

### **What to do – when the culture changes?**

I moved “down south” in 1983. I was 22 years old and was beginning my theological training at London Bible College. I wasn’t sure what to expect – but one thing I hadn’t anticipated was the difficulty southerners had in understanding my Glaswegian accent. Invariably conversations would produce the response from others – “Sorry?”; “Pardon?”

It turned out that I spoke too quickly for people to understand what I was saying. I said, “It turned out that I...” So I was faced with a dilemma – to continue in my “own little world” (unable to communicate) or to do something about it. The only option was to try to speak more slowly, which took some time and effort, and felt quite unnatural for a while. In fact I felt almost hypocritical – as if I was trying to put on an act. But the change of culture demanded that I reflect on my new situation and respond appropriately.

It’s probably not the best analogy, but we in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church in the UK face the challenge of living in a new culture. The geography we face hasn’t changed – but the “climate” (the religious and social context) has. And we (the church) find that we’re not easily understood – often failing to connect and engage with those who are not-yet Christians

A Tear Fund survey (1996) showed that six out of ten people are not intending to come to church any time soon. We can jazz up our music or (depending on your taste) get the best organist in the UK. We can animate Powerpoint presentations till we’re blue in the face. We can make all the technical changes in the world but 60% of the population of the UK aren’t coming anywhere near your church or mine.

Déjà vu – once again it seems that it is time to reflect on a “new situation” and respond appropriately. We as a regional team are trying to help our churches and colleagues face up to this new reality. Please pray for us and get in touch if we can help you face this challenge.

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