In the final part of his series, pioneer youth ministry legend Jonny Baker provides a framework for beginning your own pioneering journey.

Mission is seeing what God is doing and joining in. Simple right? Youth ministry could take a leaf out of mission thinking and aspire to do the same — to see what God is doing and join in. Mark Yaconelli, in his wonderful book Contemplative Youth Ministry, comes close to this as an approach. I used to think that mission was something I did to take God with me to people, to share with them what I had, but now I realise how naive that was. God is reaching out to the world in an overflow of love. Mission is participating with that through the Spirit. God is about of us and with us and behind us. It's reassuring.

The emergence of the current interest in pioneer ministry in the wider Church can be traced directly back to questions in youth ministry 25 years ago or so, about how to reach young people outside of Church culture. Youth ministry has been fertile ground for pioneers. Many of the students training with us at CMS on the pioneer mission leadership training courses are either involved in or began pioneering in youth ministry.

This is the third in a series of articles on pioneer youth ministry. In the first I wrote about an adventure of the imagination. By that I mean a journey in mission to pioneer something new driven by the experience of a gap between the reality of what we experience and what we thought youth ministry should be about when we signed up. In the second I explored the nature of the pioneer’s gift. My shorthand for it is the gift of not fitting in. It involves a different way of seeing things, acting in some kind of dissent which is both nurtured with others rather than alone. It’s an uncomfortable gift to carry and the Church finds it difficult to know how to deal with prophetic people and always has, but at the same time she badly needs them. Think of almost any saint remembered by the Church. They are likely to be someone who had this kind of gift, though it’s usually only recognised in hindsight.

So, let’s say you are thinking ‘yes I identify with that’ (or can recognise someone else who is a pioneer) and want to go on this adventure of the imagination. What next? How do you proceed?

I have seen a whole range of things pioneered and lots have begun in different ways. But there are a few pointers and common threads in the process that we are learning about with the pioneer training with us at CMS. One of the verses in the Bible I have found really helpful is Hebrews 11:8.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.

Step 1 - Setting out into the unknown

The first step is always the most difficult because it requires going somewhere or doing something that takes us away from the familiar, without knowing exactly where it will lead. Tom Peters reflecting on innovation in business suggests that 90 per cent of success is getting started. You have to take the risk of letting go of the old, taking a first step towards the new without knowing what is going to happen. It is real risk. At this stage you may have identified a context or culture or particular group of young people you are seeking to reach. Or the first step might be that you simply need to leave the old to move towards this and begin to create the space for it.

It would be so much easier, so much more comforting if you could set up the new and then all of a sudden jump from the old to the new without so much as a blink or any struggle. But we have discovered what pioneers have known for centuries - the journey to the new invariably leads through wilderness, desert, chaos, liminality, darkness, and unknowing. It’s a between space, a limbo. In the diagram I drew in the first article, the journey to the new led through Gethsemani. No one wants to go there! But it is also a creative space, a space where God shapes us and we have to learn to trust when other things are stripped away. I suspect that it is in this stripping away that is so important - to genuinely create something new we have to let go of our temptation to do the new thing with the old tools from the old paradigm.

Step 2 - Border crossing

Having taken the first step in journeying to the new, sooner or later a border will have to be crossed. This occurs when going to a people group beyond the reach of existing church or youth ministry. The limits of our understanding and ways in which we have always done things have to be revised so that the gospel can be reinterpreted in newly relevant and meaningful ways.

One of our pioneer students, Andrea, discovered this when she began to see an interest in spirituality among herunchurched friends. It became clear that this reflected something going on in the wider culture. She wondered if it might create a point of engagement for the church which was reaching defensively to what they perceived as growing acceptance of the occult. Having seen a connection point for mission, God then confirmed she was on the right track when at Spring Harvest she heard a talk by Yvonne Roeschold, then the curate at Coventry Cathedral, who had recently contributed to research entitled ‘Evangelism in a Spiritual Age’. She spoke of a group in Goldthorpe called Eden People who were going to fairs and offering to pray with people. In that moment Andrea knew God wanted her to do the same at Bognor’s Green Fair. This was the largest environmental fair in London and attracted thousands of visitors. When she returned home she gathered a team and prepared to pitch her tent. However, it was then that she encountered opposition from Christians who accused her of going to the devil’s territory. It was almost as if these spiritual seekers had
already made their choices and were beyond redemption.

For many in the Church, a pioneer's cross-
ing of borders is threatening - it challenges their secure assumptions about God and his sphere of influence. Yet on the day of the fair, Anderson's team was overwhelmed with people who wanted to talk about their spiritual experiences and receive prayer. What astonished them was that God was already at work in the lives of those they encountered. All they needed to do was point that out.

The other thing to say about cross-
ing borders, however, is that there is never the same again! Anderson observed that having seen the hunger of these beyond the walls of Church, you cannot go back to being content with busyness as usual. Having experienced first-hand the disconnect between our faith communities and those who want to reveal his transforming and unconditionally affirming love to is impossible to settle with the status quo. This has led to a lot of frustration and a desire to do something to help those who are looking for something more.

Pioneering is a dynamic process that relies upon and stretches our relationship with God. The Trinity could do it without us, but I believe, they love us and want to work with us in grappling with the challenges and tasks and so we grow in self-awareness and depend on them.

Step 5 - Innovating

It is out of this discernment, and the changes in attitude and belief that might accompany it, that new possibilities can emerge. This does not mean a foolproof blueprint that falls down from heaven! Failure is how we learn. The key is not to be put off by it but being willing to recognize what went wrong and how the original plan could be adapted to creatively solve the problem encountered. It is important to involve others in this process and build team to share the journey as well as spark further ideas and pose practical questions. The innovating and building needs to include questions of restructuring, infrastructure and sustainability.

Jo talks about how she can see this model at work in the initial stages of setting up One Eighty. She says: "Knowing I was called to set up something together with the skateboarding community, I began hanging around the skate park regularly, building relationships with those in the skate community." She conducted a survey of around 50 skaters to ask specific questions about characteristics, problems and needs. She then collated the results and compared them with her previous experience of skate culture. "With the help and guidance of a steering group and my line manager, I attempted to filter the information to create the main principle behind One Eighty" - a mobile, indoor skate project that would give the opportunity for young people to explore the Christian faith in a relevant way. After creating a business plan, building a team and fundraising for equipment, One Eighty was launched and began running weekly sessions. Through regular reflection and evaluation new initiatives were created to meet new needs that showed themselves through further listening and learning. We set up a schools programme, combined with regular detached work, wrote Switch, campaigned for better local outdoor facilities, created a Junior Leadership Scheme and a separate graffiti project. I kept repeating the process, listening, discerning, creating and reflecting. When there was nothing else to create and all that was needed was to sustain the existing. I moved on and a co-worker took over the project.

One of the things that is quite striking about pioneering in these early stages is that it is hard to work out from people who seem intuitively to spot opportunities and make things happen what it is that they are actual-
ly doing. I have discussed this several times with Richard Pasmore and he concludes: 'I think it is connected to opening yourself up to the Holy Spirit'. Which brings us back to where I began - seeing what God is doing and joining in. Developing attention and aware-
ness through contemplative prayer can really help. But when all is said and done, there is no prescribed formula, nothing you can pull off the shelf, each project is unique and not to be generalised. It is an adventure of the imagination, an exci-
ting and rewarding journey that we undertake with and in response to the Spirit of the God who is first with us.

THE REY PROJECT

WHAT IS THIS?

Occasionally we hear about slightly alternative youth work projects - youth leaders out there trying innovative ways of reaching young people. Here we profile one such project, to give you the ideas and inspiration you need to try something new.

PROJECT: The REY project

LAUNCHED: Full Throttle UK was founded in 2004, with the REY Project starting in 2007

LOCATION: Based in Kent, but soon to be rolled out across the country

AIM: To promote safe and responsible motorcycle riding, and to provide young people with an opportunity to hear the gospel in a biker-friendly environment

THE PROJECT: The REY Project, created by Full Throttle UK, is a specialist ministry that uses the iconic imagery of motorcycling to communicate the gospel. Equipping churches to create inclusive communities for 16-25 year-olds who are interested in riding motorcyles, it uses the central concept of life as a journey to explain key aspects of Christianity, with the motorcycle becoming a literal vehicle to explore faith, community and social inclusion. We understand that in today's culture you have to earn the right to share the gospel. This project enables churches to build up quality relationships with young people and young adults who are outside of church circles, and to share the gospel within that context.

The REY Project has been running in Kent for seven years, where Full Throttle UK runs two young riders clubs in Dover and Canterbury. Over the past four years, we have worked with over 200 young people, many of whom have stayed with the project for up to five years. The REY Project has provided several churches with the opportunity to taste God's love, offer practical support, and help a num-
ber of young people come to faith.

Running the REY Project has been chal-
enging, and the big issue has been providing ongoing support to anyone who has come to faith. Not every church wants a bunch of young people riding motorcycles to turn up at its door! One church in particular - St Andrews United Reformed Church in Can-
terbury - has been particularly supportive by allowing the sessions to be run on its premises as a cafe. Through this new look church session a significant num-
ber of young people have come to explore the faith, and follow up their commitments to Jesus. The church service had a wild and raw element to it, and the church saw young people come to faith over two years in the Canterbury REY Project. This might not sound like a large number, but it represents 60 per cent of the total group! Some of those who have made commitments have had diffic-
ulty gaps, with criminal records and histo-
ries of re-offending, but have seen their lives turned around through the project.

The REY Project has changed over time. As well as running young riders clubs, we also manage a small fleet of motorcycles which are used to run weekend road trips combin-
ing off road riding and survival training.

Another additional project is Wild Thing, named after the 1960s bikers anthem by The Tyges, which is a survival course teaching young people basic survival training while also teaching them the gospel.

One further aspect of the REY Project is our Numball Rally. This is an annual long distance motorcycle trip introducing young people to long distance riding. In 2010 we organized a 1600 mile ride travelling from Kent to London to Edinburgh to Cardiff and back on scooters. The average speed of a moped is 30mph, and it took eight days to travel the distance. We made a few amens

in the on the way. For example, when we rode into Scotland we had a fire sale, a fire behind us. Several lorry drivers, who overtook us, swept us for being road-boggs! If we were to do anything differently, we would look at how we have built relationships with young people, Unfortunately some young people have left over the past few years, due to misunderstanding or through some form of bullying by other group members. We value our relationships with our young people, and when these get damaged it causes real heart-
ache. I've had a TABOO I am sure we would want to go back and change some events that might have been preventable!

FIVE GOLDEN RULES FOR RUNNING A YOUNG RIDERS MINISTRY:

1. Never forget who you were like when you were young. It is easy to become frustrated with young people's actions and behaviour. When we remember our own youth, that we were probably just as same, or had friends in a similar place!

2. Do not encourage illegal and anti-social motorcycle riding, but keep it safe and on, but promote continued training.

3. Don't think I can't run a youth work project. If God is calling you, surround yourself with people to inspire you and follow God.

4. Because the contact zone. Many churches are not radical because they have become comfortable. To follow one man - one man - one boat - one cat - it keeps your faith moving!

5. Running a REY Project cannot be done in isolation. It needs to have strong connections to a church that is willing to accommodate your new

JONNY BAKER

Read this month's case study about innovative youth motorcycle project REY, as an example of pioneering in practice.

DANIEL HARRIS

is the founder and project director of Full Throttle UK.