

# Small Boats

A guide to starting and sustaining  
small Christian communities



NETWORK



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# Vision

Our vision is to see small communities of Christians established in villages and towns.

We see these communities as the primary way of being the local church, bringing the Kingdom of God in every dimension to the places they serve.

We see each community as a **small boat** - unique, agile, and built for fishing.

*So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. Acts 26:19*



'Small Boat' by Sarah Grant

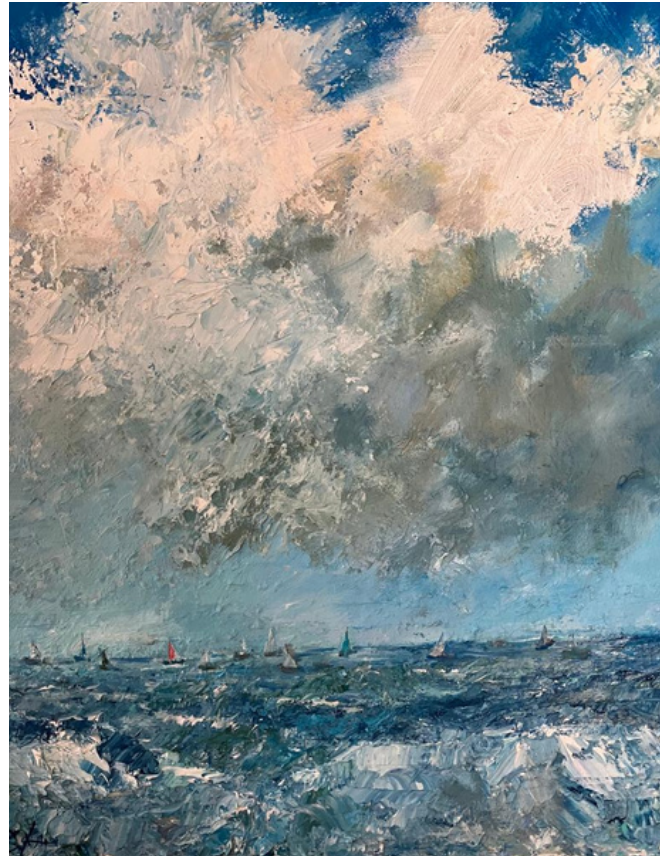
# Rural church reimagined

The rural church in the UK is in decline. We need new ways of being church which work alongside traditional models.

We seek to begin new contextual communities that are primarily relational not institutional, based on scripture and responsive to the Spirit; agile, flexible and focussed on making disciples.

The imagery of small boats and harbours helps us to picture this new future.

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? **Isaiah 43:19***



'Boats out fishing' by Cliff Baxendale

# Small boats at a glance

## A small boat is...

- The primary place of belonging, discipleship, care, and mission
- A community, not just a meeting
- Uniquely shaped by community and place, as well as by people's gifting and calling.

## The community:

- Grows together through mutual discipleship
- Regularly eats and prays together
- Connects with other small boats
- Connects to the wider church through 'harbour' (e.g. gatherings, prayer initiatives, coaching)

*The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets in their house.*

**1 Corinthians 16:19**



'Being prepared'. The harbour at Sagres in Portugal, by Cliff Baxendale

# Essential first steps

Each community will be shaped differently but will begin with:

- A sense of call to a particular location or people, and exploring the call in prayer with others.
- Continual watching and listening in that place for signs of God's activity.
- Researching the community to better understand its history and present shape.
- Establishing a prayer guard of others who will pray for you as you begin.
- Finding those who will welcome you ('people of peace').

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*

**Colossians 4:2**



# Ask

- What is the cry of this community?
- What would it look like for the Kingdom of God to come here?
- What shape should the Christian community take to see this happen?

*Your Kingdom come, your will be done...*  
**Matthew 6:10**



# Values

There are seven values which all small communities and individuals within the Threshold Network hold to:

- The presence of God
- The mission of God
- Oneness in Christ
- Care for the young
- Creativity
- Hospitality
- Generosity

*How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD almighty. My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh cry out for the living God. Psalm 84:1-2*





# Practices

In time, a fully developed small boat will be characterised by five practices inspired by the church described in Acts 2: 42-47:

- Doing life together (*koinonia* - Greek for 'fellowship'), not just weekly meetings.
- Gathering regularly around the Word and communion.
- Devotion to prayer and worship.
- Sharing generously what we have with others.
- A focus beyond ourselves in making disciples and seeing the wider community transformed.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47*

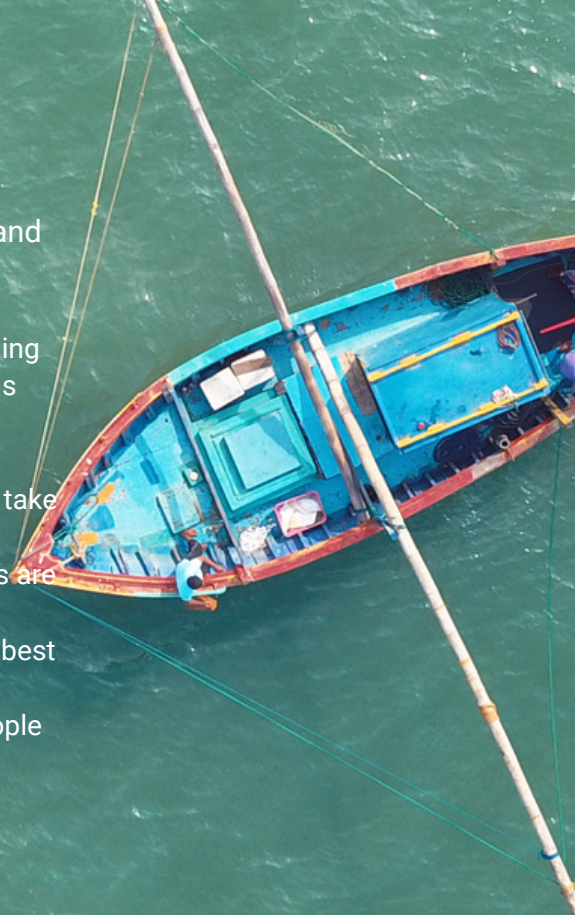


# Principles

We see 'small boats' as a way of being church that is sustainable and replicable. In starting and sustaining a small boat, remember that:

- **Only God can do what is needed.** Prayer and fasting, watching, listening and waiting are key. No initiative will serve God's purposes unless it is born by His Spirit, in obedience to His call, and begun with faith and vision.
- **The development of small boats is a long-term "sea-change".** It can take time to settle into new rhythms.
- **A variety of fishing boats are needed** - no two Christian communities are the same, nor are the places or people they are called to.
- **The call to each of us is to fish** - and going fishing with others is the best place to be cared for and grow as a disciple.
- **The size of the boat is as determined by God** - from two or three people to house size or people's capacity limits.
- **This will not come without cost** - starting and sustaining healthy Christian community involves sacrifice.

*Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **Matthew 16:24***



# The wider church

It is important for each community to connect regularly into the life of the wider church. This could be with individuals, teams, or in gatherings which are a bit like a harbour for small boats.

Harbours are important for:

- Rest
- Hearing the Word and Spirit together
- Telling stories
- Encouraging one another
- Sung worship on a different scale and dynamic
- Healing and refreshing
- Coaching and mentoring
- Young people gathering with others of their own generation for encouragement and support

*And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. Acts 5:42*



# Further information

For further information and resources visit

[www.thresholdnetwork.org](http://www.thresholdnetwork.org)

[www.thresholdchurch.co.uk](http://www.thresholdchurch.co.uk)

[www.acoustic84.org](http://www.acoustic84.org)



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