



Urban Expression: Strategic Review (October 2007 revision)

Urban Expression is an urban mission agency that recruits, equips, deploys and networks self-financing teams pioneering creative and relevant expressions of the Christian church in under-churched areas of the inner city.

A. Recruitment

1. Reflecting on past and current experience.

(a) Recruitment is never going to be easy, given the profile of inner-city mission in the British church and the disincentives many perceive in moving to the inner city. The anti-hype stance of UE attracts some but discourages others; this stance is, however, widely respected. Offering no finance or housing means that few existing ministers are likely to join as team leaders (though exceptions like Gary Serra di Migni are possible). The reluctance of many parents to bring children into the inner city means that most recruits are likely to be single or married younger people without children or older people with no dependent children.

(b) Recruitment since 1997 has been primarily through relationship, but the heightened profile of UE in recent years has played a part in this. Continuing promotion of UE is important to raise awareness, if not directly linked with recruitment. Links with various theological colleges have been significant for promotion and recruitment.

(c) Recruitment of the first two teams seemed easy, perhaps lulling us into taking this for granted and meaning we did not develop as effective a recruitment strategy as we might have done. Although team leaders have continued to approach UE, we have not recruited many team members for these leaders – Tom & Barbara, Karen and Charlie & Sarah (although there were reasons to delay in the case of Charlie & Sarah). Paul & Esther and Ian & Rachel seem to be recruiting their own team members. We did recruit Pete & Ruthy for Nick & Kerry.

(d) Open days have been worthwhile but have attracted varying numbers and people with diverse agendas. Many enquirers have also wanted to visit on other occasions, placing additional demands on the teams.

(e) The website seems to have been a significant factor in the heightened profile of UE, generating enquiries of various kinds, although this has resulted in far more Associates than new team members joining UE.

(f) Efforts to recruit returning missionaries via BMS Word Mission have thus far been ineffective.

(g) The recruitment of 40+ adults for inner-city church planting and the persistence of almost all of these for 3 or many more years is a cause for celebration. The attrition rate has been low.

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2. Recommendations.

- Develop a targeted and prayerful promotion strategy and review its impact
- Allocate primary responsibility for recruitment to a designated person
- Look for ways to create 'background noise' about urban mission
- Pitch recruitment at team member level as well as team leader level
- Target especially (but not exclusively) younger people and the early retired
- Look for opportunities to challenge ministerial students about urban mission
- Encourage team leaders to play an active role in recruiting team members for their own teams
- Encourage UE Associates to be advocates for UE and to help with recruitment
- Enhance aspects of the website that encourage recruitment
- Arrange taster weeks or weekends
- Strengthen links with theological colleges (Spurgeon's, Northern, Nazarene, ICC, Moorlands, etc.)
- Explore with BMS, other missionary societies and those who run year-out teams opportunities for recruitment
- Explore joint promotion with other agencies (such as Urban Mission Toolkit, NEO, SPEAK, Christian Peacemaker Teams, etc.)
- Keep in touch with those who leave UE and encourage them to promote UE and encourage recruitment
- Keep statistics of recruitment, attrition rate and length of service in order to monitor progress
- Develop a clear enquiry and application process, a person specification and job description for team members (and team leaders) and consider the use of psychological profiling in this process

B. Deployment

1. Reflecting on past and current experience.

(a) Decisions about where to deploy teams have been reached after research into possible locations, consultation with local church leaders and the involvement of team leaders. On some occasions the initiative has come from the team leader because of a strong sense of calling to a particular location. The level of research and consultation has been exemplary and has enhanced the reputation of UE locally and nationally. The deployment of teams has been fully consistent with our stated commitment to under-churched inner-city communities.

(b) With the benefit of hindsight we may not have asked enough questions of Charlie & Sarah in relation to the Ferrier Estate and the viability of their ministry there.

(c) Deploying teams in close proximity to each other was not intentional in the early years but has had huge benefits in terms of mutual support and joint mission activities. In Tower Hamlets this has facilitated the possibility of a merger between Cable Street Community Church and Open Door.

(d) There has been a combination of deploying pioneering teams commissioned by UE (Shadwell, Stepney, Wapping, Forest Gate, Glasgow), adopting existing church plants (Plaistow, Ocean), and enabling emerging church plants or replants (Newton Heath, Kidbrooke, Levenshulme).

2. Recommendations

- Concentrate on deploying new teams rather than adopting existing initiatives, but continue to consider the latter when requests are received

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- Become more proactive in selecting locations and waiting for suitable teams to be formed before deploying them in these locations
- Carry out further research and consultation in London, Manchester and Glasgow in order to determine locations for future teams
- Encourage existing teams and regional steering groups to identify locations for future teams
- Continue to deploy teams in proximity to others, wherever possible, and aim for multiple teams in each city or region
- Ask hard questions of any potential team leaders with existing commitments to particular locations before endorsing their sense of calling
- Draft a list of questions to be considered when selecting a suitable locality
- Beware becoming too thinly spread by deploying or adopting teams in other cities but also beware becoming risk-averse
- Deploy at least one team in any city before setting up a steering group

C. Equipping

1. Reflecting on past and current experience.

(a) With the exception of the first team, the induction and training aspect of UE has been patchy. There has been no planned induction process or training programme for new team members/leaders: induction has happened in organic and relational ways but this has not been adequate or consistent. Much has depended on the initiative of team leaders.

(b) The Crucible course has been a significant development and offers an introduction to many aspects of urban church planting, but this course has not been available for most existing team members, nor have we required new team members to study on it. Team members have been alerted to some relevant training opportunities but there has been no strategic approach to training, nor have we developed a 'culture of training' so that team members expect to undergo ongoing training.

(c) Pastoral support for team leaders and their accountability to Urban Expression has been facilitated in three ways: through the bi-monthly team leaders' meetings, through mentoring/coaching sessions between Stuart and team leaders; and through informal peer mentoring and support. The second of these has become more sporadic due to Stuart moving away from London and some team leaders needing less input. The openness, quality of support, depth of mutual care and creativity of theological reflection at team leaders' meetings has been impressive.

(d) Pastoral support for team members and their accountability to Urban Expression has depended very largely on team leaders, as we have not provided opportunities for team members to encounter members of other teams or offered pastoral support directly to team members. The persistence of team members, despite this minimal support, is remarkable and reflects great credit on team leaders.

(e) The availability of Nigel Copsey as 'pastoral backstop' for the London teams has been important, however much or little team members have made use of this. Nigel and Kathryn have a new role now in conducting exit interviews as people leave UE.

(f) The emergence of teams in other cities than London offers fresh opportunities but also presents new challenges in relation to training and pastoral support.

2. Recommendations

- Allocate primary responsibility for equipping to a designated person
- Develop an induction process that spans the period from joining UE to the end of the first year of team membership

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- Put into place a customised induction process for each team member, taking into account also the families of team members
- Develop induction study material that can be downloaded from the website and that is tailored to diverse kinds of people
- Allocate a mentor to new team members/leaders from another existing team (as agreed with the team leaders), or from the UE Associates if appropriate, and encourage new teams to draw on the experience of older teams
- Encourage new team leaders and team members to study on a relevant training course (Urban Mission Toolkit, Invest, Crucible or similar) during their first year, subsidised by Urban Expression, and on further courses during subsequent years
- Develop in conversation with the regional steering groups appropriate systems of pastoral care for teams and leaders
- Appoint someone in each city or region to act as 'pastoral backstop'

D. Networking

1. Reflecting on past and current experience.

(a) Networking between teams has happened alongside pastoral support and has thus primarily involved team leaders rather than team members, facilitated by the bi-monthly team leaders' meetings in London. There has been a good level of story-telling and sharing of ideas and resources. Some team members are very locally focused, but others are happy to network more widely.

(b) The emergence of teams in other cities than London offers fresh opportunities but also presents new challenges in relation to networking.

(c) There have been significant discussions about whether UE is evolving into (or should take steps to become) an urban mission order.

(d) The emergence and growth of the Associates' network has been unexpected and has been hard to keep up with. The monthly email updates seem to be well received but relatively few Associates respond to these or contribute to them. The website is well used and blogging has increased significantly in the past year. The daily liturgy offers a further resource but its use is not monitored. The annual Associates' days have been encouraging and much appreciated: they have had the additional benefit of being a further opportunity for teams to network together. Personal visits to Associates have been greatly appreciated and have encouraged greater involvement in the network.

2. Recommendations

- Encourage the development of bi-monthly team leaders' meetings in each city where more than one team emerges
- Institute a national teams' day in the spring for vision-casting, team-building, consultation and prayer (paid for by UE)
- Institute a national team leaders' day in the summer for strategic thinking, mutual support, story-sharing and prayer (paid for by UE)
- Arrange the dates well in advance so people can book time off work if necessary
- Encourage participation in the UE Associates' day in the autumn
- Continue to encourage UE Associates to network together and visit Associates whenever possible, but this should not be a priority within UE
- Continue to think through the implications of UE as a mission order, learning from groups such as UNOH and InnerChange
- Consider developing a covenant between UE and team members that spells out mutual responsibilities

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- Consider developing another category beyond ‘team member’ or ‘associate’ for those no longer team members but much more than associates (e.g. partner)
- Develop an exit process for team members considering leaving UE and find ways to celebrate what they have done and learn from their experience

E. Values

1. Reflecting on past and current experience.

(a) The values at the heart of UE have been the most attractive dimension of what we do, achieving much greater prominence than expected when they were created. These values are deeply owned by team members and their importance is recognised by the trustees and members of the steering groups. Associates are primarily attracted to UE by these values.

(b) The values have stood the test of time over the past ten years with one substantial revision and occasional minor changes but nothing that has changed their essence or ethos. There is no apparent need to revisit or revise these again at present. However, issues have arisen regarding the theological foundations on which the values stand or theological assumptions implicit but not explicit within them.

(c) The development of a daily liturgy based on the values, providing it is well used, offers an important resource and a way of internalising the values.

(d) As any community or organisation ages and diversifies the danger increases that the original values are forgotten, marginalised or ignored in practice. Recent discussions about guarding the values and occasional challenges as to whether we are operating according to the values are necessary checks.

(e) Issues within the Glasgow steering group also indicate that shared values do not automatically resolve theological differences.

2. Recommendations

- Ensure that the values are at the heart of any induction or training processes
- Encourage team leaders’ meetings to reflect on the values when they meet together and talk about practical or strategic issues
- Incorporate visual reminders of the value headings (relationship, humility, creativity) in agendas, minutes and other internal communications
- Set national team leaders’ or team members’ days firmly in the context of the values
- Encourage everyone involved in UE to be alert to any activities or procedures that call into question our commitment to the values
- Engage in periodic reflection on the theological assumptions and implications of the values.

F. Governance and Infrastructure

1. Reflecting on past and current experience.

(a) Beginning with an informal advisory group, UE formed a charitable trust and now has a two-tier governance structure consisting of trustees and regional steering groups. The trustees are legally responsible for the work of urban Expression. The steering groups are linked with and accountable to the trustees through their two representatives on the board of trustees.

(b) Developments in governance and infrastructure have been vital to enable UE to grow and diversify, but these carry with them certain dangers, including bureaucracy, dilution and distraction, as new people join

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with different agendas, disempowerment of the grass-roots, etc. The transition from self-employed coordinators to staff carries similar dangers but has the potential to enhance the scope and impact of UE.

(c) The recent adoption of a child protection policy and policy on vulnerable adults has been crucial and further policies may also need to be put in place in the near future. The issue of chairing trustees' meetings needs to be resolved.

(d) Communication is already becoming a significant issue, ensuring that consultation is not unduly extended but includes all the appropriate people.

(e) Urban Expression has responsibility for overseeing the work of the teams but not for overseeing the development of the churches these teams plant. The coordinators or others within UE may be invited to offer consultancy to these churches, but UE is a mission agency rather than a mini-denomination.

2. Recommendations

- Ensure that team members and emerging churches are clear about the limits of UE's responsibility for oversight.
- When UE appoints staff, put together job descriptions and person specifications and issue contracts of employment
- Ensure that the minutes of trustees' meetings and regional steering groups are circulated to each of these groups
- Encourage Phil Warburton to see himself as the representative of the UE teams on the trustees and encourage all members of UE to regard him in this way
- Encourage Karen Stallard to see herself as the representative of the UE teams on the London steering group and encourage all members of UE in London to regard her in this way
- Encourage similar representation on the Manchester and Glasgow steering groups
- Agree a permanent chair or trustees and a vice-chair, neither of whom should be representatives of particular cities

G. Finance

1. Reflecting on past and current experience.

(a) UE has been and remains a mission agency that requires relatively little central funding because of our reliance on self-funding teams. Finances have been adequate but quite tight for much of the past 10 years, although we have more in hand at present than previously (partly due to Stuart not claiming consultancy fees and in part due to increased donations from Trusts and individuals). There are no short-term threats to our viability.

(d) Funds have been raised nationally and by the Glasgow steering group. But obtaining further income from Trusts will be harder as UE ages, so a broader base of individual supporters will be increasingly important.

(c) The BU Home Mission grant available to UE this year will enable us significantly to increase 'staff' input and should enable us to follow through on the recommendations in this review and take on some new initiatives. Without additional funding and staff time we will struggle to do more than maintain the current level of activities.

(d) We have an excellent treasurer who has exceeded expectations in relation to his role as a trustee and his interest in all aspects of UE.

2. Recommendations.

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- Explore ways to increase the base of individual supporters
- Encourage the Manchester steering group to look for financial support from that city and region
- Maintain links with Trusts that currently support UE and put limited time into approaching other Trusts
- Celebrate UE as a mission agency that requires little central funding

H. Partnerships

1. Reflecting on past and current experience.

(a) UE has operated within a cross-denominational context with trustees and steering group members, team members and Associates, drawn from various denominational backgrounds. There is some theological diversity too, especially in Glasgow. Teams and emerging churches have forged strong and unusual partnerships with other local churches.

(b) UE has tried with very limited success to develop a network of 'partner churches' as a context for recruitment and prayer. Paul Ede has been much more successful in this in Scotland.

(c) UE has forged strong links with other urban mission and training agencies – Urban Mission Toolkit, Alove/NEO, Workshop, Urban Presence, Eden, Synergy and Resource (Bristol). Some of these might be interested in developing a new urban mission forum, especially if the 'Jesus in the City' congresses do not continue. UE has also explored links with BMS World Mission.

(d) A new factor is the approach by some Baptist Associations for help in establishing a mission strategy or engaging with a particular local situation.

(e) The emergence of Rural Expression has been a surprise and may not fit long-term within the orbit of UE, but this seems to be a timely and natural development.

(f) The emergence of Urban Expression Netherlands has also been unexpected but is a welcome development. UEN will develop as an independent but closely associated agency.

2. Recommendations.

- Acknowledge and celebrate the diversity within UE and explore with trustees the implications
- Investigate Paul's success in developing partner churches and look for any transferable lessons.
- Ensure that any partnership with Baptist Associations (or similar groups) continues the practice of careful research and thorough consultation.
- Expect Baptist Associations to take the lead in promotion and recruitment in their areas but insist UE is involved in interviewing and induction
- Explore with other urban mission agencies a possible urban forum, coalition or partnership
- Continue to assist in the development of Rural Expression but keep on the agenda its likely eventual independence from UE

Stuart Murray Williams 24/10/07

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