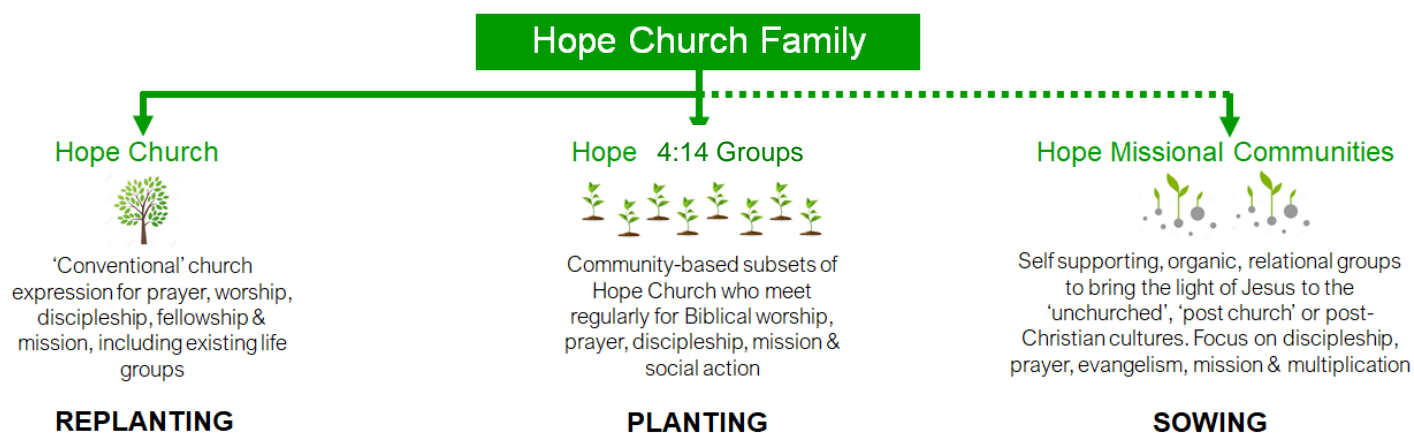


## 'Pathways to new people' (Sowing) - a rationale for ROC Dawlish and Missional Communities



**Fig. 1 Replanting, Planting and Sowing Expressions of Hope Church**

Within the Hope Church Family, this document forms one single part of the whole, and sets out a 'Pathways to New People' strategy and rationale for the 'Sowing' expression of our church, as set out in Fig. 1 above. Other documents will explore 'Pathways to New People' regarding the equally valid and equally important 'Replanting' and 'Planting' expressions of our church. This document does not cover how the conventional church expression of Hope Church, or indeed Hope 4:14 Groups, will relate to the unchurched community directly, or how the Hope Centre might serve to facilitate some of these connections. Again, these discussions will be covered in depth elsewhere.

This short document sets out to answer two simple questions: 1) what is ROC Dawlish and why does Hope Church need to engage with it for the benefit of the whole?, and 2) what are Missional Communities and why do we need them as part of the Hope Church Family, and what role will they play as part of the whole?

Only by all parts working together can the whole body grow and build itself up in love (Ephesians 4:16). Then, and only, then can we fully manifest the body of Christ on earth and truly glorify Him. We need each other and we need to understand the breadth and scope of what the Lord is seeking to do amongst us as we Replant, Plant and Sow in obedience to His vision for us.

### **Background**

We know that less than 10% of UK people are interested in attending conventional expressions of church; the other 90% are not coming, even if they are personally invited, even if we feel what we are offering is accessible and contemporary and exciting. For these 90% of UK people, the issue is not that we have not met them, it's not that we have not invited them, and it's not even that church isn't currently done in the right way for them. The issue is that they are not interested in church, and they are never coming to church. So what are we to do, when faced with such widespread disinterest and disconnection? Significantly, and encouragingly, 55% of the UK population currently remain open to a conversation about life, spirituality, God and the Bible, in a non-threatening, non-church context, for example, around food in someone's home, or in a coffee shop. Taking into account the 10% of people who are open to conventional church (including those currently in attendance), and the 55% of people who are open to something different to conventional church, the remaining 35% of people are much harder to reach, showing genuine resistance to the gospel specifically and / or to spirituality generally. For now, let's focus on what we can do to reach the 'open' 55%.

### **Local mission is real mission**

Like all missionaries, both past and present, to reach the local people, we first need to 'go' and embed ourselves in the heart of the local community, learn their 'language' and customs, gain trust and credibility with the local population, and pray for the Holy Spirit (the true and better missionary) to open up new 'spaces' where the gospel can begin to be spoken, heard, understood in the local dialect and applied in the local context. This has always been the missionary call - the Greek word for missionary/messenger (*apostolos*) literally means "sent one". The sending out of God's people is very clear throughout the Bible, and the New Testament in particular (see, for example, Romans 10:14-15).

We are very used to the idea of the missionary's call to the developing world, but the world has changed and the majority Christian church is now increasingly in the Global South (South America, Africa and Asia especially). The church in these places is actively training and sending missionaries to our shores, as Europe is now the most under-evangelised continent on the planet, as a whole (the Middle and Near East and North Africa is a region, not a continent, of course, but remains in great need of the gospel). The problem is that most Christians in Europe still believe they live in essentially Christian nations, but they do not. Europe, and the UK within it, now have post-Christian cultures with post-Christian governments making post-Christian laws. The spiritual ground beneath our feet has shifted, and it has shifted far faster and moved further than we are often aware of. In some senses, it's helpful to think of our local church having been replanted in the middle of the jungle to enable us to truly rethink our strategy for mission.

### **Why ROC Dawlish?**

The church in the UK faces a huge credibility gap and often has a bad reputation for being disinterested in local affairs and disconnected from local people. Most churches that engage with their local community are perceived as doing so simply to 'get their message out', or do what they think the local community needs, without ever stopping to truly engage with local people, hear their stories and seek to meet their real needs (*Matthew 20:32; Mark 10:36, 51; Luke 18:41*). Redeeming Our Communities (ROC) Dawlish is a gospel-driven vehicle to enable churches to engage with their community in meaningful, practical ways. Imagine driving down a single-track country lane in a small family car. To reach the heart of the farming community requires an off-road, four-wheel drive vehicle as the small car will never make it up the stony, muddy tracks to the top fields. ROC is a different vehicle to enable the same people to complete their journey, 'making tracks' into the hard-to-reach places. Many local organisations would simply not be allowed to collaborate directly with the local church. In many other cases, the people of goodwill who run local organisations, neither, would not want to be seen to do so. ROC Dawlish creates legitimate, credible spaces where partnerships can be formed that enable good Kingdom work to happen (helping the poor, the lonely, the anxious), mobilising local people to do good work that the church can say 'Amen' to. It's about rightly seeing Jesus as the Lord of all - he's the Lord of all healthcare, all education, all crime prevention, all government, and so much more besides. It's all His, and all of interest to Him, so we need to form relationships with the people on the front-line of human life, to thank them for serving us, to bless them for their sacrifice, and to make friends with them for the Kingdom (*Luke 16:9*). One of the best ways to make friends is to work alongside people and help them out with the good things they are already doing. When Jesus promises to build His church (*Matthew 16:18*) he ignores the words for temple and for synagogue and co-opts a secular, Roman word 'ekklesia' to explain his strategy. The Roman 'ekklesia' was a central part of Rome's strategy to turn everyone into Roman citizens, and in the process claiming all things for Rome. Using Jesus' 'ekklesia' strategy, reimagined for God's Kingdom, rather than for Rome, the Holy Spirit can create new inroads into the heart of the community, taking the gospel out and spreading far and wide, which is God's global plan for mission.

### **God's global plan for mission**

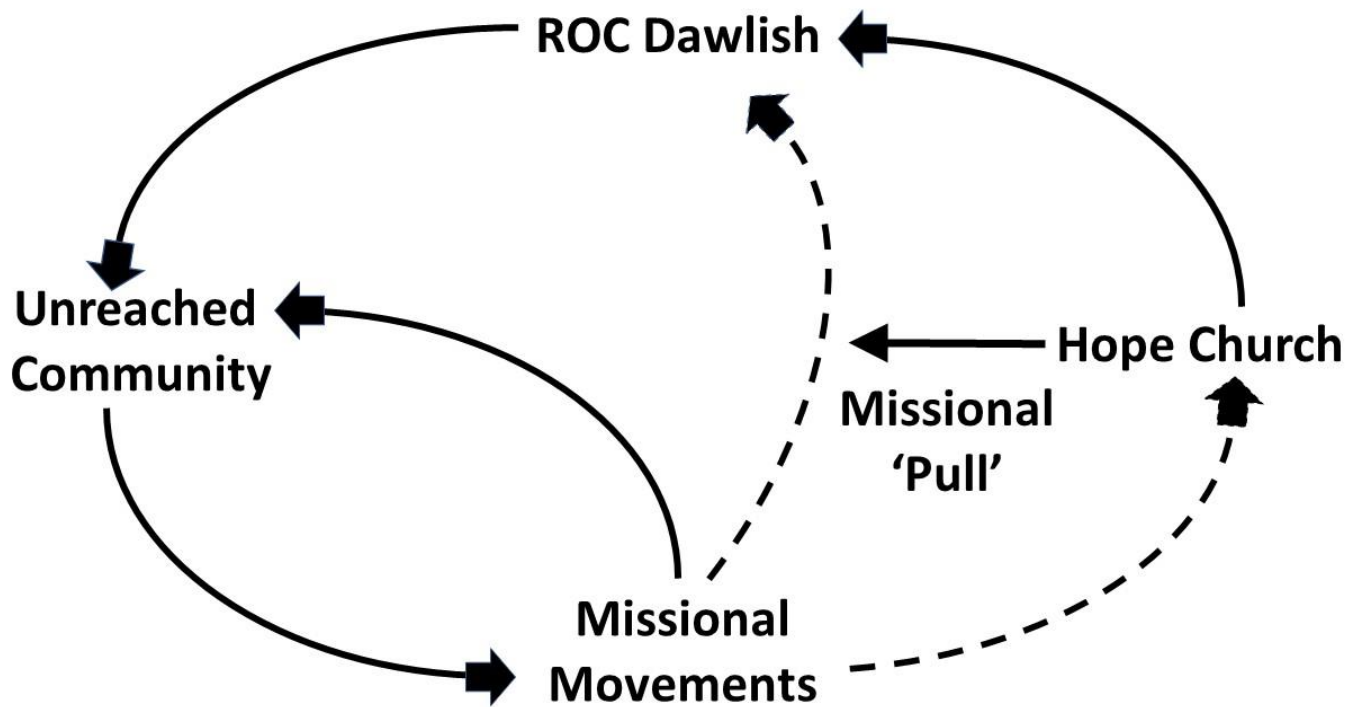
God's plan is for all things to come under His rule and reign (*Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2; John 13:3; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Ephesians 1:10, 22*). This means that His gospel has to go out 'to the ends of the earth' (*Acts 1:8, 13:47; Romans 10:18*). Our task is to be witnesses to Christ's death and resurrection 'in Jerusalem, then in Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth' (*Acts 1:8*), and 'make disciples of all nations' (*Matthew 28:19*). For Jerusalem, read Dawlish; for Judea read Devon, and so on. The Great Commission is, of course, the Great Reversal of the Great Dispersion that happened at Babel (Genesis 11) as God restores His authority over all the earth through His people drawn 'from every nation, tribe, people and language' (*Revelation 7:9*).

I once asked George Verwer of Operation Mobilisation what his advice would be for a church seeking to engage with an overseas mission. He responded 'Don't even think about attempting an overseas mission until you are already doing it on your doorstep'. Sobering words, but they offer good advice. It always begins in Jerusalem and spreads outwards from there. None of us would claim that, with only a few hundred people, at best, in regular church attendance in Dawlish, our local community has already been saturated with the gospel and does not need fundamentally saving. Even 10% of the local population in local church attendance would be over 1,400 people and we're currently a long way from that level of commitment. Which leads to my follow-up question to George - what would your best prayer be for the global mission field? He responded 'my prayer would be for discipleship in the local church'. In other words, his prayer was that the local church, in places like Dawlish, would make disciples, who did what disciples do and got on mission locally and then, once they had succeeded in making more disciples here, had an overflow of hope for the rest of the world.

So, how can we best mobilise the local church to make disciples who make disciples in Dawlish and aspire to achieve anything close to gospel saturation in Dawlish, as a springboard to mission to the rest of Devon, and overseas mission, in the years ahead? In answering this, we will discover what missional communities are, why we need them.

### **How do ROC Dawlish and Missional Communities relate to Hope Church as a whole?**

As a key interface between church and community, ROC Dawlish creates a legitimate space where trust can be built, stories shared and friendships formed (See Fig. 1). In this respect, ROC Dawlish bridges the credibility gap between church and community. But, given that 90% of UK people are not interested in going to church, what are we to do with the people of goodwill we meet through ROC Dawlish? An interface between church and community like ROC Dawlish needs another space where trust, stories and friendships can be deepened and where intentional gospel conversations and prayer can happen. So, although a few people might choose to come to church from a friendship formed through ROC Dawlish, the majority will need something else, that is situated, like ROC, in the heart of the community. This is the rationale for both Missional Communities and for 4:14 Groups. Now, in faith, we anticipate that some people will come to faith through these new expressions of church, as this is, after all, their express purpose. But, as all multiplication movements like these intentionally create self-reproducing organic entities, their tendency will not be to recruit new people to conventional church, but to send people back out into the heart of community to meet even more new people (Fig. 1). These people might choose to volunteer for ROC Dawlish, or they might choose to generate another DNA group, Missional Community, or 4:14 Group. A few might choose to join a conventional church, of course. But by working in the community, going to meet new people where they are, a positive feedback loop is created that can begin to achieve two things (Fig. 1). Firstly, it will begin to feed new believers back into the mission field. Secondly, it will have a positive effect on drawing conventional church expressions further out into the mission field itself, by creating 'Missional Pull' (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 2 How ROC Dawlish and Missional Movements relate to Hope Church**

**How do ROC Dawlish and Missional Communities specifically relate to 'Replanting' and 'Planting' expressions of our church?**

By creating this 'Missional Pull' the 'Sowing' expressions of the Hope Church Family will benefit the whole by pioneering new inroads for the gospel into the heart of community, creating spaces for gospel conversations which were not there previously. The 'Replanting' expressions of Hope Church will hopefully be inspired and challenged by the 'new wine' (Luke 5:38) stories they hear from the 'Planting' and 'Sowing' expressions, as much as the 'Sowing' expressions will be encouraged and empowered by the 'better wine' (Luke 5:39) of the more traditional expressions of Hope Church. In time, some 'Replanted' life groups might, for instance, feel led by the Spirit to become 4:14 Groups, and some 4:14 Groups might feel led to become MCs, although this will, in no way, be a long-term expectation or requirement. Everyone is free to serve either in the vineyard, working with the new wine and the new wineskins, or down in the wine cellar with the better wine, so to speak. There might also be some fresh new wine being made in the 'Replanting' expressions, of course. All expressions are good and valid and all are needed for a fully-functioning winery. Whatever expression is experiencing God's blessing, together, we can all celebrate the laying down of new wine, and its maturing into old wine. Of course, this does not mean that everyone from the 'Sowing' expressions of church will eventually need to move back into the 'Replanting' expressions - far from it. This winery imagery is merely picture language to describe a spiritual reality of increasing conformity to the likeness of Christ, who is Himself the true and better wine. So we should expect, and pray for, over time, more people becoming more like Jesus, and manifestly living more like he lived, and doing the things he did, to the glory of God the Father, and this is all three expressions of Hope Church.

If you have any questions about this document, or would like to find out more, please speak to Mark or Jo.