institution through

its incorporation of significant commercial activities, while trying to be an exemplary organisation through its exercise of social responsibility. Exemplary organisations have an admirable and inspiring ethos and embody it in everything they do. They monitor their performance through good governance. They cherish their people, communicate their purpose, embrace a range of partners, and share their wisdom. They thus attract engagement, participation, commitment, support, and imitation. SMITFL seeks to embody the mission of God in offering warm hospitality, giving good customer service, being a fair and flexible employer, and being open to internships and apprenticeships.

The results have been remarkable. The top-line result is that St Martin's has been able to maintain and expand its ability to extend its mission well beyond the imaginations of its wealthiest and most generous members and donors. But there's more to it than that. Originally the food services, retail, events and commercial concerts were seen largely as a worldly cash cow to underwrite the lofty spiritual mission and ministry of the church. What's happened is that the business has ended up teaching the congregation a lot about the kingdom. Its 110 staff hail from more

than 25 countries; the commercial enterprise is a microcosm of the idea of a multicultural society. If you have a Jewish head chef and a Muslim financial manager, you don't say they're staff subcontracted to deliver services: they're wearing a St Martin-in-the-Fields T-shirt like everyone else and St Martin's has had to adapt its notion of church to accommodate the kingdom that God is giving it.

St Martin's now offers a unique range of cultural, commercial and charitable programmes rooted in a vibrant congregational life. It's become a vision of a civil economy, of what work and play, friendship and worship, social concern and evangelism, diversity and identity might look like. So, for us, the financial imperative proved to be a good thing: it renewed the church. And the business is now an integral part of our life.

From these experiences we have learnt that renewal is thus first and foremost about building on assets. This is crucial for three further reasons: it embodies the conviction that God gives us everything we need; it affirms those in place that they have genuinely been called to good work; it ensures that the institution remains recognisable to insider and outsider alike. In its use of buildings, education, lay training, and invitations to participate in and partner with other organisations the church needs to model exemplary practice. Simply by using the advantages it has, untold good can be done.

We have found that leadership is about: agreeing, communicating and implementing strategy (Acts 15:19); establishing, embodying and commending culture (Mark 10:43); and ensuring and practising scrutiny and accountability (Acts 5:3). This is where a change of culture in the Church is needed. Most training has been about helping people, especially clergy, think and perform duties well. This is good – indeed, indispensable – but it isn't the same as leadership. Leadership is less about doing things

well oneself, and more about bringing a team to a point of deciding what they're going to do, promoting good ways of behaving and interacting while doing it, and ensuring it is being done and done well.

Here is the central, prophetic conviction: God gives the church everything it needs, and if the church experiences its existence as scarcity, that's largely because it has neglected the gifts God has sent it. (John 6:9).

We have also learnt to take contracts seriously. Care and detail over contracts is a form of love towards those we don't know very well. It's a recognition that life is full of unexpected pitfalls, and a way of holding one another to honesty and honour in the face of temptation and distraction. Never assume though that we can run our whole lives by contracts. If we do, we'll find ourselves unprepared for the deepest and most beautiful things God has to give us. Instead, try to turn contracts slowly but surely into

covenants. Contracts can give us security and trust, but only covenants can bring joy and delight. One sign of doing business well is that you can have cordial relations not just with your colleagues but with your suppliers and your customers. That indicates you haven't exploited the one or taken advantage of the other. In other words, good business is a process of gradually turning contracts into covenants.

All this has led us, in establishing *HeartEdge*, to seek to support churches in blending their ministry around four key areas (the 4Cs), which include commerce as a key and equal element of mission:

- Congregation – inclusive approaches to liturgy, worship and day-to-day communal life;
- Charity – models of outreach which serve local needs and address social justice issues;
- Culture – art, music and ideas used to re-imagine the Christian narrative for the present moment; and
- Commerce – approaches to developing commercial activities that not only assist in the financing of mission and ministry but also creatively extend and enhance mission and ministry through different degrees of social enterprise.

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This integrated model, rooted in a vibrant congregational life, means that the wider operations (of compassion, cultural expression and commerce) are not seen as secondary or simply instrumental to mission, but as creative and challenging forms of church in their own right. In order to explore the 4Cs, we have developed

HeartEdge introductory events in which churches can explore mission by sharing ideas, uncovering solutions and finding support.

Supplementing these introductory events are a series of Mission model workshops including:

- Disability Advisory Groups – approaches to ensuring disabled people can 'join in', not simply 'get in'.
- Great Sacred Music – growing new congregations by using music in mission and sharing faith insights with secular audiences.
- *Inspired to Follow: Art and the Bible Story* – a discipleship course exploring the story of the Bible through works of art.

- International Groups – hospitality groups for those with no recourse to public funds.
- Liturgy on the Edge – templates and workshops for Outreach, Pastoral, Acute Pastoral, Annual Special, and Broadcast Services.
- *Start:Stop* – growing new congregations by engaging with working people.

We offer consultancy days to individual members. For these we gather a small hand-picked team of people from member churches to visit a specific church for a day, and spend the morning seeing and hearing about their ministry, buildings and context, before using the afternoon to share stories of relevant experience and thoughtshower ideas and approaches which may be of use within that context. Additionally, we make spaces (sharing sessions) where members give from their experience and take from others – an exchange that’s inspiring and mutually useful for all. In these sessions we work with members to find solutions, share resources and connect with others developing their church and community. Each sharing session results in a short HeartEdge Ideas & Experiences paper that summarises the ideas, advice and experiences shared in that session, in order to share these good practices more widely.

We are telling our story of commercial enterprise at HeartEdge events through visits by churches to St Martin’s and occasional secondments to other commercial enterprises. However, we increasingly

want to share the enterprising stories of other HeartEdge members. At St Paul Old Ford, based in Bow, a £3.5 million refurbishment project resulted in an adaptable meeting space for 250 people, with the original interior now including four storeys of flexible rooms. Partners using the space include *Ability Bow*, a gym for people with complex needs; IntoUniversity, supporting young people in accessing university; and St Paul’s café, a social enterprise open each weekday. The building welcomes 30 to 40 community groups per year hiring out space or offering for free – from Zumba classes to NHS clinics, neighbourhood forums to children’s parties. St Paul’s has become a central resource at the heart of the community it serves. At Greyfriars Kirk, in Edinburgh, through mentoring, social enterprise, training and education in a nurturing environment, the Grassmarket Community Project develops skills which enable vulnerable participants to develop to their full potential and move away from cycles of failure.

We believe that churches can do unbelievable things together by starting with one another’s assets, not our deficits. We believe churches and communities thrive when the gifts of all their members are released and they build one another’s assets. Thus is deficit turned to plenitude, threat turned to companionship, and fear turned to joy. This is the life of the Kingdom.

Sharing our particular assets (skills, experience, insights and ideas) with other members fosters a wider

understanding and models the practice of hospitality towards others. To support such sharing we match churches with particular forms of experience to other churches in need of just that kind of experience; in essence, a form of peer-to-peer mentoring. We also visit new members to understand the context of each church and provide a range of relevant information and inputs as a result of these visits. To date these have included: information and/or contacts about whole-site redevelopments, church websites, and inclusive liturgy; a sharing session on engaging with vulnerable people; and visits to St Martin’s to discuss organisational structures and international groups.

Generosity, based on our sense of gratitude towards God, is therefore central to HeartEdge. Our members are takers and makers; people and churches that both take from the network and give to it. By listening to and learning from each other we build a community of practice which can evolve new forms of cultural, commercial and community-based work. By doing so, we believe we will find our way to becoming abundant communities that open space for generosity and cooperation. 🙏

For more information about HeartEdge (including a Membership Pack) see www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/church/worship/partnerships/ and for up-to-date news see www.facebook.com/theHeartEdge/.



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