



ARE WE POST-COMMUNITY? CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIAN FAITH AND MISSION IN A RAPIDLY URBANISING WORLD

This article defines community as ‘a sense of belonging that is the fruit of common commitments and personal investment’ and explores the art and nature of community building for mission within the context of a rapidly fracturing, individualising and urbanising world. Christian faith is argued as not primarily about general statements of belief or intent, but a particular kind of sharing life. The core thread of the biblical narrative is to love our

particular God with particular neighbours in a particular place. Yet, sharing life with others in this tri-dimensional way is increasingly foreign to most Western peoples and other urbanites alike. In this article Ash reflects on Jesus' example as the archetypical community builder, alongside anthropological insights and personal experiences from over twenty years of living and serving in teams immersed in urban poor neighbourhoods. He proposes intentional community formation processes, to bond and build this crucial defining dimension of Christian faith.

'Jane' was having a coffee in our small home in Klong Toey slum, Bangkok. Twenty four years old and an aspiring Christian musician, she explained, 'I want to be just like Mother Teresa. I want to kick the darkness here till it bleeds daylight.... I can give you two months over my summer break.'

'Jane' was seriously earnest and didn't appreciate my reflex grimace. I tried to explain,

'That's a great dream. Mother Teresa is actually one of my pin-up girls for mission, but it might take a fair bit longer than two months. You do know, don't you, that Mother Teresa wasn't the Mother Teresa we know at our age? She did her formation with Loreto Nuns, then twenty years of service, and didn't start the Missionaries of Charity until she was forty. We do offer a three year community formation experience that could give you a start, in Australia or New Zealand.'

'Three years? Living here? That's the start? Seriously?' Jane's head dropped and she looked at the floor. Eventually she looked up at us with tears in her eyes,

'But see... I've this talent. Wouldn't it be wasted on people here when I could use my fame to advocate for thousands of trafficked women as a musician traveling the world?'

'Well.. I'm not sure Jesus would see you sharing his life with our neighbors as a waste...'

Jane left Klong Toey disappointed. We were sad too because we know Jane is just one of thousands we talk to each year who *could* find their vocation in community based mission, but are simply unaware or unable to commit to do what it takes to make a long term difference. They never seem to find what they are looking for.

Why does this seem to be such a common experience now: the frenetic search for instant impact, over the real, long-term commitment it takes to see transformation?

Perhaps a loss of community with others is a part of this? How can we nurture a sense of community with others when our most powerful conditioning demands that we consume, and only find value in what we offer others to consume from us? This conditioning has not been subtle and has grown in intensity over the last few decades.

Post-modern, globalized culture inherently nurtures a need for individuals to feel special, separate and superior. Indeed, two hundred years of conditioning for radicalized individualism and three decades of systematic marketing means each person now feels entitled to the best in life because, 'we are worth it'. We are now far more ready to defend our own image created for cyberspace, than be ready with the sensitivity and maturity needed to love others in our own neighbourhood. These cultural conditions create real challenges to building any real sense of community with others, be they in church, or indeed any other voluntary or unpaid association.

This conditioning, though initiated and incubated in the West, is spreading. A rising number of Majority World people, now birthed in and conditioned by rapidly urbanizing, consumer global culture, are also finding personal image easier to maintain than sharing life with those crowded around them. Over 1 billion people, around 1 in 6 people, live in urban slums like mine and yet we are all overwhelmed by the same marketing as the West now. It may be more overwhelming because there are simply no limits. I mean I can walk out of my front door and look up beyond the corrugated iron rooftops, tangles of illegal electrical wires and jutting TV antennas and see a flood lit, tennis-court sized billboard, advertising the latest condominium you really must have if you want the goodlife. Nurtured with the same desires and expectations as the rich then, but without the where-with-all to even touch that lifestyle, this radical inequality is creating a poisonous resentment in the burgeoning urban poor toward those few who can. Added to this there is also a bubbling guilt that my neighbours feel, a sense that they aren't quite good enough to join that life just beyond their reach. That, maybe, if they just cared more, worked harder, drunk less or were smarter they could join the high society. Someone else must be to blame for my lack, however, for surely I am so special! In this context is it any wonder we see so many violent street riots. Surely we have not even begun to see the start of the urban unrest, instability and environmental disasters that will ensue, as these unsustainable lifestyles are pursued by individuals at all costs.

What then can Christian faith and mission offer to these serious global and local challenges that threaten to de-humanize us?

Christian faith is not primarily about general statements of belief or intent, but a particular kind of sharing life. The core thread of the biblical narrative is to love our particular God with particular neighbours in a particular place. Yet, sharing life with others in this tri-dimensional way is simply foreign to most Western peoples and other urbanites alike.

Indeed, even the basic practices for community living are almost a lost art, even by Christians. Christine Pohl, for example, researched what helped and hindered Christian community building, and identified four crucial practices.^[1] It is hard not to compare these four practices with contemporary values. Where 'nurturing a sense of gratitude' helps build a sense of community, a sense of entitlement often pervades. Where 'making and keeping promises' helps build the trust needed to share life together, we see the norm as keeping all options open in case something better comes along. Where 'truth telling' helps us grow and mature, we see spin control and image management by even our best leaders. Where 'sharing hospitality' opens us to others not like us (and therefore who we really are), we see a tribalism

that seeks only its own advantage, blaming any woes on outsiders (and therefore in denial about who our tribe really is).

This lack of experience and aptitude in community building affects the Body of Christ as much as the wider world. Indeed, a lack of maturity in sharing life with others has undermined many good missional starts today. You can see it when even the most gifted people refuse to pick up responsibilities, take initiative or push through difficult tasks and seasons in life. It's easier to take my bat and ball and play somewhere else than go deeper with God, people and place

This conditioning is especially a problem for those who want to end poverty and injustice. As Jayakuma Christian explains poverty is the result of relationships that don't work, principally the god complexes of the non-poor oppressing the poor.^[2] Even our best ideas and intentions then, can undermine transformation because god complexes - thinking we are all powerful, centers of the universe - reinforce more oppressive relationships. You see this especially in development industry marketing: if you just give £30 a month you will end poverty for this child. Well, we know vulnerability, suffering and oppression are far more sinister than a spare change problem. This is not to say we shouldn't work or advocate for justice, but the power dynamic relationship between poor and non-poor is a complex one that requires humility, maturity and change in both.

Finding Life in Community Formation

After twenty years of Urban Neighbours Of Hope we have experienced our fair share of all this and more in ourselves and others. Yet, we now have 8 teams in Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland and Bangkok and have found ways for our workers to sustain immersed life in neighbourhoods facing urban poverty, and to seek transformation through Jesus from the bottom up. A key has been some common practices and disciplines that can offer a container to help us all grow in maturity, for life, community and sustainable mission in and through Jesus. We call this process community formation and it helps individuals and communities to name their expectations of each other at different stages in their development. This container helps people 'stay put', facing themselves in Jesus, rather than avoiding or distracting themselves into superficiality.

Jesus of Nazareth did not simply proclaim a message. He built a community in the power of the Spirit that could multiply his discipleship movement and sustain his transformative vision that God's Kingdom is at hand (Mtt. 12:28, Mk. 1:15, Lk. 10:9, Jn. 14:12, Acts 1:8). Jesus called people to leave family and friends to join a new set of family and friends and demonstrated that it takes an empowered, committed community to reach a community (Mtt. 10:35-40, Mk. 10:29-30, Lk. 9:23, Jn. 12:24-25, Acts 2 and 4). This kind of committed team dynamic is also crucial if Christians are to experience a sense of the incarnational dynamic of God and see long-term transformation happen in urban neighborhoods. Community is a sense of belonging that is the fruit of common commitments and personal investment. It's crucial then those common commitments are named and their meanings explored with those who have experienced this belonging. These are time-consuming starting points for new workers and their communities, but essential if our consumer conditioning is to be reset and resisted.

Inspired by ancient Celtic orders and successive waves of committed, covenanted Christian communities through the centuries, we have found life together makes a difference; that our collective witness is far more effective in the long-term than individual heroism. We have found that our committing to some specific lifestyle practices together can free members from guessing whether they are “in” or “out” since the pathway is clear and up front, with clear markers and boundaries on the way. For example, the first level for our community is an Apprenticeship that is a commitment for one year. The aims of the Apprenticeship are to enable the Apprentice to have a lived experience of our community and to clarify if the gifts of that individual are compatible with the gifts of our order. The bonding with both the existing order members and neighbours are the priority of this first year more than any ministry results. While there are some action reflection and study groups, ministry responsibilities, and participation in common practices, the Apprenticeship is not considered a long-term investment by the Order or the Apprentice.

A community formation process is different from simply gaining the right information or training. For apostolic teams it requires apprenticing oneself to a common community to live out the gospel and experience a sense of common identity, ownership and belonging. Such formation gives the team a huge head start in working together and providing real opportunities to follow Jesus in difficult contexts. Indeed a lack of common formation can drive a team apart even before the real work starts. One of our important learnings in UNOH has been that it is crucial to give new-comers to the community the space to identify if they too have been given a grace from God for this way of gospel living, or if God has called them to another vocation.

There are many definitions of community formation. In UNOH we have found Gerald Arbuckle’s definition helpful:

The process of liberation by which, under skilled guides, the person frees himself/herself from constraints of:

- *a personal order (sin, pride, ignorance of Christ as the centre of life, ignorance of academic/pastoral skills necessary to be part of Christ’s mission today); and*
- *a social or cultural order (undue cultural pressures, prejudices)*^[3]

Such community formation is a process in and through community. An aim of community formation is for character, values and skills development to all come together for a person through a lived experience of a Christian community’s charism that helps to identify their vocation. Such formation requires a connection and initiation into the community’s founding charism that questions and affirms a person’s calling. Having tasted the community’s charism a person can better discern their own vocation.

The initiation rites found in many traditional cultures may well be helpful frameworks helping

teams initiating new workers. For example, Arnold van Gennep describes rites of passage in three stages: separation, liminal and aggregation rites.^[4] In the Gospels we can see the three stages in relationship between Jesus and the initiation of the first apostolic workers.

First, Jesus calls the disciples to separate from their previous lives and to simply follow him. The attachments and securities they had always known needed to be left behind so they could be free to find a new way of living. They had unreal hopes for what Jesus would do for them, but they would only find out what was real when they were separated out from what they knew they could rely on. A special challenge in Luke's calling stories, for example, is the word 'everything'. For those who get a taste of Jesus and his mission of the kingdom, everything else must be left behind in the pursuit. The rich young ruler would be called to 'sell *everything*, and give it to the poor' (Lk 18:22) and others would be challenged to 'sell your possessions and give them to the poor' (Lk 12:13). 'So, therefore, if anyone does not give up *everything* he has he cannot be my disciple' (Lk 14:33). Does the hope of Jesus, briefly experienced, make it worth leaving everything that has been owned in order to pursue a place at the kingdom banquet? In an e-connected world, with Generation Y staying at home longer and having a deep dependency on friends, such separation requires real intentionality and discipline today.^[5] As Stephen Covey argued, there must be a movement from dependence to independence before there can be interdependence with others.^[6] The maturity of Christian slum workers can be undermined without such separation and individualisation. The early disciples did risk everything themselves, with faith in Jesus, and certainly this is required of new workers if they are to join teams in slums.

Second, Jesus intentionally led the first apostles into the chaos and disorientation of liminal space. Jesus was not the Messiah the disciples thought he would be and at different times they faced their own death and, ultimately, Jesus' torture and execution. In Luke, Jesus' suffering and death is connected to the resistance by the powers toward Jesus' prophetic lifestyle and message. The challenge Jesus puts to the wealthy and powerful is reacted to in the strongest possible way. For Luke it is not the crowds or ordinary people who are as much responsible for Jesus death (as in Matthew 27:25) as the rulers and people in authority. 'And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one"' (Lk 23:35). Indeed, at Jesus' death, when the ordinary people 'saw what took place they returned home, beating their breasts' in repentance (23:48). In Luke a wedge is drawn between the people's movement and the established powers. This is taken up in Acts. Although the disciples are taught and given authority by Jesus at the last supper (22:24-38) they keep their distance at his time of need (23:48), just watching. It is one of the criminals Jesus is executed with who responds to him on death row. In the darkness 'one of the criminals' is promised to see Jesus first in paradise that day (23:39-43). A Roman centurion who guarded Jesus when he was executed remarked after his last breath, 'Certainly this man was innocent' (23:47) and a Jewish leader named Joseph of Arimathea provides hope that those in power can respond, if only after the death of an innocent, by finding an appropriate grave (23:50-56). It is fair to say that such space for the disciples is as dark and fear-inducing as any

could experience. Yet, as Richard Rohr argues, it is this kind of liminal space that is crucial for transformation and maturity in people:

'Liminal' in Latin means 'threshold' and I've been saying for some years now that I believe transformation almost always happens when you're inside of liminal space, when you're on the threshold. The job of a good spiritual director, in my opinion, is to lead you to your threshold, to encourage you not to be afraid of it; then to keep you there, holding the pain until you've learned its lessons; and eventually lead you out of it as well.^[7]

The liminal space faced by boys as they became men in traditional initiation rites helped them face their own humanity. Rohr argues that essential life lessons can best be found in liminality, lessons such as, 'life is hard', 'you are going to die', 'you are not in control', 'life is not just about you' and 'you are not the centre of the universe'.^[8] Certainly the first disciples experienced this kind of liminality. If Christian workers in slums are to sustain their vocations there, then illusions about such lessons also need to be addressed too.

Third, through his resurrection, Jesus helped his disciples come through liminal space to 'aggregation' (van Gennepe's term), or belong to a new group through transformation. Luke's accounts of the resurrection of Jesus are more detailed than in the other Gospels (Lk 24). Jesus is not found among the dead but is the Living One (24:5). He not only appears to his disciples but has meals with them and is encountered as a stranger journeying away from Jerusalem (24:13-49). An ascension account further distinguishes Jesus' new existence (24:50-53, Acts 1:9-11), preparing for a new form of presence through the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-5). The lasting commissioning in Luke has the resurrected Christ who explained the Messiah, who needed to 'suffer' and 'to rise from the dead on the third day', but by the Spirit's power Jesus' disciples could be witnesses to 'all nations' proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins. (Lk 24:46-49, Acts 1:8) This is not what the Jewish disciples would have expected before separating themselves for Jesus, nor during their dark liminal space. Through Jesus resurrection and the Spirit's empowerment, they found new ways to enter this incoming, whole new world. These disciples had experienced a personal and social transformation, and were now prepared for their vocation, to be lived out in many different ways. The process of ideal, ordeal and new deal is certainly there in the first disciples' experience and is required by new slum workers today if they are to pass transformation on and not just pass on their own cultural biases.

Such a community formation process should not to be entered into lightly. Both the community and potential workers need to be confident that the personal investment required has the potential to be a life-giving experience in the end. Community formation may actually be one of the most critical factors in worker-impact over a lifetime. Formation is not just a matter of getting a person through a course, helping them to pick up the required skills along the way. It focuses as much on character traits and daily habits as disciples, as on our big hopes and dreams. Only communities can guide and lead workers and ask them the tough questions, shaping them as people.

Perhaps there can be no more important years in a Christian worker's intentional development than the first three. Like Jesus' first apostolic community the initial period sets the foundations and habits for a vocation. If, for example, a worker cannot bond with the existing community and neighbourhood within the first three years, it is unlikely it will happen after that. Three years is long enough for workers to identify the real gifts and passions they have (not just what they think they should be gifted and passionate about) if there is honest feedback, mentoring and shared living. New workers can find their real selves by living with community members and choosing to keep dealing with the issues that emerge.

It must be acknowledged that in many ways the process of community formation is countercultural in the modern church. Short-term missions are preferred to the careful and thoughtful preparation that community formation requires. The broader global culture also creates a desire to keep all options open, just as many have always wanted to 'keep their life' rather than 'lose it'. Yet, the deep desire for a sense of belonging, self-knowing and being known that community formation brings is still a deep part of the human condition. The hard question to answer is whether Christian workers will keep trying to take short cuts, consume community and end up isolated and lonely, unable to see long-term change? The desire for authentic community, belonging and real meaning is still there, but will Christian missional communities provide opportunities for this? In regard to slums such commitment to formation, while costly and time consuming, helps workers for the long-term.

How can community formation be practiced?

In UNOH we have attempted to give space for community formation through a three year process for new workers. A lot of our energy goes into helping to create good formation experiences for new workers. Our training, group work, seminars, community living, mentoring and feedback processes over the first three years have been especially invaluable. Some of this is accredited theological training (our first year program, Sub-merge, for example, can be done for credit through Stirling College University of Divinity and Great Lakes Christian University), but much of it is more personal and communal in nature.

Why go to all this effort in community formation for new workers. as Jesus himself did? First, it should be acknowledged that there are workers who can do slum or other urban ministries without any such community formation. They may naturally have appropriate characteristics, which may be seen for example, in a leader of church plants. They may well thrive in a slum ministry with or without intense community formation. However, community formation for these new workers is beneficial in that it can help bond the worker with other peers and in the long term help sustain work in current and even future neighbourhoods. Perhaps more importantly, however, it also helps to enable these high-capacity workers to reproduce themselves in other new workers who might not be able to go it alone.

Another issue with those of natural ability, is that very few people actually feel like naturals

when it comes to the kind of suffering neighbours in slums face. So even if workers do have a natural aptitude for this vocation, they may not recognise it in themselves and need the community affirmation that formation brings. This relational affirmation can also be a factor in helping high calibre people, who can often do all kinds of ministries, to be encouraged to follow a urban vocation or remain in one.

Second, it should also be acknowledged that not all Christians are called to live and serve in an incarnational way, focused on slums. No matter how excellent the formation process, no matter how well-intentioned a person may be, some are simply not called to this vocation. This can be especially the case if a spouse or children don't feel a part of this call too. It may also be because of mental health, addictions or character traits that could cause serious harm to the worker or those around them under the pressure of living in slums. It may just be that they have a different calling. All Christians are called to serve Jesus by loving others in need, but not all are called to focus their best attention on those in particular slums. A good formation process helps people explore this vocation, but also find their freedom beyond it if slums are not their call.

Third, there are people who are not naturals, but with some good community formation and support can and do have an effective vocation in slums. It is for these people that community formation is especially important. Until new workers can identify their own calling and have a lived experience of a community's charism, they usually cannot decide if they can invest their lives with us or not. As business writers Barry Posner and James Kouzes have found, there is a positive correlation between workers' commitment levels and the clarity of their own values in relation to their organisations. They found that even if an organisation was clear about its own values, if workers were not, their commitment levels and longevity in the work place were much lower.^[9] Orders have always known this and have seen formation to be as much about self-knowledge and liberation as it is about knowledge and conformity of the worker into the order's ethos.

The space provided by community formation nurtures and protects the sense of self in both the individual and existing community, providing a graduated entry into belonging and responsibility. Without such space, inexperienced workers cannot invest themselves with others because they do not know in whom they are investing. Orders, therefore, can wait to confirm calls and do not given any serious responsibility in the order, to those in formation. It is those who personally invest the most that should have the most say.

An important question for all Christian communities and missions is not just how to help new people to get involved, but also how to help all workers to stay true to the purpose of the community. What are the ways of identifying gifts, passions and contributions of individuals and providing feedback and training to free them from prejudices? How do new people get a lived experience of a community's founding charism?

There are no guarantees what will emerge through the process of community formation over

this first year. Some find their heart's new home. Others will bounce off the community and clarify it is not for them. Some will miss the "life lessons" and seek security back in the dominant culture's "life lessons". Of Jesus' twelve, after three years of formation, one hung himself - so dark was the chaos. Even the best discernment and formation then has its limitations. Hopefully, the Apprentice goes through the chaos and is ready to commit to the two-year Novitiate before becoming a full member of UNOH.

Markers and pathways like Apprenticeships and Novitiates help to name the grace we need to seek if we are to be faithful to what we believe God is calling us as a community to be. Grace is not a cover all for our wrong-doings. Rather it is a gift to be the authentic person and community God has called us to be.

For a community to make a difference over a long period of time it has to be worth the personal investment of its members. A loose network without common expectations or protection of members' personal investment cannot provide this. Indeed, those who invest the most in loose networks are often those who have the least say. Orders, in contrast, aim to provide encouragement to those who invest in a community by having clear boundaries and power based on personal investment, not personality. This happens through graduated entry processes so that personal investment can be measured along the way and celebrated with greater expectations and responsibilities.

Unlike local churches, apostolic communities like UNOH have a specialisation. Orders provide benchmarks (their Rule of Life) to support this specialisation. Without such benchmarks, communities can quickly lose their reason for being and drift to become softer and less focused. Formation is based on this specialised way of life; helping new recruits to encounter and stay true to the reason the community exists.

Such formation is a massive undertaking and should not be entered into lightly. For this kind of formation to be a reality for those in UNOH, we have these basic prerequisites:

1. A free and deliberate choice to pursue UNOH's way of life.
2. A willingness for each of us to take primary responsibility for our own formation.
3. A prior demonstration of the 'common characteristics of effective UNOH workers' and having been through a community discernment process.
4. A clear formation process based solidly in the Gospels as well as having UNOH's stories and personnel to guide.

5. A willingness to be part of a graduated entry into membership. To give space to discern whether people are really called, challenged and equipped by God to be a part of UNOH. We have found having an Apprenticeship and then Novitiate time to be important “spaces” for formation.
6. A neighborhood team to serve a particular community facing poverty and injustice.

Each year we also have retreats and weekly team gatherings. Our time together is made up of our stories, ethos, practices and reflections based on Jesus’ formation of the original apostolic community.

In May 2012 I got to meet Jean Vanier, the founder and spiritual leader of L’Arche communities who now have communities of people with disabilities in over a hundred countries. His tall, 80 year old frame, just glowed Jesus. He was kind enough to have read my PhD on the rise of slums and did the Foreword to the published version of *Slum Life Rising*^[10] and I was there to thank him. He was genuinely interested in the rise of slums, and at one point said, ‘This is so terrible. What is happening to millions, the Mafia control, the fate of children. It’s terrible. You do know though don’t you, you are not a solution to this, but you can be a sign.’ I found that liberating, helping to challenge my own god complexes and maturity. Our community building is not the final solution for urban poverty, but we can be a sign of hope for what God wants done in the world.

Perhaps it is not going too far to suggest that the Church will rise and fall on its ability to do community formation with the emerging generations. Without it there will be a self-destruction through immaturity. Skills are not enough in these times and character-lessons take time to develop in people. If new communities are going to be the new wine-skins required, it would seem impossible without taking seriously intentional, spiritual, community formation. I hope somehow the Janes of our experience can find this too.

[1]Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

[2]Jayakuma Christian, *God of the Empty-Handed: Poverty, Power and the Kingdom of God* (World Vision Intl, 1999).

[3]Gerald Arbuckle, *From Chaos to Mission: Refounding religious life formation* (Homebush: St Pauls, 1996), 102.

[4]Arnold van Gennep, *Anthropology and Ethnography: The rites of passage* (London: Routledge, 2004 (1960)).

[5] See for example, Mark Sayers, *What's Wrong with Paris? Following Jesus in a world of plastic promises* (Nashville: Nelson, 2008).

[6] Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Restoring the character ethic* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 185.

[7] Richard Rohr, 'Sadness', Address to Medical Students, Yale University, November 2005, *Male Spirituality*, <http://www.malespirituality.org/sadness.htm>, Accessed December 10th, 2010.

[8] Richard Rohr, *Adams Return: The five promises of male initiation* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004).

[9] Barry M Posner and James M Kouzes, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002) 49-50.

[10] Ash Barker, *Slum Life Rising: How to en flesh hope within a new urban world* (Dandenong, Aus: UNOH, 2012)



Ash Barker

Ash Barker with wife Anji and their children live in Klong Toey, the largest slum in Bangkok. Since early 2002, the Barkers have shared life there focusing on building relationships, discipleship, church planting, education, creating employment and recreational options so that their neighbourhood could be transformed through Jesus from the bottom up. Until October 2013, Ash was the founding director of Urban Neighbours Of Hope (www.unoh.org),

which the Barkers started in Springvale (Melbourne, Aus) in 1993 and now have eight teams of Christian workers loving God and neighbours in some of the neediest urban neighbourhoods in Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland and Bangkok. After over 20 years leading and founding UNOH, the Barkers will move to Birmingham, August 2014 with Ash to join the faculty at Springdale College. The Barkers also plan to be immersed in the life of an urban poor neighbourhood, this time a Birmingham public housing estate, to seek transformation through Jesus there. An inspiring speaker and lecturer, Ash is the author of seven books including 'Make Poverty Personal' and 'Slum Life Rising'. He completed his PhD addressing a Christian response to the rise of slums (MCD University of Divinity) and is the Convener of the 'International Society for Urban Mission' (www.newurbanworld.org).