

# Creativity

This following text is Jonathan Green's speaking notes from the third of ten values talks held at The Sanctuary Westminster on 16th February 2006.

## In the image of God

“In the beginning God created...” Genesis 1:1

The first 5 words of the NIV translation of the Bible tell us that our God is creative! And not just a bit – but wildly creative! If we look at scientists' attempts to classify the natural world then we will discover that there are thousands of species of animals, insects and fish and birds and pretty much every other kind of living creature and organism.

Just last week a team of scientists announced that they have found a "lost world" in the Indonesian jungle that is home to dozens of new species. They discovered more than 20 new species of frogs, including a tiny microhylid frog less than 14mm long. I wonder how many more untouched places like that exist around the world?

We have been created in the image of a very creative God – we have a created capacity to create! We are creations who make creations... through childbirth, through art, through our imaginations, in our lives, in community. The Sanctuary Westminster is a creation!

Here at The Sanctuary we want to explore what being Christian is all about, what it means to be fully human. Unlike God we cannot create from nothing. We create from substances that already exist. But he has put within us the ability to be creative and I believe that part of “becoming” Christian is about learning to grow as creative people!

## You don't have to be bohemian to be creative!

When we think of creativity we often think of the obviously arty kinds of people – who hang out in coffee shops writing poetry and draw in the streets and write music and sing on the underground or in the middle of a park on a bright summer day.

We too often associate being creative with the visual arts, images, music, colour, dance, poetry, drama etc. Often, when I ask people if they are creative I hear the reply, “Oh I'm not creative. I'm not artistic.”

## Everyone is creative

‘Every child is an artist: the problem is how to remain an artist when they grow up’.  
Pablo Picasso

The dictionary definition of *creativity*:

- The quality of being creative
- The ability to use the imagination to develop new and original ideas or things, especially in an artistic context.

Creativity can be helpfully applied to everything we do, for instance how can we be creative in our living, organisation, finance, time, use of space, modes of travel, hospitality? That's just a start, there are many more opportunities for us to apply our creativity – think about it!

## **Permission giving**

The Church has often wanted to restrict freethinking and creative expression. It has often discouraged artistic expression. (Of course some denominations have been supportive patrons of the arts.) I would love The Sanctuary to be known as a place where we give people permission to be creative.

One of the key questions that can unlock so much for us is to ask **“what if?”**

A Christian community should be a safe place to ask that question. We have church history and tradition and doctrine to keep us accountable. A healthy Christian community should keep itself in check.

## **Surviving through innovation**

Creativity is a survival skill! There are some notable companies that have innovated themselves out of difficult times. Apple computer were going down the drain a decade ago. Innovations like the i-pod have helped turn the company around. Apple now lead the computer industry and are renowned for innovation.

In the context of the United Kingdom with declining church numbers, we might do well to develop our creative thinking. Indeed when your resources are limited you need to be more creative than ever. Perhaps Christians need to encourage creative thinking to reverse the declining trend. Perhaps prayerful, innovative thinking is a key to growth for the church. Why don't we try it out here!

## **The Brain**

Our Brains are incredible creations – experts say that we only use 5% of our brains. In the spirit of Valentines day - I love the line from the film The Wedding Crashers when John Beckwith (Owen Wilson) says: ‘you know they say we only use 5% of our brains, I think we only use 5% of our hearts.’

So I thought it would be fun to exercise our brains (and our hearts) by working out for the next 15 minutes or so.

## **Exercises 1: Our mind is a great search engine!**

Close your eyes: OK, I will now say a word:

*Beach*

Instantly, your mind makes a list of our experiences and knowledge of beaches.

Now to demonstrate how brilliant our minds are at searching for different things let us now search within those parameters!

*Sand...*

*White...*

*Australia...*

Now if anyone here has walked on a white sandy beach in Australia then your search results will be pages long. You may bring to mind how the sand felt between your toes. Our minds are very good at searching through our experiences. Of course some words are more helpful than others... Sometimes we want to forget some word or names, as the search results are a difficult memory.

However, our brains can only search on data it already holds. If you were to say “Sega Mega Drive” to a 4 year old, they won’t have a clue what you are talking about!

As Sir Tom Farmer says, “Nothing comes from nothing!” So it is good to ask what are we feeding our minds with!

### **Tips for getting better search results: EXPLORE THE WORLD AROUND YOU!**

**Radio** – listen to a new radio station

**TV** – watch wildlife programmes and black and white films

**Books** – read an academic book (or if you read academic books pick a popular novel)

**Comics** - Read a comic

**Pubs** – ask someone in your local about their work

**Walks** – Stop when you are next out for a walk and examine the leaves on a tree

**Hug a tree** – what does it feel like?

**Offices** – what type of wood is your table made of and where is it from?

**Shoes** – The leather from your shoes – how did it get that colour?

**Trees** – why do they have bark?

**Birds** – what do you know about the migration of sparrows?

**People watching** – when was the last time you just sat on a park bench and watched everything?

**Boats** – when was the last time you were in a boat – what do you know about boats?

**Culture** – Go to the theatre, listen to opera and watch a ballet.

**Magazines** – Read a science magazine, a woman’s magazine and a gardening magazine.

And here’s the really good news: **Information is actually calorie free, so go ahead and stuff yourself!**

### **Some more questions:**

What do you know about the Christian faith?

What do you know about the Holy Spirit?

What does it actually mean to have life in its fullness?

Why is Jesus divine?

Why do we meet together to worship?

What does the church think about leadership?

What does the church think about women in leadership? Why?

Why don’t all Christians agree about things?

What does a pastor do? Have you read a book about it?

What are the practical issues when trying to plant a new congregation?

Do you care? Should you care?

### **The power of a question**

Why do we do that?

Don’t just DO – **THINK!**

Why do we do it this way? See past the ‘normalies!’; Oh we *normally* start meetings with 3 songs and a prayer. We *normally* serve digestive biscuits after church. This person *normally* does this job. **WHY?** Is there a better way? How could we improve this system, this process, this cake, this coffee, this product, this web site, this relationship, this outfit, this room?

And remember: It is often the *little* changes that make all the difference. It is that tweak to the chorus that makes a good song a great song!

### **But I don’t have enough time to think!**

“Do you ever complain that you don’t have enough time? You certainly don’t have enough time to think! You’re too busy with all that *doing* to be *thinking*. But there are literally hundreds of hours you have that you could liberate for your thinking!

Research into company directors has shown that only 11% have their best ideas at work. 12% have them in the bath, 18% while in bed and 39% do their creative thinking when travelling. When could you think?

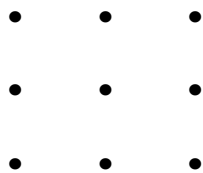
So how much travelling or rather creative thinking time do you have?

Your travelling time could become your creative thinking time. Think! If you commute to work every day, between the ages of 22 and 65, taking one hour each way, then you will have spent 2.5 years in transit.

### **How many ideas could you conjure up if you could just sit about thinking for two and a half years?”<sup>1</sup>**

### **Exercise 2: Connect the dots**

Join up the nine dots with four straight lines without taking your pencil off the paper.



HINT: Be careful not to make any assumptions about the instructions – think outside the box.

**The answer can be found at the end of this paper.**

### **Exercise 3: Play a word association game!**

Form a circle. The first person starts by saying a word. The person to the left says out loud the first thing that they associate with the previous word. Circle around the group twice!

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<sup>1</sup> Tina Catling and Mark Davies, *Think*, p18.

## **Exercise 4: The Green Game!**

Write down as many types of green as you can think of in 60 seconds:

Start with Brazilian frog green.

- Brazilian frog green
- ...

## **Create opportunities in our gatherings to Think!**

In fact that is what we are going to do for a while now.

The Dietrich Bonhoeffer exhibition we have just engaged with exhibited art that communicated a specific message. The artists creativity was channelled to *do* something. It has a purpose. We are going to use our creative abilities to do something!

We are going to split into groups and spend some time thinking about some specific scenarios that relate to us as a newly formed congregation. Each group will get a pack with instructions in and I would like you to grapple with the issues and think of some steps forward.

**Let us pray: Lord, help us to be creative. Inspire us now as we apply our creativity to real world situations so that we might make a difference and bring honour to your name. Amen.**

Here are the creative briefs to look at, they are varied and we would love your input. If you have a **brainwave** then **e-mail me** and we can talk about doing some of these things!

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## **Creative brief No. 1 : How can we be a compassionate Christian community in Central London?**

Helping out at the Open Door Meal at St James the Less is a great start...

... but how do we grow in our effectiveness and our ability to be compassionate and make a lasting difference...

How can we impact Westminster?

How can we impact the world?

List the practical issues and possible solutions.

Remember to ask the question - what if?

and... think outside the box!

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## *Creative brief No. 2: How can we be a place of learning? How would you encourage conversation?*

*Asking the question is a great start. Making space for conversation in our meetings, I mean really doing justice to a topic is a little trickier... especially as we grow numerically!*

*... so how can we encourage conversation and effective discussion within our community? Where people actually feel heard and their suggestions will be taken seriously. We don't want token discussions!*

*How might the web help and other digital communication methods?*

*Remember to ask the question – what if?*

*and... think outside the box!*

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## **Creative brief No. 3: How would you publicise The Sanctuary Westminster?**

WOW publicise! So we think The Sanctuary has potential and a pretty good set of values that are worth sharing with the world. More precisely the world of Central London Students, and young professionals...

A few projects to consider:

- A values booklet to hand out to the congregation; newcomers/visitors; at fresher week; and in the businesses community.
- Small cards like the one in your pack.
- Posters on the underground
- Radio advertising

What other projects might be worth thinking about. Get going with some designs, some ideas of the kinds of paper or card to be used. Style. Colours. Logo's. Quantity. Distribution methods.

Remember to ask the question – what if?  
and... think outside the box!

Special consideration – you don't have an unlimited budget!

## **Creative brief No. 4: How would you encourage/shape community life in the hustle and bustle of Central London living. How do we share our lives together in a meaningful way?**

WOW are you serious! Yes, its part of our value system, Jesus came to build a viable alternative community calling us to 'do life together'. It's part of being a Christian. So how then can we be a community who know how to have fun together and have a life outside of church meetings?

### **Factors to consider:**

- We live in London with all the pressures that brings.
- We have to think about including students who don't have 'loads of money'.
- We have to think about busy young professionals who don't have 'loads of money'.
- We don't want to become a clique!
- Do we need a dedicated 'fun group' who suggest ideas and help shape and initiate these kinds of ideas?

Remember to ask the question – what if?  
and... think outside the box!

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## **Creative brief No. 5: Our physical meeting space communicates so much about us. Taking into account our values.... how would you decorate this place?**

Yes, the yellow has to go! How could we create a meeting space that inspires us and communicates who we are to any visitors?

### **Factors to consider:**

- You can't repaint!
- You can't drill holes!
- The solution needs to be portable.
- The solution needs to grow into new spaces as The Sanctuary grows.
- It can't take forever to put up and pack away!

Remember to ask the question – what if?

... also remember to ask the question – is this really necessary?  
Perhaps we could live with the yellow!

and... think outside the box!

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**Creative brief No. 6:** How can we encourage The Sanctuary to be a prayerful community?

Remember to ask the question - what if?

and... think outside the box!

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**The answer**

