Muddling through

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Leading a church that isn't a "church," doesn't meet regularly, and has a loose version of itself is all rather tricky. It's also a lot of fun. I'm four weeks into my position at Mission Developer with [The Project F-M](#), and I'm discovering new joys and challenges each day. I won't overshare or bore you with mundane details (like the three hours it took me to put together that damn office chair), but I am developing a series of working theories about the Project and young adult ministry in Fargo-Moorhead.

All these hypotheses are very preliminary, but the little time I've had to tackle the Project's next steps so far has led me to think on these things. So, in the spirit of openness, I invite you to think on these things as well. And, of course, please let's think together in the comments.

Hypothesis One: Some new faith communities have natural starts; others have more chaotic births.
As I've spoken with other people who have started new missional/emergent/whatever communities, many stories are of communities that have developed quite naturally. "I almost came onto such-and-such a community by accident. Friends kept telling me to lead an informal prayer service, so when I had the time, I did, and it just took off from there."

Or, mission developers were called with very specific tasks in mind: start a bible study, transition into a church, buy a building, go from there. Neither of these starts are simple or without many challenges along the way, but there's a natural flow, a building of interest and energy and a clear movement from A to B.

On the other hand, other starts are more chaotic. Values and vision and energy don't mesh as easily, and larger challenges keep cropping up. Talking through these challenges can be really helpful for all, but if they're not addressed head-on they fester and positive growth is difficult.

Hypothesis two:
paraphrasing from a conversation partner, "Most 20/30 somethings I know (myself included) would never want to 'go to church,' but they all are happy, even eager, to discuss faith and spirituality."
Another side of this statement has to do with our traditional notion of what church is, and the young adult stereotype that church is boring, out-of-touch, and irrelevant. Without arguing that point one way or another, I'm totally willing to grant that the impulse to talk about faith, and to be in an accepting community of faith-seekers, is stronger (and more powerful) than an invitation to "go to church."

Hypothesis three: smaller might be better.
Words like "community," "friendship," and "relationships" keep coming up in my discussions. Fargo-Moorhead boasts some very large Lutheran congregations — some totally great ones. Their size is usually a huge asset, but I find myself considering the benefits of small groups and small gatherings for now. As much as I can, I'm trying not to jump to a working image of gatherings that measure success by their size.

Hypothesis four:
The elephant in the Project F-M room is how to speak of Jesus Christ without being off-putting, how to claim a distinct Christian identity without coming across as too in-your-face or close-minded.
I've read many places that Gen X and Y is said to belong to a community first before they believe (whereas, in the past, people first believed a certain theological framework and then sought to belong to a church that espoused a similar belief). The question becomes, though, how to move from belonging to believing with a group of people who are of a questioning/seeking faith to being with.

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