

Case Studies

commerce

compassion

culture

congregation



HeartEdge



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Foreword

Foreword

F O R E W A R D

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**REVD DR
SAM WELLS**

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Foreword

This collection of case studies is a mini theology of the Holy Spirit. It traces the way the Holy Spirit works – blessing open-hearted, open-minded enquiry, exploration, discovery, partnership and initiative. Rather than settle on a model of church and strive to reproduce it far and wide, this approach perceives how the Holy Spirit is working in the world, and sets up a tent there, harnessing the Spirit's energy and yoking itself to the world's imagination.

HeartEdge is a movement that finds inspiration in what churches and communities have discovered by following the Holy Spirit into places where the face of Christ is to be found. This process requires humility, because one has to renounce the notion that one already knows what Christ means and how the Spirit works. It requires appetite, an eagerness to learn new tricks, make new friendships and join new struggles. And it requires imagination, as one adjusts one's perceptions to pay close attention to manifestations of the Spirit's work one had never thought of for oneself.

The church is getting older, smaller and – in some cases – narrower. While this realisation sometimes generates anxiety, defensiveness, and a retreat into dogmatism and old ways, it also releases a healthy search for alternative models, a welcome sense that church is something we continually discover, rather than perpetually replicate. The crucial thing is that, when local congregations, or larger denominational bodies, are looking for inspiration and encouragement, they don't find themselves alone. Instead, they can quickly turn to three things: (1) those who have trod this road before, and recently; (2) those who have translated that particular experience into transferable wisdom; and (3) those who can help them turn that experience elsewhere into the vision and skills needed to begin or renew something appropriate to their own circumstances.

This document addresses the second of those requirements. Naomi Jacobs has been in contact with more than 100 of the first group; and is preparing the ground for the third group. But here they chart the second terrain, distilling transferable wisdom from pioneers in mission, who have modelled the work of the four Cs of HeartEdge: commerce, compassion, culture and congregational life.

HeartEdge began in 2017. Its early work was to bring people together – at conferences and day events to discuss practice and experience, at on-site consultancy days and through peer mentoring relationships, and in training and reflection programmes. During the pandemic it mushroomed online into a permanent festival of theological discussion and practical exploration. Now it's emerging on four continents as a genuine new element in mission and renewal. At every step it seeks to align theological reflection, interpersonal encouragement, and practical example. The questions of why and how are in the end inseparable. This volume is bursting with the energy of those who are suffused with the why and are making major strides in the how. I commend it to you as a source of inspiration, encouragement and wisdom: an encounter with the Holy Spirit.

Revd Dr Sam Wells

Vicar, St Martin-in-the-Fields



Introduction

Introduction

I N T R O D U C T I O N

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**DR NAOMI
LAWSON JACOBS**

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Introduction

HeartEdge carried out research into projects in the 4Cs among member and external organisations, either based in churches or rooted in earlier church work.

The first research outputs are written case studies: 5 in each of the 4Cs; 20 case studies in total. The final case studies are in-depth explorations of each project – their contexts, processes and achievements.

Each case study has drawn out some key principles that other churches can use to set up their own similar projects.

The final products show how churches and organisations have initiated projects or ministries, how they have addressed challenges, and the factors relevant to their success. They share models and inspiration for HeartEdge member churches to initiate and advance their mission in each of the 4Cs.

We acknowledge the support of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England.

Dr Naomi Lawson Jacobs

A Few Findings

Partnerships are the only way to get almost anything done, especially in the community.

Funding has been essential to almost all the projects we looked at, whether commercial or not – and fundraising is difficult, professional work. And while there may be assets in a congregation, like a PCC treasurer with a history of charity fundraising, there may not be, and there may be a need to buy in fundraising. (See Open Door Centre and the Grassmarket Community Project in particular for some approaches to this issue)

Knowing the purpose of what you are doing is important – whether a church café or an art exhibition space in the church – the best examples have tried to do one thing really well.

Church-based commercial projects need to know that they are businesses and run like it – buying in expertise and thinking about the kind of business they are (social, instrumental, exemplary). People are particularly keen to support social businesses, whether or not registered social enterprises, and other businesses with a particular outreach or community purpose. It's what they think churches should be doing. (See St Stephen's Norwich, Grassmarket Community Project and St James with the Sherriff Centre for examples).

Churchgoers need to be happy with how their space is being used in different ways (see St James with Sherriff Centre and Victoria Methodist with art exhibitions for examples).

Communication is a big part of what avoids or helps problems when churches are doing something different from the expected (see Open Door Centre at Christ Church Barnet, Westray & Papay, St James with the Sherriff Centre).

Church projects and businesses are often interdependent, especially after a few years. Emphasising this interdependence with both sides is important (see St James with the Sherriff Centre and Copleston Centre for example). Key to the success of many of these interdependent projects is a **person who takes responsibility for bringing the two together in one vision** (at the Copleston Centre this is a Church-Related Community Worker, at the Open Door Centre it is the Chairman of the charitable trust, at St James with the Sherriff Centre it has been the Vicar), focusing on effective communication and keeping both sides informed.

People are hungry for something different from church – but not always too different. If it is recognisably church, but church doing something in a new way, they may well be intrigued. (see CityKerk and Chapel in the Fields for examples).

Most of the people being drawn into these innovative church projects are dechurched, not

unchurched. (see CityKerk and Chapel in the Fields). That seems to be where there is a particular hunger for churches to do something different.

Many of the HeartEdge churches are drawing on Sam Wells' theological and missional themes – especially being with.

An innovative church project will have a life-cycle and may not last forever. But the life cycle could be many years (see Chapel in the Fields).

Churches that try things out and see what God does with them, without particularly high expectations, are having the most success. In partnerships, churches can take risks that statutory organisations can't (see Carluke St Andrew's Drop In for an example of starting small and growing quickly).

Diversity

We have aimed to include a balance of congregations and projects, including those with an ethnic diversity among members. These include:

The Sherriff Centre at St James West Hampstead – a social enterprise based in a black-majority parish, used mainly by a white community, which is considering and addressing the disparity that this can cause in a number of ways.

Copleston Church and Centre – based in Peckham, with a large UKME population, this congregation involves a mix of ethnicities. Programmes at the Copleston Centre are focused on the needs of an ethnically diverse area, including a funded project aimed at a growing local multi-cultural community of people over 65, and a counselling service aiming to make mental health support more accessible and culturally sensitive to a diverse community.

CityKerk, whose House of Connection project is based in an urban renewal area, working with a diverse community, building partnerships and relationships, and aiming to empower the community in their own projects – in resistance to colonial models where churches may seek to 'rescue' poorer and more diverse local communities.

Soul Sanctuary Gospel Choir, a diverse choir where half the members are black and others are from other minoritised ethnic groups. We have included a focus on its Courage performance, which aimed to keep the Black Lives Matter conversation open at St James's Piccadilly and in the community, using gospel music to bring the issue of racial injustice alive through the arts.

Projects at the diverse churches of **St Martin-in-the-Fields**, London and **St Isidore, Texas**, where outreach brings diverse people with diverse perspectives into the churches, renewing these churches as the lines between congregation and community are blurred.

The international partnership between the churches in **Westray and Papay** and partner churches in the **Thyolo Highlands, Malawi**, where presbyteries are working together on grassroots projects with joint fundraising and relationship building. They are challenging colonialist models of international church outreach as they focus on being global church together and on mutual empowerment arising from each church's different gifts and assets.

Cotham Parish Church, a white-majority church taking a conscious approach to white privilege through its creative tradition, for example by reading black authors for a season in their book group.

However, many of the congregations and projects involved in the research are white-majority. There are a number of reasons for this:

- At the beginning of the project, aware that we were undertaking research in a pandemic, HeartEdge accepted that many of those who were responding to research requests were HeartEdge member churches, and focused its research recruiting efforts here. Many of the HeartEdge churches that responded to research requests were white-majority churches. This is an imbalance that HeartEdge is addressing.
- Two contextual issues have arisen during the research process, in terms of inclusion of black-majority churches in the research. First, almost none of the black-majority churches we contacted responded to the research request at all. This is likely to reflect the need for HeartEdge to build relationships with people and churches. A (white) researcher contacting ethnically diverse churches, where there is no pre-existing relationship with the organisation, may raise issues for those churches around power relationships and how they will be perceived and represented in research. Second, the most diverse churches in HeartEdge seem to be in London, and we had few replies to research requests from any London churches – which have been under higher pressure than others as a result of the pandemic, especially those with commercial projects and compassionate outreach.
- We made a number of efforts to counter the imbalance, resulting in the inclusion of the projects described above. However, this research project has been a small, 7-month scoping research project with an in-depth focus on a small number of case studies. With only 20 churches included, the research could never be representative of all the work that is going on in churches around the country. Future HeartEdge research will look in more depth at race and ethnicity in UK churches.



Amsterdam

Amsterdam

A N E W K I N D O F C H U R C H
F O R A M O D E R N C I T Y

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CITYKERK, AMSTERDAM

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Our

mission is to create a gospel-centred, seeker-friendly, culturally relevant church that can become – by God’s grace – a pulpit to the city and a catalyst for a revival of Christian faith in Holland.



TIM VREUGDENHIL, CITYKERK
Founder and City Pastor

A NEW KIND OF CHURCH FOR A MODERN CITY

CityKerk, Amsterdam

In 2017, when Tim Vreugdenhil took sermons out of church buildings and into the city of Amsterdam, it would launch him on a journey that would lead him to reimagine church entirely. As his Stand-up Theology reached unchurched people as part of a live theatre show, Tim saw them responding to Christian thought in a new context. Inspired by their response, Tim began to ask how he could be a new kind of pastor to twenty-first century Amsterdam.

Four years later, the seventeenth-century Oosterkerk is CityKerk's base for a modern city ministry. As Tim and his team design programmes to reach an individualistic city with the gospel, they are inspired by what works in business and secular culture. Based in an urban renewal area with no other church presence, CityKerk has launched a neighbourhood ministry, where team pastor Mirjam Sloots connects people in the deprived but vibrant Eastern Islands. And seeds are now being planted for an urban order to help root people more deeply in faith. CityKerk is a new kind of church for contemporary Amsterdam, with different kinds of pastors in Tim and Mirjam.

Taking sermons out into the city with Stand-up Theology

During his 15 years in ministry, Tim had seen many church-planting initiatives fail in Amsterdam. He began to ask why the church failed to engage the people of the modern city. As he conducted funerals and reached out to people outside the church, Tim could see that church culture made little sense to them – but the gospel did. “People didn't

respond to the liturgy, the prayers,” he remembers.

“It didn't make sense to them. But the sermon – they responded to it, they understood the questions.” Tim found himself talking through his sermons over coffee with people who were excited by Christian thought and wanted to share their own insights. Here, in the informal environment of a café discussion, theology made sense outside the walls of church.

“I realized that there was much more market for the sermon part of the worship service, than for the whole thing.”

- Tim Vreugdenhil

But even the best sermons could never engage most of Amsterdam, Tim realised, if he only ever preached in churches. He wondered whether he should open the doors of church on Sundays at all. Instead, he saw an opportunity – and a market. What would it look like to take a sermon out into the world, like Paul in Athens?

If they have a good time, that's fine. And some of them are a little bit more interested... And then there is conversation afterwards, or somebody has a question and says, 'Can I ask you something by email?'

- **Tim Vreugdenhil**

The epiphany led Tim to leave his congregation and hire an empty church. Inspired by the Stand-up Philosophy movement, Tim created a Stand-up Theology programme. In a theatre setting, a growing crowd came to listen to. Tim brought together his love of academic theology and a heart to translate the gospel for the culture around him, speaking on topics relevant to the people of Amsterdam – stress, fear of missing out, finding hope in cynical times. The genre proved instantly recognisable for the mainly non-Christian

audience. They needed no experience of church culture to respond to the storytelling and performance. And for a few, the Christian message sparked a desire to go deeper.

When an audience member brought their work team to a Stand-Up Theology performance, Tim identified a market in bringing theology to business training days. The Business Theology venture would become the social enterprise that still helps to sustain CityKerk, while it takes Christianity to another new context of modern city life.

Taking people deeper through content

In discussions over post-show drinks and by email, people asked Tim how they could respond to the message they were hearing at Stand-Up Theology. It became clear to Tim that he needed to develop an “after-sales programme” to take those people deeper. A few were even interested in getting together in groups to explore Tim’s ideas. Without knowing it, they were talking about church – but in a format that made sense to them.

As Tim built local networks as a City Pastor¹, he was finding out more

U N D E R T H E S P O T L I G H T

STAND-UP THEOLOGY

Tim has been holding Stand-up Theology evenings since 2017, when he rented the empty Oosterkerk and opened it as a theatre. Soon he was bringing in audiences of up to 90 people. Against the appealing backdrop of a show with music and drink, Tim brings theology to life as performance art. With a familiar format, engaging communication and relevant topics, he opens up Christian thought to those who never knew they needed it.

In the best traditions of stand up performance, when Tim speaks to people who may never have been to church before, his words must resonate with their real lives. *“It only works by practical examples,”* Tim says. To prepare for a show, he immerses himself in a topic, has conversations on

social media and does *“experiments”* – as he did when he joined Tinder as part of a show about love in the digital age. The result is storytelling rooted in the concrete reality of modern city life. Through creative use of Biblical sources, Tim takes people on a journey from the familiar to the spiritual.

Stand-up Theology has shown Tim that there is a wider audience for the Christian story, if he is attentive to what the Holy Spirit is doing beyond the walls of the church. Through CityKerk, Tim and his team have gone on to build relationships in interfaith contexts and across the community, engaging with more of the unexpected places where the Holy Spirit is moving in 21st century Amsterdam.

about what the city's people wanted from a church. Like many cities, modern Amsterdam is dominated by individualism – in fact, it is designed for it. For his programmes to make sense for people with an independent spirit, Tim needed to focus not on community, but on connection.

What's the model for the people who say, "What's next? I like these talks, but I want I want to do more with it. I'd like to be connected".

- **Tim Vreugdenhil**

Remembering that his Stand-up Theology patrons responded to the Christmas message, Tim put content first. He began by sharing seeker-sensitive gospel messages using the tools of connection that bring people together in an individualistic age. His blogs and videos attracted hundreds, sometimes thousands of visits and responses.

CityKerk's first programme of content is Church-to-Go, a "redefined church" aiming to bring together those who have responded to Tim and his content. When the programme was interrupted by coronavirus, Tim took it online, with an initial group of 25 – at least half with no Christian background. Through a WhatsApp group, Tim inspires the group with daily bite-sized theology, and weekly videos and articles to take them deeper. And they have not abandoned the idea of meeting together, joining on Zoom every two weeks to rework Richard Carter's book *The City is My Monastery* for their own context. Adapting to an online discussion format, Tim ends the conversations after an hour, leaving people thinking and hungry for more. The team hope an in-person Church-to-Go programme will run next year alongside the online version.

Lonely City is a guide to spirituality in the city. Inspired by the Lonely Planet travel guide, the programme is aimed at a market of independent spiritual travellers. Through Stand-up Theology and his work as a City Pastor, Tim meets people who are inspired by the Christian message and connect with him, but have no interest in joining groups. They are often lost, not knowing where to start exploring spirituality and theology outside of community. "It is quite an art to find your way," Tim observes. Signing up to Lonely City involves a small

I expect that in the future people will realize that not everything that is online is helpful for [them personally].

- **Tim Vreugdenhil**

T H R E E
P I L L A R S
O F
C I T Y K E R K

**1. THE COMMERCIAL
PILLAR:**

A social enterprise to bring income to continue the church's work, starting with Business Theology and Stand-up Theology.

2. THE SOCIAL PILLAR:

A neighbourhood ministry with Mirjam Sloots at the helm, connecting community groups and individuals, led by their needs as a community.

**3. THE
CONGREGATIONAL
PILLAR:**

An urban order to help people make a deeper commitment in their city context, inspired by the Nazareth Community at St Martin-in-the-Fields, London.

fee – it is a service, not a congregation. In return, subscribers get a digital newsletter and the option to contact Tim with pastoral needs. Rather than trying to quell these seekers' independent spirit, the programme aims to empower them with ideas for exploring Christianity alone. They launched the programme early in 2020, and now have 40 subscribers.

Neighbourhood ministry at The House of Connection

The Oosterkerk stands at the centre of Amsterdam's Eastern Islands, a fast-growing urban renewal area with 10,000 residents and no church presence. From here, CityKerk launched the House of Connection project in 2019. Mirjam Sloots, Neighbourhood Pastor, has set out to transform the role of a church in a less affluent city district. "I think the people of the Eastern Islands don't see me as a pastor, but as the woman of the House of Connection," she reflects. After initial distrust about the church's agenda, the House of Connection is becoming known locally as a place where local people organise their own community work, together with the church.

In a "first, listen" approach, Mirjam consults with local connectors and brings groups together to respond to the community's issues themselves. Together they have set up a women's house in the Oosterkerk, where local women come to

empower each other. The women's textile art projects are transforming the church into a celebration of the community's life and artistic expression, putting the women's house on the map when they won competition money from the city.

The Food from the Heart programme was set up by a Syrian woman who asked to use the church for her community. Now her Syrian kitchen shares meals weekly from the back of the church, in a project that is as much about connection as food. And a Heart of the Neighbourhood group organises events to connect people across interfaith and cultural lines, from a March of Little Lights to remember those the community has lost, to a Christmas performance bringing together professional and amateur actors.

"It was important to prove to the people who financially support us that we can create something great on the Eastern Islands," Miriam says. With no other church in the area, "we can fill in this space in a new way."

Before us there was a group in the [Oosterkerk], and they were very pushy about Christianity. And so the people thought, "You have a hidden agenda with us. You want to convert us." And I said, "No, I just want to connect, because I think that's good to do. And that's also a mission of the church."

- **Mirjam Sloots**

The House of Connection is fast becoming the 'other side' of CityKerk – using the back of the church, where the community takes over rooms and a kitchen. But they work from the same model as the rest of CityKerk, sharing spiritual inspiration while enabling social connection. As Tim listens to local political critique of community centres as no longer fit for this time, he envisages funding streams for a new kind of local centre. "We are figuring out what a neighbourhood centre on a spiritual basis could look like," Tim says. "It's about connection. It's about inspiration."

People are so hungry for connection. And for joining in and putting in their own talents and what they can do, and being part of a bigger whole.

- **Mirjam Sloots**

And as the pandemic has reshaped the city life in Amsterdam, CityKerk has had opportunities to bring more of the community together.

Among other local events, Lights and Hearts encouraged people to share messages of hope and encouragement weekly at decorated tables outside the church. And in May 2020, Connection

Liberates celebrated the 75th Liberation Day in the Netherlands, bringing people together to tell their stories and deliver traditional Freedom Lunches to those in need.

F E E D B A C K

FROM STAND-UP THEOLOGY & THE CITYKERK COMMUNITY

Tim really understands what a ‘pastor for a time like this’ looks like. He fully grasps the topics that are most relevant and in a crafty way he builds the bridge to old stories, for example from the bible. It’s amazing how the connection between ‘then’ and ‘now’ works out.

- **Hannah, 28**

Tim really helps me to pause because he paused himself for a long time, while reflecting the actual theme.

- **Anka, 42**

Tim doesn’t need the title of ‘vicar’ to impress with his ability to tell a good story.

- **Remco, 26**

The Oosterkerk is now home to all three of CityKerk’s ‘pillars’ – the social enterprise, the neighbourhood ministry and a developing urban order. As CityKerk becomes a recognised church, Tim and his team are exploring the option to buy the Oosterkerk, so that they can grow the social enterprise and the church’s work.

A tripartite model for a new kind of church

CityKerk is connecting people to each other and the gospel in three ways – a ‘hands’ level, a ‘soul’ level and a ‘heart’ level. They are now laying the groundwork for the third level of commitment: an urban order, influenced by Richard Carter and the Nazareth Community.² Tim has always believed that modern life needs a different template from Sunday worship, and now he is drawing on the Nazareth Community’s rule of life – including Sabbath time, sharing and silence – to help people live as part of the body of Christ in modern Amsterdam.

In 2021 the team are planning a hackathon to help them plan the details of the third level, bringing their “first, listen” approach to the digitally connected culture around them. The urban order will call people to be at the heart of CityKerk. For most of the people Tim works with, this will be a deeper commitment than they can make. But the ‘heart’ level will also permeate all the

programmes of the church – beginning with Church-to-Go, where they have been working through Richard Carter’s book, exploring themes of staying in difficult circumstances and practising silence.

Tim believes that traditional churches are too often one-size-fits-all groups. CityKerk sets out to help people find God in the midst of their lives, not just in a Sunday morning oasis. “My dream is that you can create a very firm idea of community,” Tim says, “which is much more than a regular Sunday service.” The team at CityKerk are still exploring all the ways people might be able to make this congregation of the future work for them, but they know that it will be far from a one-size-fits-all church.

Challenges

Coronavirus has presented a significant challenge to CityKerk’s programmes, with reduced team capacity. The launch of Lonely City coincided with the beginning of the pandemic, and the programme has grown more slowly than they had hoped. Tim and the team have shifted focus away from Lonely City in favour of developing Church-to-Go online, listening to demand for new ways to encounter God in a challenging time. And the work at the House of Connection has grown as they respond to immediate needs in the city. The CityKerk team learn from the corporate world, using business strategies to build their resilience in a spiritual marketplace. The strategic approach has helped them to succeed in several funding applications, with grants from Europe Collaboration, the Protestant Church of the Netherlands and Dutch foundations. CityKerk’s social enterprise raised £50,000 in 2019.

I’ve always intuitively understood that it cannot all be done in that Sunday service. [A Christian community] in this time should be something different.

- **Tim Vreugdenhil**

Principles of a ministry to a twenty-first century city

based on experiences at CityKerk

At CityKerk, they adapt Christian thought to the modern city. Like

THE CITYKERK COMMUNITY: THE MODEL

The CityKerk community works on three different levels, threaded through all the church's programmes. There is something for everyone to connect with, no matter where they are in their exploration of Christianity.

HANDS: a 'living generously' level. At an introductory level, CityKerk links individuals to give back to their city. A message of generosity features in Tim's stories, and opportunities for sustainable generous practice are developing at the House of Connection.

SOUL: a 'living consciously' level. For those who want to navigate a spiritual path but need a guide to where to begin, CityKerk connects people with a different kind of introduction to Christianity, with inspirational and reflective resources and programmes to take them further on their journeys.

HEART: a 'living spiritually' level. A planned urban order where people commit to being the body of Christ together, inspired by Richard Carter's monastic practices. In all its programmes, CityKerk aims to make sense of Christian thought for people living modern city lives.

Paul in Athens, they take mission into unexpected places. Stand-up Theology brings Christian thought to a new audience through a familiar setting, reaching people who might never enter a church. And they have shaped Church-to-Go programme to fit the ways that people engage digitally, rather than trying to fit what the church has always done to an online space.

And as they adapt, **they empower people in the ways that they want to explore Christianity**, rather than forcing them into traditional church models. Lonely City supports independent spiritual travellers outside a church context. And at the House of Connection, a community development approach draws on people's strengths, as assets to their local neighbourhood, seeing connection as Christian mission in the area.

They ask what twenty-first century Amsterdam really needs from the church. Taking a "first, listen" approach, they research before they assume. Tim works with a wide network, including non-Christians and interfaith groups, listening to what a modern city wants from a church. And the work at the House of Connection emerges from the community, as Mirjam works in partnership with grassroots groups, creating collaborative solutions to local problems.

They focus on what works. "Accept that you cannot do everything," Tim advises.

Coronavirus has meant putting their energy into the programmes that they have capacity to run. Agile working has allowed them to repackage and redevelop other programmes based on real demand.

They use business strategies to make the most of their position in a spiritual marketplace where, to many consumers, Christianity looks like just another competitor. The CityKerk team spend time discovering what people really want from a church, as they network, listen and test out new programmes. Flexible business planning helps them decide when to launch programmes and how to adapt when the market changes.

The church [is always offering] a programme or something to do, and you can join in. But let's first listen. What are people interested in? What is really what they want?

- **Mirjam Sloots**

Last Word

At CityKerk, they understand that theology is the clay that must be shaped in new ways for each age. They are working to adapt theology to the future, keeping mission and the gospel at the heart of everything they do. The results sometimes look very different from traditional church. And, in modern Amsterdam, a different kind of church is exactly what many people are looking for.

The 21st century asks for 21st [century] concepts. Theology is the clay that you can use, but then you have to make your own models and figures... Society will change after [coronavirus], but I think that happens all the time. We are in a very fast developing lane of society. And that's one of my great insights, that theology really has to do its best to be to be adapted to the future.

- **Tim Vreugdenhil**

¹Alongside his work at CityKerk, Tim is a City Pastor for the Protestant Church of Amsterdam.

²R. Carter, *The City is my Monastery: A Contemporary Rule of Life* (Norwich: Canterbury Press. 2019).



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Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester

REVITALISING A CHAPEL,
RESOURCING THE WIDER
CHURCH

■

CHAPEL IN THE FIELDS

■

My

driving thing is, 'let's be a sign of the kingdom'. And because we're in a field, let's sow some seeds. Learn the lesson from the fields around us, where things take time to grow, and some things don't grow, but you still scatter a seed.

KEVIN JOHNSON

Minister



Chapel in the Fields

When Methodist minister Kevin Johnson refurbished a small chapel in the countryside near Dunham Massey, his vision was to use the building as a place of creativity and spirituality, sharing it with the wider church as a resource. Through Godly Play, woodworking and retreats, Chapel in the Fields would make faith tangible and relevant.

Kevin's flexible concept for the Chapel has flourished, as he and his team – with support from the Methodist Circuit – have responded to local community and wider church need. Through Quiet Days, they open the Chapel's peaceful space to Christians, seekers and other groups. In regular Woodwork for Wellness workshops, they help people with mental health problems to make simple, beautiful things. Throughout the pandemic, they have reached a scattered community with a regular Postcard from the Chapel, an online bitesize video reflection aimed at those with or without faith. And as a community of local people has come together around the Chapel, a small Gathering is reimagining congregation for interactive times.

Four years later, a community has embraced Kevin's vision for a creative approach to faith – some engaging locally, some remotely. The Chapel's way of sharing faith in everyday, tangible things has chimed with post-pandemic life in ways that the team could never have foreseen.

A lightbulb moment for a new kind of church

In 2016, training in Godly Play sparked a lightbulb moment for Kevin. With a background as a carpenter before entering the ministry, Kevin was inspired by the potential of Godly Play to reimagine church. Could a new kind of church project be built around creative spirituality, bringing new life to a declining church building? Through the healing potential of woodworking, could this project reach out to the community? And could it be an oasis of spirituality for the wider church?

From the start, this was a practical vision. "We could rescue a building that might be getting close to being closed and sold," Kevin realised. "We could do spirituality and creativity. We might do Godly Play within that. We might have retreats and quiet days. And we might do

woodwork – we might reach out to men and women who, like me, have had mild depression, for almost therapeutic reasons. But, more than that, to create things and just enjoy being together.”

This moment of inspiration was just the beginning. To turn the idea into reality, Kevin would need to bring his creative vision together with all his practical and ministry experience. A background in carpentry. Expertise in refurbishing buildings. Pastoral experience supporting those with depression. A small team that shared his vision. And 20 years in Methodist ministry, in which Kevin had seen too many church buildings close, despite their potential to be used to do church differently.

At first, the idea seemed unworkable. Kevin had no idea where the money would come from. Would the Methodist church be willing to take a risk on such a new concept for church? “I immediately laughed it off, like Abraham and Sarah,” Kevin says. But, in a leap of faith, he brought the idea to the Chair of District and Circuit Stewards. Against all expectations, Kevin found them excited by the idea. Kevin Jaquiss, who was Circuit Steward at the time, remembers how the creative vision came together into a church project that would make faith approachable in practical ways – through Godly Play, creativity for wellness, and space for reflection. “Like a lot of what we have done since within the project, the original vision involved bringing together a number of ideas and opportunities and asking, ‘Might this fit together into something worthwhile and meaningful?’” He remembers getting the sense that “we were pushing at an open door” – that the Methodist Church wanted to support this reimagined vision of church.

Kevin brought together a Project Management team who shared his vision. Together, they would go on to develop Sinderland Green Methodist Chapel into the Chapel in the Fields project.

Refurbishing the Chapel

In 2016, Sinderland Green Chapel was home to a small Methodist community struggling to stay viable as an independent congregation. At first, they were reluctant about the project. Kevin took six months to

M A R K ' S S T O R Y

Mark and his wife have been attending the carol services at the Chapel for many years. Mark was inspired to become a Friend of the Chapel through the woodwork and other outreach, seeing it as distinctive community engagement from a different kind of church.

“Kevin had people come and talk about some of their experiences in the Chapel through the course of the year,” he says. “I was really quite taken with what Kevin was doing, and thought it would be a good thing to support.”

When Kevin set up the Gathering, the timing was perfect for Mark, who had recently left his traditional congregation. Mark appreciates the Gathering’s small community and interactive approach to faith. “It’s much more of an engaging experience than you would get in a normal church service,” he says. “It’s more of an interaction approach, rather than a theatre. That’s been really rewarding.”

work alongside them and “gently journey with them.” The Chapel in the Fields project team would be guests in the building, to make a distinction between Kevin’s new pioneer work and the existing congregation.

Kevin’s background as a carpenter was invaluable as he and his team refurbished the dilapidated chapel, with the help of a grant of about £300,000 from the Methodist Church. Their aim was to create a welcoming, bright space to encourage creativity and reflection. At the heart of the chapel was a wood workshop, created by converting the kitchen and vestry. From here, Kevin would work with local people with mental health problems, Godly Play figures would be made, and ministry to resource the spiritual and creative life of the wider church would take shape.

Being a sign of the Kingdom in the community

The project was called Chapel in the Fields, reflecting the building’s location, surrounded by fields worked by tenant farmers. This setting would go on to shape the team’s developing vision for the Chapel, as they began to understand the local community around them – from the isolation of many local men, to the nearby crematorium. As the Chapel opened in 2017, Kevin and his team engaged in a discernment process. Who made up their

community, and how could the Chapel reach that community with their creative vision?

They began with monthly Quiet Days. These retreats make the most of the setting of the Chapel, with reflection and psalm walks in the local fields. In keeping with the Chapel's ethos, Godly Play is a focus, along with opportunities for visitors to work in the wood workshop.

For the Chapel team, being present in their local community had to mean more than bringing in groups to the building from elsewhere. As they have taken opportunities to share faith in action, the Chapel's local presence has grown organically. They share hot drinks at the local crematorium on its busiest days – Christmas Day, Father's Day and

Mother's Day – as a gift to the community. With growing support from the crematorium manager, they have held several Dying to Talk events. Poetry evenings have allowed the Chapel to invite in local audiences of up to 50 people to each event, giving voice to creative writing in the community. And for the past 4 years, an annual carol service has made the Chapel more visible in the area. Through this much-loved community event, where Kevin shares the impact of the Chapel's work through the past year, people who attend year after year have begun to gather around the Chapel.

As the host and minister, it's a bit scary because you have no idea what people are going to say... But that's great. It's always been really profound. It's made us laugh; it has been a bit on the edge sometimes. But there's always been some sense that the Kingdom of God has been expressed in some way.

- Kevin Johnson, reflecting on the Chapel's Poetry Evenings

But it is Kevin's Woodwork for Wellness workshops that have perhaps made the most significant impact in the community. Several courses run each year, through connections Kevin has nurtured with local mental health support workers. He began

the project with men in mind, noticing a lack of support for men with mental health problems, but women are also very welcome. Through the simple satisfaction of making woodwork items in community, Kevin has seen people's self-esteem grow. Many leave their woodwork behind for the Chapel to sell to raise funds and awareness.

Over the next few years, a real sense of the Chapel's value took hold, as they opened up a space for spiritual engagement and reached the community in practical ways. More people from the local community and beyond wanted to be part of what the Chapel was doing. Today, a community of 52 Friends of the Chapel pray for and donate to the project.

A community and Gathering forms around the Chapel

While the Chapel was never intended as a church plant, Kevin wondered whether a new kind of congregation might form around the creative, reflective ethos of the Chapel. When he was approached by a number of people asking whether he would offer Sunday worship in the Chapel's unique style, he saw an opportunity. The result was The Gathering. The Chapel's practical outreach matters to this nascent worshipping community. From Dying to Talk to Woodwork for Wellness, the Chapel's local visibility has emerged through concern for the community. Many of the Gathering's members have slowly built a relationship with the Chapel, over many years. A number were repeat attenders at the Chapel's carol services. Some were ambivalent about church, but comfortable with the Chapel's creative approach to faith.

Excited to see what God did with this growth of interest, Kevin started the Gathering gently, beginning with one Sunday a month. People came to their first meeting in March 2020. "We did a coffee, croissant, Sunday brunch type setting, where we spent more time talking to each other than we did praying in the chapel," Kevin remembers, followed by "some devotional worship in the Chapel." Commitment to the group has persisted despite the constraints of the pandemic. Ten to 15 people meet each month over Zoom for an hour of coffee and connection, as they use Brian McLaren's book *Naked Spirituality* to inspire creative devotions.

Kevin has aimed to keep the community ethos of the Chapel at the heart of what they do. Members come back because the Chapel offers them something different from other churches, valuing conversation, creativity and community. The relaxed, interactive space encourages

members to go deeper than they might be able to in traditional churches. Kevin is looking forward to being able to bring the Gathering back to the Chapel building in the future.

Postcard from the Chapel

The Chapel's vision has grown again in response to the pandemic, as they have reflected on the role of church in the 'new normal' of 2020 and beyond. The team suspected that there were many people seeking answers to questions of faith raised by the pandemic, but who were not engaged by hour-long live streamed services. How could the Chapel engage with these people on the edge of churches, while staying connected with their scattered community and Friends? The team's answer was to share something very short, every day – a Postcard from the Chapel. Lasting only 90 seconds, these reflective videos include an inspiring photograph and a very short prayer.

The Postcards carry the distinctive stamp of Chapel in the Fields – they are reflective, creative and grounded in the everyday. Aiming to meet a spiritual need exposed by the pandemic, the short videos are widely accessible and focus on hope in a difficult time. Presenters have inspired spiritual reflection on the crisis and its impact, rather than telling people what to think. For team member Kevin Jaquiss, the Postcards epitomise the

DAILY POSTCARDS

The daily Postcards from The Chapel in the Fields have been a source of comfort, inspiration and guidance in a turbulent and unsettling time through this coronavirus pandemic.

Always insightful and relevant, and uplifting. I look forward to it dropping into my inbox each morning.

I find the Postcards uplifting, encouraging, relevant and [they] unify me with other brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you so much for producing them for us.

Chapel's creative approach to faith. "They try to suggest an answer to the question 'Does my faith mean anything when I'm sat at home worrying about the world and looking out of the window?'"

The Postcards aim to be relevant both to an observant Methodist audience and people who might have disconnected from church. As Kevin Jaquiss reflects, "There seems to be some evidence that talking about faith in an approachable way, in the context of a crisis which makes us all question who we are and what life is about, may also be helpful to people

who are not churchgoers.” Keenly aware that not everyone receiving the Postcard will be familiar with Christian concepts, the team have worked with themes that have both universal and liturgical relevance. A Windows theme at Advent focused on longing for light to come. The theme allowed them to use the windows of the Chapel itself in the Postcards – including an image of a visit from the window cleaner – to keep the sense of place alive.

A consistent team of four has produced the reflections, including Jane Johnson and Clair Jaquiss, an Anglican vicar who has presented the BBC’s Pause for Thought. The Postcards have reached 1500 people a day during lockdown. With their short video format, they have become a successful marketing tool for the Chapel, as people have passed them on. The Chapel has seen community engagement increasing as a result. Personal responses to the reflections have come in from across the country, and the Friends of the Chapel scheme has grown. Now released on a weekly schedule, the project has been such effective community outreach that Kevin and his team plan to continue the Postcards indefinitely.

A developing vision for the Chapel and its community

As the vision grows beyond the Chapel’s immediate community, the team have recognised that the Chapel fills an unmet spiritual need. People see the Chapel as a practical place where things are made. The

It has become clear that church as it is being delivered at present is missing something.

- Kevin Jaquiss, member of the Postcards from the Chapel team

Postcards are one more way that the Chapel is opening up space for people to explore grounded questions about what faith means in the context of a social crisis. By repackaging faith using ordinary yet novel images, the Chapel’s outreach helps people to see Christianity’s relevance for a modern, often troubling world.

The overwhelming response to online engagement has left the team asking how the Chapel can fulfil its vision in new ways, while still reaching out to community and resourcing spiritual journeys. Asking what will church look like in a post-pandemic future, Kevin Johnson anticipates the need for creativity to help people address a rise in mental health problems and

grief. “Christian places that are offering something creative – I think we ought to be at the front of the queue to help,” Kevin argues. He is making plans to open up the Chapel as a reflection space, using art and creativity to help people encounter loss and change. Building on its existing work in wellness and spiritual formation, the Chapel is already well placed to develop in new directions like this.

The Chapel’s work is valued because they are willing to take risks, unencumbered by tradition. Kevin constantly returns to the Chapel’s setting in fields as the living parable for their work. Seeds planted by a project like this may grow against expectations, defying fixed plans. He believes the church will need this kind of flexibility in a post-pandemic world. “We have to be in tune with what God might be saying to us, because I think old formulas are just going to go out the window.”

Challenges

Finances can be a challenge for such a unique project. Now in its fifth year, the Chapel is coming to the end of its initial Methodist Church grant, and they are constantly seeking creative opportunities to fund the work. Friends of the Chapel contribute about £650 per month to the Chapel’s income, helped by online engagement including the Postcard project. Woodwork sales generate income – Kevin makes church furniture alongside Godly Play figures and smaller items. Use and hire of the building also brings income, whether for Quiet Days or external hire. Together, these sources have been more lucrative than the team expected – the Chapel’s finances came in £5000 ahead of income projections in 2020, despite the constraints of the pandemic on building use. But Kevin thinks the Chapel will never be self-sustaining, and they have a shortfall of £18,000 this year. Their next funding targets may include grant-making bodies for mental health funding and Methodist Church new congregation funding.

The team’s legal situation as ‘guests’ in the building of another congregation has been a challenge, but one that the team has embraced. For Kevin Johnson, working with the current congregation of Sinderland Green Chapel involved slow relationship building. Although there has

PRINCIPLES OF A CREATIVE MINISTRY TO THE COMMUNITY AND WIDER CHURCH

- At Chapel in the Fields, the team discern and respond to local needs. They have built local relationships in response to what is going on around them. This has given them opportunities for outreach, from Dying to Talk sessions to Woodwork for Wellness. In responding to the community's spiritual needs, a community has formed around them, leading to the Gathering.
- At the same time, they have reached out to a scattered online community, taking opportunities to go further with their mission to resource the wider church, especially in response to Covid measures and increased online engagement.
- They work in ecumenical and local partnerships. They ask for advice from other creative projects across the wider church. They have built local relationships at the crematorium and through their mental health work. They work with an ecumenical team on Postcard from the Chapel. Partnerships have given them insight into what works and opportunities to do more.
- They have been flexible with the original creative vision, developing it in new directions. While Godly Play has been important in the Chapel's Quiet Days and woodwork, it has not been the focus they had hoped. Instead, as they have planted seeds based on their original ethos, some have grown. From the Gathering to the Postcard project, they have taken new opportunities.
- They have been practical in seeking funding and support, particularly from the Methodist Church. The Chair of the Project Management group has experience, and has helped to make sure that Kevin's creative vision is supported by a realistic, measurable plan.

been little collaboration between Kevin's project and the congregation, both sides have been gracious about the unusual situation. Kevin sees the significance of Chapel in the Fields starting new ministry in the building just as the last service of the traditional congregation was taking place. But such an unconventional relationship with the building and

its management can be fragile. With the congregation closing, trustee status for the Chapel has now been transferred to the Circuit – this may see legal issues arising, when the ultimate responsibility for the building lies with the trustees. This potential pitfall is one for other pioneering churches and ministers to be aware of.

The Chapel's response to the challenges of lockdown has grown their community, but it has split their focus between online and in-person activities. Kevin is aware that the project's sense of place is vital to its survival. The Chapel in the Fields is named after its building. While their online presence is allowing a global community to connect with them, the Chapel is a physical destination where people choose to come. "We are not a local church," Kevin Johnson says. While they have been able to maintain their Quiet Days and other activities online, the team are concerned about how long it will be before people feel comfortable returning to the Chapel in person. But they hope that the Chapel's unique offering in the building will see people come back in the future, even as they maintain forms of contact with their community online.

Last Word

At Chapel in the Fields, they have encountered a hunger for Christianity done differently. Their practical ethos has encouraged people to connect with them who might never have engaged with traditional churches. Offering a reflective, creative way to explore faith, the work of the Chapel has been especially relevant in a world facing a pandemic. *"It is about how to keep faith relevant in the modern world,"* Gathering member Mark says. *"I think that's what, for me, the Chapel epitomises."*



—
Bristol

Bristol

T H E C R E A T I V E
C O N G R E G A T I O N M A K I N G
C H U R C H T O G E T H E R

■

THE BENEFICE OF COTHAM PARISH CHURCH AND ST PAUL'S

■

We

tend to do things
from the grassroots up...
We've always had clergy
who've said, 'If you want
to plan something, if you
want to do something,
go ahead and do it.' It
doesn't depend on the
clergy.



COTHAM PARISH CHURCH
Parishioner

THE CREATIVE CONGREGATION MAKING CHURCH TOGETHER

The Benefice of Cotham Parish Church and St Paul's, Clifton

Surrounded by student residences in Bristol, Cotham Parish Church and St Paul's, Clifton are places where church is homemade. Where congregations take the lead in prayer, creativity and social action. Where a grassroots spirit pervades everything they do, as they make church together.

The twin themes of prayer and creativity run through everything that goes on at Cotham and St Paul's. Rooted in a long history of prayer, church life here is shaped by congregational initiatives for spiritual formation, many tinged with a creative flavour. Lay-led initiatives for creative prayer and formation range from an annual cross-benefice Month of Accompanied Prayer to a creative writing and spirituality group and a Peace Prayer Group. Prayer and creativity guide the churches' engagement with social and environmental justice, give their artistic life a spiritual motivation, and are at the heart of their commitment to inclusion and welcome for all.

An inclusive, creative and contemplative Christian community... on an exciting journey of continually reimagining faith and what it means to live in ways inspired by the gospel and the open promise of God's kingdom.

- **Cotham Parish Church**
(cothamparishchurch.org)

Prayer in church life, prayer in daily life

Prayer has been central to the lives of both congregations since before they were linked as a benefice in 2000. "People really do seem to take faith into the domestic realm here," vicar David Stephenson says of the congregations. "Faith practices are quite well embedded in life."

Today, many of their prayer activities bring the benefice together as one praying community. Most of these initiatives are lay-led – a theme that runs through everything the congregations do. A Month of Accompanied Prayer takes place every January, and lectio divina sessions run throughout the year. At Cotham, a Peace Prayer Group is coordinated by a Franciscan Tertiary from the congregation, who brings together people with a burden to pray for peace. Across the benefice, a Thursday Pause meditation session has been inspired by the anxieties of the pandemic. And an annual

benefice retreat builds community as people pray together.

The churches' foundation of congregational prayer has been important during the pandemic, bringing them together through a growing online prayer culture. In the spring of 2020, with both churches closed for in-person services, curate Pippa White wondered how they could offer something more profound than streamed services. She wanted to encourage more people to take up a prayer life that would nourish them through the pandemic and beyond. Building on the congregations' existing familiarity with lectio divina, a group has come together to meditate on lectionary readings over Zoom. They have found that lectio works well over video calls, with its clear structure that alternates reading and silence, encouraging an emphasis on attentive listening. "Every time, it's wonderfully rich and resonant," Pippa says. The group has been a very different kind of online church amidst the stress of the pandemic, rooting the churches deeper in prayer.

The Month of Accompanied Prayer

Since 2012, an annual Month of Accompanied Prayer has been organised across the benefice. A lay initiative, these individually-guided 'retreats in daily life' link people from the churches with independent prayer guides. Retreatants share their experiences of prayer through the month with their guide. "For many people, it's the first time in their lives they've ever talked one-to-one about their praying," says Catherine Richards, who coordinates the Month of Accompanied Prayer.

Prayer guides encourage retreatants to pray in new ways, drawing on a library of prayer resources that the church has built up over the years. When the Months of Accompanied Prayer began, the prayer guidance often had an Ignatian structure. More recently, the guides have come to emphasise silent prayer, and other ways to pray that go deeper than familiar intercessory prayer.

Building church community through prayer

Their familiarity with contemplative practices gives the churches a

strong foundation for shaping community life around prayer. One way they come together is through a very different kind of annual benefice retreat, another lay initiative. Unlike many parish retreats, it is not led or preached. Instead, there is a focus on silent prayer and lectio divina, using a structure that values everyone's experiences and insights. Up to 20 people from the church go together to a retreat centre in the Brecon Beacons. While clergy often come with them to share a daily Eucharist, the emphasis is on what retreatants bring, through a process of listening and sharing what has resonated in prayer. "There's this really special listening, that you don't jump in and discuss what is said – you hold it as sacred. It's holy ground stuff," says one of the organisers. The retreat is silent from Friday night until Sunday, and yet they have found it accessible to people from all kinds of backgrounds, with retreatants as young as 12 coming back year after year.

But weekends and courses that throw people into contemplative practice might be daunting to those with less experience. To help people try prayer out, the churches have offered taster sessions in lectio divina, and last year a church away day in South Wales worked as a taster for the retreat.

From the Month of Accompanied Prayer to the emerging online prayer culture, the church finds that prayer builds community. David also perceives a growing church literacy in prayer. In keeping with the communitarian spirit of the church, prayer is no longer seen as something just for clergy, but a core practice for all. "People have been encouraged to own it."

Creative spiritual life in the benefice

- **David Stephenson**

In both these churches, faith finds expression in creativity. They are blessed with a number of artists and poets in the congregation, who lead a creative writing group with a spiritual focus, benefice art and book groups, and poetry performance evenings.

But creativity and spirituality are not separate things for these

M O N T H O F
A C C O M P A N I E D
P R A Y E R

THE PRACTICALITIES

- The coordinator contacts experienced prayer guides, matching applicants with guides.
- The group of guides and retreatants meet to open the month in prayer.
- Retreatants meet with their guides weekly, for four weeks, to reflect on their prayer over the month.
- They give retreatants a booklet to encourage prayer journaling, using other resources to guide prayer.
- A final session allows the group to reflect together.

HOW IT WORKS

- Four weeks allows space and time for reflection between meetings. It is good to “trust in the slow work of God” (Teilhard de Chardin).
- Prayer guides come from outside the benefice, allowing for safe, confidential discussion.
- Guides are flexible in when and how they meet, to help people fit prayer guidance into their lives.
- Taster sessions encourage people to take part. Follow up helps people reflect on the process, but it has not always worked – not everyone has time.

congregations. The creative spirit of the churches runs through the whole of church life, helping the congregation to grow together. In the 2020 Advent course, a group worked with Carys Walsh's *Frequencies*

The more you pray, the more you want to pray. It's such a daylight moment when people cross a barrier from it being something you fit in if you have time during the day, to knowing that it's something you do anyway.

- **Catherine Richards,**
Month of Accompanied
Prayer Coordinator

of God: Walking through Advent with RS Thomas, using poetry for lectio divina. The lay-led benefice book group engages with current issues through a spiritual lens. In the past few months they have been reading books by black authors, as part of a broader aim to make Black Lives Matter an intentional, formational journey for the benefice, as they work to confront their privilege as mainly white congregations. An art group, organised by artist and congregant Sara Easby, brings creative expression to a community of older people. Creative lay-led services at St Paul's are aimed at children. Church member and poet Philip Dixon organises themed poetry performance evenings. And the

benefice journal, 'Connections', comes out four times a year, filled with what Pippa calls "deeply thought-out contributions" from congregants – poetry, book reviews, photography and more, along with spiritual reflections. Again, the journal is entirely congregationally led.

Participatory creative expression is part of the "corporate authenticity" of the churches, David says. It reflects the instinct of the churches to encourage people to explore the spiritual journey as "a window on mystery," rather than aiming for conversion through proposition. For David, creativity "invites people into the exploration, rather than saying, 'This is how it is.'"

Telling the story of church social and ecological action

Social and ecological justice is another theme of church life that is driven by the congregation. As the churches work towards Eco Church awards, there are Eco Champions in every area of church life, with the aim of making creation care a core focus of their expression of faith. Church members are involved in Extinction Rebellion and other

movements for social and environmental justice. They support Bristol Churches Winter Night Shelter and a community programme to sponsor a local refugee family. One challenge for the benefice is to tell these congregants' stories more effectively. "We know so many people are doing different things," Pippa says, "whether they're involved in a community farm, whether they're volunteering, working with homeless people or refugees. How do we tell our story so that we know what's going on in the benefice better?" With so many people active and connected outside of church, their collective narrative of social and compassionate action is part of the wider benefice story. Developing this benefice identity may empower more of the congregation to act.

We have a strong creative stream in our congregational prayer and contemplation. One of the ways that people express their spirituality is through writing, art, making.

- **David Stephenson, Vicar**

As the benefice looks to the future, the churches want to become more accessible to the wider community, which has been a challenge in the past. Plans include more commercial activity to enable a sustainable future, and reordered church spaces, including a mini art gallery in Cotham's front porch, to be managed by Sara Easby. Church reordering will also allow them to extend their existing creative vision, and they are keen to engage in more sacred music.

Challenges

The churches have not always brought in diverse congregations.

Cotham has mainly served an older congregation, although St Paul's is involved in creative children's work. Most of the prayer and creative activities at Cotham attract an over-fifties age group. The congregations are also aware that they are not racially diverse, and are trying to find ways to address their privilege consciously. David has been surprised that the church in Bristol as a whole does not reflect the diversity of the city. In response to this challenge, the benefice's aim for the future is to engage more with their creative city. This is driving their plans for commercial and cultural engagement with the wider community.

The churches would like to grow more through creative encounter.

The creative groups draw from beyond the congregation, but not in large numbers. But the churches are not anxious about this. Their aim is for growth to be an embedded process, rather than a strategy.

The churches need to tell their story better, to continue to make the most of their assets in the congregation. They know their congregations are rich with artists and people experienced in prayer. Their vision for their future as Eco Churches is to draw on this activist spirit together, bringing social and ecological justice deeper into benefice life and identity.

The Principles of Prayer and Spiritual Formation

at Cotham and St Paul's

- **Lay-led activities are valued by the community.** They may be more likely to take part if they feel that groups belong to them, not clergy. The democratic spirit at Cotham and St Paul's encourages lay ownership of prayer initiatives.
- **Creativity and congregational formation are intrinsically intertwined** for these churches, from the creative writing and spirituality group, to a book group that builds on members' theological thought and social action. A lay-led newsletter gives people's spiritual experiences a creative voice, and art and poetry shape congregational life. Contemplative prayer is not for everyone, and the strong creative stream at these churches is another route to formation.
- **Prayer can be made less intimidating** with support and focus. The clergy at these churches empower a growing prayer literacy.

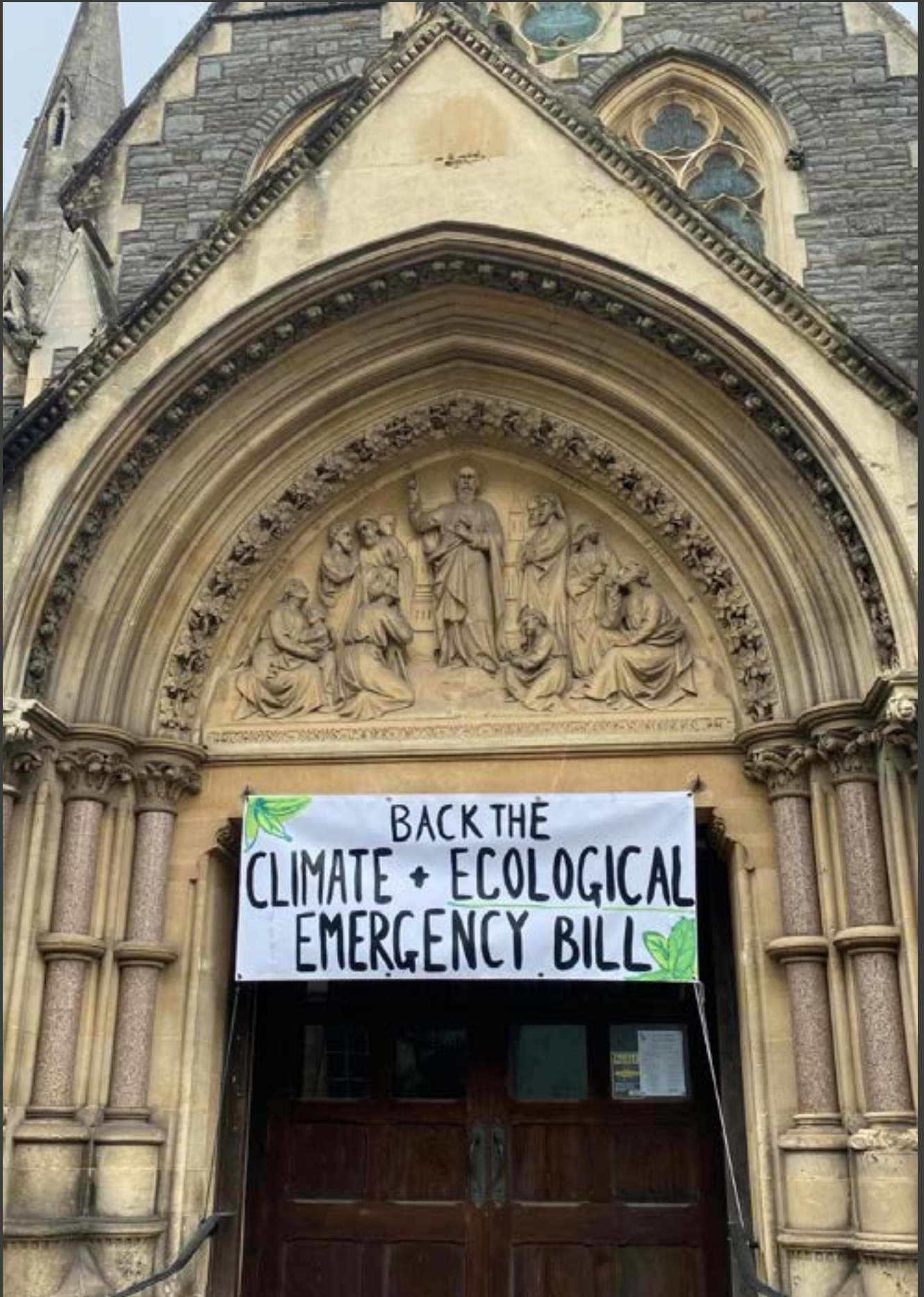
- Online contemplative groups have kept prayer accessible through the pandemic. Themed initiatives give a focus to prayer, from a group with a burden to pray for peace, to retreats and Months of Accompanied Prayer that become familiar annual events. And taster sessions help make new forms of prayer less intimidating.
- **Creative encounter can make church growth a gentle, embedded process.** Friends of the churches who link with them through the art group or poetry performances may not come to Sunday worship right away, but they are valued as part of the church's outreach.
- **Social justice can be empowered by congregational prayer and clergy support.** The churches are building on existing enthusiasm for social activism, weaving ecological action into the prayer and worship lives of the churches, and looking for ways to support congregants' social action.
- **Congregants can be assets for spiritual formation.** These congregations are blessed with artists and people with experience of prayer. Clergy empower lay members' ideas and initiatives.

Last Word

In the benefice of Cotham Parish Church and St Paul's Clifton, the clergy steps back so the congregation can step forward. An active congregational life empowers the community to pray, act and create, as they make and renew church together.

"This is who we are. We make church. I think church is, in the best sense, homemade and participative."

- **David Stephenson, Vicar**





Texas

Texas

T H E C H U R C H
O F M A N Y
C O M M U N I T I E S

■

ST ISIDORE, TEXAS

■

This

community's liturgy draws on military language, to honour veterans' experiences. Their opening prayer begins, "We gather in the name of God, honour, integrity, courage and selfless love... and we protect one another."



THE CHURCH OF MANY COMMUNITIES

St Isidore

In the Houston suburbs of Spring and the Woodlands, as Reverend Sean Steele began his ministry, he encountered many people who were not reached by local churches. At the laundry, he met working poor people, who needed their Sundays for household tasks. At the gym, he talked to men with active lifestyles, who could commit to regular exercise, but could not find churches where they felt welcome. Through outreach, he met veterans of military service with post-traumatic stress disorder, who found church distressing. Sean wondered how these people could find community and sacrament. Was it possible to bring these church-excluded and church-rejecting people into intentional missional communities, gathered around the common identity of a larger church?

Today, St Isidore shows that church does not have to be a one-size-fits-all event. With eight active communities, the church is shaped around members' own, diverse ways of worshipping. Each community is a full expression of church life. The communities draw on the wisdom of their members to create liturgy and services that fit them. As one church, they live out a principle of offensive generosity through a food truck and food pantry, coming together to serve those around them. And a new Common Collective gathering is bringing the communities together for worship, building a shared church identity. St Isidore is a church in the world, transforming culture as they bring worship and sacrament into the community.

Church transforming culture, culture transforming church

Sean's vision was for a church that would help people to encounter the sacred in everyday life. "Could we go out into the world and be thoroughly Anglican?" Sean imagined a church with many walls, gathered in everyday settings, from laundrettes to kitchen tables. A new kind of church would emerge, as church encountered culture in two-way transformation. "If we can take the power of the sacraments out in the world, and people consume Christ, then that changes culture." The vision was to share the invitation of Nazareth – come and see – as a

gateway into church.

This would not be a traditional church plant model. Although St Isidore began as the daughter church of Trinity Episcopal Church, The Woodlands, Sean was not interested in creating another church that worshipped in the same way as all the others around it. Instead, it would grow through a more organic process of “church birthing.” Embodying what Sean calls “the scandal of particularity of the incarnation,” people would shape the St Isidore’s communities through their identities and hurts, not in spite of them. “Each one of these communities would come from not a what, or how, but from a who.”

Warrior Church Liturgy

This community’s liturgy draws on military language, to honour veterans’ experiences. Their opening prayer begins, “We gather in the name of God, honour, integrity, courage and selfless love... and we protect one another.” Their confession takes seriously the way trauma feels, while recognising how God can transform it. “Forgive what our lips do not name and what our hearts can no longer bear; set us free from a past that we cannot change and open us to a future where we can be changed.”

- Warrior Church Liturgy

Through the community, Sean has learned that traditional worship is often not accessible to those with PTSD. “For people who are suffering from psychological injury, the traditional worship experience is not conducive for them,” Sean says. “It takes them a lot of energy just to be physically present.” To help keep people present, a Warrior Church service includes 40 minutes of exercise, which Sean calls “exercising demons.” Scripture discussion is also central to the service, together with a Bread Ceremony.

As at every St Isidore community, the service also includes a time of Mutual Invitation, where members share their responses to the lectionary and invite others to share. The process allows Sean

The communities

At **Warrior Church**, veterans and people in military service come together with others with post-traumatic stress disorder, in an active community that meets in a gym. Prayer and liturgy are at the centre of worship, but the service otherwise looks very different from most church services, including physical exercise.

to manage the conversation, so that people from very different backgrounds can worship together. Member Allie appreciates how mutual invitation invites God to transform difficult experiences, through the hope of the Gospel. “It’s very real and honest, but also moving us forward. It’s like, we don’t just need to stay in this awfulness – let’s move forward.”

Taco Church is a men-only breakfast community that meets in a restaurant attached to a gym. The most diverse of the communities, its members come from all sections of the local community, from homeless people to those who own businesses. Their service is less structured than in other communities, with a focus on shared prayer, discussion and discipleship. The group was one of the first St Isidore communities, and now sees up to 20 men attending each meeting.

The community was inspired by the shared team spirit Sean saw at his gym. Many of the men there knew Sean was a cleric and sought him out during workouts, but they had little interest in attending church. The men had already built a sense of community by supporting each other during their workouts. Sean saw the potential for a St Isidore community to form around that shared identity. He invited 4 of the men to a post-workout breakfast at the taco restaurant next door. Five years later, the group is still going strong, building on this sense of shared values and community.

At Taco Church, members have discovered a level of vulnerability that can be shared in single-gender groups. With a strong contingent of professional athletes, the community members are comfortable in the post-workout environment. But in contrast with the stereotype, the community has shaped locker room conversation into a mutually supportive space. Community members appreciate the open and honest discussion at Taco Church.

Of course, Sean is aware that Taco Church could be criticised for its exclusivity. But groups built on shared identity were always part of the St Isidore vision. For Sean, single-sex groups make sense if they grow out of people’s shared lived experience, as long as there are opportunities for



WARRIOR  **CHURCH**



others to form their own communities. Sure enough, women's groups have emerged more recently at St Isidore, inspired by Taco Church.

Allie's story

Allie and her husband attend two St Isidore communities – Kitchen Table Church and Warrior Church. Longing for a more diverse community than they found in most local churches, they came to St

Isidore through personal connections, “and we fell in love with our community there.” At Kitchen Table Church, members gather around a table for liturgy, a meal and an exploration of Scripture. The kitchen table is a safe setting for members to bring authentic, sometimes painful experience to church. “We live life together, and I’ve never been a part of a community like that [before].” This weekday church fits Allie’s schedule, and attendance is low-pressure. “They always tell us, ‘We love you, but we don’t need you’.”

When I go to church, I look around, and people are so different than me. That’s something that my husband and I really wanted.

- **Allie, St Isidore member (Kitchen Table Church, Warrior Church)**

Warrior Church is also a good fit for Allie, because of its inclusive approach to people with PTSD. Allie has a background of adoption from a family with drug addiction issues. The community fits into her busy life, allowing her to exercise and share in a Eucharist before 9 on a Sunday morning. But on a deeper level, Allie’s more challenging experiences are welcome at Warrior Church. She appreciates how well Sean manages the honest sharing in the group, making space for difficult lived experience, but always pointing to hope in God.

When Allie and her husband recently went through a miscarriage, the St Isidore community showed up for her in ways that a church never has before. The community responded to the couple’s experience both practically and in worship, sharing in a liturgy for the loss of a child, around the kitchen table that is the centre of the couple’s sacramental life.

Trey's story

A former professional football player, Trey is a business owner in the

Woodlands. Experience of megachurches left him seeking more personal connections in a different kind of church. One of the original members of Taco Church, Trey feels able to be his authentic self in the all-male environment in a way that he has never experienced in other churches. He can be open there, sharing real prayer requests and speaking from the heart during discussions. He enjoys hearing the equally unfiltered viewpoints of the other members of this changing community, too. "Every week is completely different, with a different group of guys. That's one of the beauties of the Taco Church group, just hearing from all of the diversities that we have there." Trey and his fiancée recently took part in the pilot of a St Isidore marriage course, and it had a positive impact on their relationship. Trey's involvement with the Taco Church community has led him into a deeper faith commitment, expressed in his service to the church. Six days a week, he sources all the food that St Isidore needs, from the Abundant Harvest food truck to meals shared by communities meeting in homes.

Common Collective and Abundant Harvest Kitchen

The church's mission statement has always included a principle of offensive generosity. The church's Abundant Harvest food truck has responded to food poverty in the area since 2017. St Isidore gathers there to help meet local need,

ST ISIDORE COMMUNITIES

- **Warrior Church** is a gathering of veterans and those with PTSD.
- **Laundry Love** offers free laundry services and haircuts, with a bilingual Spanish-English Eucharist.
- **Taco Church** is a men-only community, meeting over a post-workout breakfast.
- **Kitchen Table Church**, gathers the community to share liturgy for everyday life in a household setting.
- **Two house churches** make space for adults in different walks of life.
- **Youth Church** meets in a café, gathering young people from 11-18.
- **The Abundant Harvest Food Truck** is St Isidore's food ministry, regularly reaching 200 local families.
- Beyond the communities, a **Pub Philosophy** discussion group allows people to encounter St Isidore from the edge. It has piloted a marriage course, and runs the Episcopal anti-racism course **Sacred Grounds**.
- **Common Collective:** All the communities meet together once a month, as a gathered church, in the large warehouse which houses the Abundant Harvest Kitchen.

expressing their life as a common community by serving others. As Allie puts it, “There’s never an us and them – there’s a we, no matter who we’re serving.”

In the face of rapid growth, St Isidore has been facing two problems – sustaining a whole-church identity, and financial difficulties. Although they value their diverse membership, it can bring income challenges. The church found new solutions to these problems when it responded to local pandemic needs. St Isidore launched the Abundant Harvest Kitchen food pantry and meals service early in 2020. By the end of the year, the food pantry had shared a million pounds of food. They hope the social enterprise will give them the resources to launch more communities, and they have already been able to extend the leadership team with an Executive Director and Executive Chef.

You can be yourself. You’re not going to be looked at cross-eyed if you say something that in normal church, you don’t talk about. I can talk about anything that I’m going through, and I’m not going to be judged.

- **Trey, St Isidore member (Taco Church)**

The food pantry is helping them to build a whole-church identity, too. It is housed in a warehouse, an ideal location for a Common Collective gathering. Sean had been looking for a way to create a more traditional sacramental experience for people who are not interested in joining the communities. The new building is helping to bring those people to St Isidore, while building the common identity of the church, as they gather the communities for shared worship and formation.

Challenges

There is a risk that communities will not see themselves as part of the larger church. When gathering around a strong shared identity, communities may identify as members of Taco Church or Warrior Church, rather than feeling part of St Isidore. Sean’s vision is that the Common Collective service will build common identity. But many people have joined St Isidore for the communities, not to come to a traditional church service. The challenge will be to balance common church identity with the incarnational particularity of the communities.

Church growth can be a mixed blessing. Each St Isidore community has an ideal size, and Sean encourages the attrition of communities that have grown too large to work well for their members. Growing communities can also take a relational toll on church leaders. To help, the church has recently slowed down on launching new communities. They are working on building community lay leadership, identifying the right leaders from within communities, so that communities can truly shape themselves. Some members also see potential challenges for the church as their outreach grows, and as the church tries to balance the new social enterprise with the needs of communities.

There is a risk that exclusion will become identity. St Isidore's communities often gather around exclusion. Unchecked, this can create toxic communities. Sean emphasises the need to maintain boundaries, balancing the "radical yes" of the church with a "holy no." He reflects, "Somebody in these communities has to say, 'Your identity cannot be as a victim. You can talk about woundedness. But our identity here is always rooted in that Christian vision of hope and reconciliation.'"

A diverse church may need alternative income to sustain growth. Many of community members are on low incomes and cannot give much to the church. For St Isidore, one solution has come from extending their mission. In 2020 the church received about \$500,000 in grant money; 65% of their budget goes on outreach. Through their outreach they also shape lay leaders, to help meet other community challenges. They build on their assets in the congregation, developing the skills of volunteer accountants, treasurers, administrators and many more.

Principles of a successful 'church with many walls'

based on the experiences of St Isidore, Texas

- **One size does not fit all.** Instead, there is a community for everyone. These "communities of particularity" are shaped around the needs of their membership. Communities are places where members can come to church exactly as they are. Some

members feel empowered to bring their pain, while others feel they can speak more freely than in traditional churches.

- **Communities are a full expression of church**, with sacrament and liturgy, whether they meet in a restaurant or in the laundrette. “The idea is that somebody could come to Warrior Church their entire life, and it wouldn’t be a ‘less than’ expression of Episcopal Church,” Sean says.
- **Communities are church that fits people’s lives.** At St Isidore, church happens all through the week, fitting into busy schedules. Members do church in ways that work for them.
- **The wisdom is in the room.** At St Isidore, they know that God is not working in spite of people’s experience, but through it. Sean is always asking “Who has been left out?” and seeking out those with leadership capacity in the communities. He encourages these people to shape community liturgy and structure from within their own stories of exclusion.
- **A church of many walls is a diverse church.** The St Isidore communities bring in people from all walks of life, including many who feel excluded from churches, making for an eclectic congregation. This comes with challenges for the leadership, who must hold very different people together in one community. But diversity transforms the church, and members value it.
- **St Isidore has a slow, relational discipleship model**, with a constant invitation to go deeper. When people come to Laundry Love, and see Sean presiding over a bilingual Eucharist on a fold-out table, they might ask why a church would come to them. They can be pointed to a low-pressure activity like Pub Philosophy, and from there to a community where they can build relationships and grow towards baptism. Trey and his fiancée show this relational model in action. They joined the marriage course because they have come to trust Sean and St Isidore to make discipleship relevant to their lives.
- **‘Offensive generosity’ brings the church together in serving**

others. While the Common Collective gathering aims to bring all the communities together, it can be a little too much like traditional church for some. But it is through serving people around them that St Isidore really comes together, in communities of service like Laundry Love, through the food truck, and now at the new food pantry. And service draws in new members, who get a chance to see what St Isidore is about – offensive generosity – as they serve side-by-side with church members.

Last Word

St Isidore is a church for everyone, where people are not asked to leave their authentic selves at the church door. Instead, communities live out a gospel invitation for everyone to come as they are, shaping the church through their stories. The result is a diverse and growing church, making space for people who might never feel safe in a standard Sunday service. And as the communities bring Christ into the world, through sacrament and service, Christ transforms culture through them.

“St Isidore is a church for the misfits, people that don’t feel welcome in any church. There’s all walks of life in the communities. They’re all welcome.”

- **Trey, St Isidore member**



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London
London

T H E N A Z A R E T H
C O M M U N I T Y
& T H E D I S A B I L I T Y
A D V I S O R Y G R O U P

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ST MARTIN-IN- THE-FIELDS

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Rule of Life, it seemed to me, needed to try and help us to get out of the man-made back into the God-made, attentive to the things of God again.



RICHARD CARTER

Associate Vicar for Mission,
St Martin-in-the-Fields

The communities renewing a congregation and resourcing the wider church

The Nazareth Community and the Disability Advisory Group, St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, London

Standing on the corner of Trafalgar Square in central London, St Martin-in-the-Fields is a church where the edge and the heart meet. Here, the congregation share their lives not only with each other, but with those beyond the church steps. Rather than trying to solve problems around them as a church, the St Martin's congregation seek to recognise the Holy Spirit already at work in the abundant life around them. In Sam Wells' words, the church aims to "discover gifts where others might only see needs, and unearth treasure where others might only see trouble."³

As those on the edge and at the heart share their lives, two congregational initiatives are helping to renew the church. The Nazareth Community call themselves "an experiment in being with God, with one's neighbour and with oneself in the centre of London."¹ This scattered community commit annually to a contemplative and compassionate Rule of Life, as they learn to listen to God in the city

together. Through the Bread for the World informal Eucharist and other open times of silence, sacrament and service, they share their contemplative and connected way of life with the church. The Disability Advisory Group brings together people with lived experience of disability. Recognised by the church

not as a burden but as a resource, their insights open up the church to those who have been excluded. They share gifts of vulnerability recognised and difference celebrated. At St Martin-in-the-Fields, as people from all walks of life share their lived experience – of homelessness, disability, city life, and much more – the church is transformed.

At the heart. On the edge.

- Vision statement, St Martin-in-the-Fields

Finding God in the now and in the ordinary

The Nazareth Community

In 2017, Richard Carter had begun to feel fragmented by modern life in London. As Associate Vicar for Mission at St Martin-in-the-Fields, he had come to London after many years as a member of the Melanesian

Brotherhood, an order in the Solomon Islands. He loved his ministry, but in all its busy-ness, he no longer felt present to God. “I felt that I had become alienated from the things of God,” Richard says, “which I think is very easy for us to do without realising it, so that our lives lose the sense of mystery, they lose the sense of connectedness with the natural world, they lose the miracle.” But Richard did not want to escape the activity of the city. He wanted to seek and find God right where he was – in London, among its life and people, just as he had lived in the Pacific.

*Our monastery is here and now
Where you are today
The person you are speaking with
The room you are sitting in
The street where you are walking
The action you are doing now
This is your monastery
This is your prayer
Eternity is now
The city is our monastery.*

- **Richard Carter,**
The City is my Monastery:
A Contemporary Rule of Life, p.17

Richard knew he was not alone in his hunger for a sense of God’s presence in the modern city. He could see those around him seeking the same connectedness with a God-made world. “Why do people spend their whole year waiting for their holiday in the south of France?” he was asking himself. “It’s because those are the times where they connect with land, sea, sky, water. You don’t have to wait till a holiday to find the holy. You can find the holy every day.” Richard believed that a contemplative Rule of Life could help people find the holy in the midst of their modern lives, not in spite of them. And

perhaps such a contemplative community could renew a church that is often just as focused on activity as the rest of the world. “The church was not meant just to mirror the world with all its entertainment and busy-ness,” Richard says. “It was created to create holy times, sacred space – to allow people to explore their spirits.” Rooted in the church, a community finding God in the world and each other could share that with a congregation.

Now an Assistant Vicar at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Catherine Duce was curate at a nearby church at the time. She was feeling her own longing for a deepening of her prayer life in community with others. Richard and Catherine met regularly – under a tree in St James’ Park – to discern God’s direction in their concept of a monasticism in the city. They

began with silence, meeting every morning through Lent 2017. They wondered whether people would gather for an hour of silence early in the morning. To their delight, they were joined daily by others with a hunger to find the holy in the everyday. When they reached Easter, the group could not bear to abandon the silence that was giving life to this nascent community. A group of about 15 people from the St Martin-in-the-Fields congregation continued meeting twice a week. The Nazareth Community was taking shape.

Being with us is the nature of God – the grain of the universe; Jesus’ coming made that manifest, and clarified how integral and costly it was to God.

- **Sam Wells, The Nazareth Manifesto, p.25**

A Rule of Life to connect people with God and each other

As their name attests, Sam Wells’ theology of Nazareth was on the community’s heart from the beginning: in Jesus, God came to be with us, and we are called to imitate this.² The Nazareth concept of being with would ground the community’s contemplative life in the here and now – being with God, each other and the people of London. A simple Rule based around 7 principles shaped this way of life, through silent prayer, service, attentive listening to the Scriptures, a deepening sense of sacrament, generosity, rest on God’s Sabbath, and perseverance in a community. These would become the seven Ss of the Nazareth Community, intended not as another source of strain in busy lives, but as an accessible way of living in God’s presence in the contemporary world. This adaptable Rule of Life grew from the bottom up, not the top down, as together the community discerned God’s direction.

We were first rooted in the silence. That’s how we came together. The other [7 Ss] grew out from each other.

- **Paul, member of the Nazareth Community**

Just as Richard had imagined, there was a hunger for this expression of “a more compassionate Christian faith, a deeper wellspring.” Forty-eight people joined the Nazareth Community, launched at a service in March 2018. Three years later, they have grown to a group of 75. Their branches now reach beyond St Martin-in-the-Fields, though all members are still London based. Members make a vow, but not for life – they renew their commitment annually. The life of the wider church is fed by their prayer and service,

THE RULE OF THE NAZARETH COMMUNITY - THE '7 Ss'

SILENCE: The root and heart of the Nazareth Community, silence reveals God within each member, the community and the world. While some members attend the 3 hour-long sessions of Nazareth Community silent prayer each week, others find different ways to fit silence into their lifestyle. Both approaches are equally valued.

SERVICE: In the Nazareth Community, contemplation is not separate from action. As they encounter God in community, being present to the world leads to generosity – sharing each other's lives as they recognise each other's humanity. Many of the Nazareth Community are volunteers at the Sunday International Group, a community of homeless people with no recourse to public funds. Here, they come to understand that the guest brings the gift. And a number of Sunday International Group guests have gone on to join the Nazareth Community.

SCRIPTURE: Dwelling in Scripture together, the community listens to the gospel at work among them, in the church and in the world. Lectio divina groups, after the midweek Bread for the World service, are one setting where the community encourages deep engagement with Scripture. A member shares the Gospel reading for the day on the Facebook group, for reading with a listening heart at home.

SACRAMENT: The community gathers regularly with the wider church for communion, sharing the presence of God and taking it out into the world. On a midweek evening, the Bread for the World informal Eucharist is open to the whole congregation, upholding the community's philosophy of openness.

SABBATH: The Nazareth Community arose from a sense of disconnection among the busy-ness of life. The community sees Sabbath as God's gift of time to reconnect and enjoy the holy in the world. Members of the community hold each other accountable to honouring God's invitation for rest.

SHARING: The group has a commitment to generosity and hospitality. Each month, they come together for an hour and a half of teaching and sharing. In between, members reach out to each other to share experiences more informally. Outside the group, the community shares church and society with people who are very different from themselves, as they encounter and love the other.

STAYING WITH: In a world that often sees people and creation as disposable, the community has a commitment to stay with each other, in steadfast love. Many members of the community meet each other for spiritual accompaniment three times a year, reflecting on the Rule in their lives. This is just one of many ways they deepen their sense of community, as they live the 7 Ss together.

whether they remain members of the Nazareth Community, or move on to share their contemplative life elsewhere.

Each person keeps the Rule in their own way. It fits people's lives – not as a concession, but as a way to draw them deeper into the presence of God, right where they are. "The Rule doesn't outweigh the reason for the Rule," Richard says. "The Rule is not to confine and to imprison, but to help to flourish." There are different vocations among members – everyone brings different assets to build one community. Some members of the Nazareth Community find particular joy in service, and many volunteer at the Sunday International Group at St Martin-in-the-

Fields, where they share their lives with refugees and asylum seekers. Others especially appreciate silence. The flexibility of this way of life makes for a diverse community of practice and people.

There's that lovely sense of finding God in the now – finding God in the ordinary.

**- Catherine Duce,
Assistant Vicar,
St Martin-in-the-Fields**

The Nazareth Community is yeast in the church, shaping spaces of prayer, worship and service with congregation at St Martin's. The group is a vital part of the church, not separate from them. "With many church communities, the danger of anything is it becomes exclusive," Richard reflects. "We are beginners; none of us is holier than anybody else. The reason we're doing this is because this is life-giving." The only closed session is the community's regular times of sharing, a confidential space to encourage trust. Otherwise, all elements of the Nazareth Community's life are open to everyone, as they share their way of life with the church through the Bread for World informal Eucharist and open times of silence. In response, a diverse community of members have come to the group from all kinds of access routes – including the Sunday international Group. Here, where many members of the Nazareth Community live out their commitment to be with the people of the city, they are blessed by the homeless people with whom they share fellowship.

Paul's story

Paul hails from the Bronx and moved to London in 2010. When he found his spiritual home at St Martin-in-the-Fields, it was service that

THE LAMPEDUSA CROSS

As Richard Carter describes in *The City is my Monastery*, the original members of the Nazareth Community were each given a Lampedusa Cross. After 360 migrants drowned off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa, a local carpenter made crosses from the wreckage of the boat for survivors. In recognition of the work at St Martin-in-the-Fields with destitute migrants, the carpenter sent crosses to the Nazareth Community – a symbol of the community’s call to be with God and the people around them.

Michael is a founding member of the Nazareth Community. He already lived a Rule of Life that he has blended with the Nazareth seven Ss, and appreciates the balance of “*small ‘e’ expectations*” and “*big ‘E’ expectations*” in the community’s activities. Through the adaptable Rule, Michael’s own spiritual practices bring the seven Ss to life for him. In a spiritual practice influenced by the Ignatian Examen, Michael uses his Lampedusa Cross as a prompt for the Rule in his life. “*Every morning when I put this cross on the pillow, I think, ‘How am I going to live my Nazareth Community Rule of Life today? How*

will silence show up in my life today? How will sacred studies and service show up in my life today? How will I persevere?’ And when I take the cross off of my bed at night, I ask myself, ‘How did those 7 S’s show up in my life during the course of the day?’” As Michael lives his promises as a member of the Nazareth Community, the Lampedusa Cross is a concrete sign of his connection with a spiritual community across London. He envisages them living in their own “hermitages,” coming together at the “monastery” – St Martin-in-the-Fields.

The Nazareth Community is about making the Kingdom of God a concrete reality in the here and now, Michael believes. The Creator is not finished with creation. Drawing on Sam Wells’ theology, Michael says, “*What we’re trying to do with the 7 Ss is to create heaven on earth... and model it to other people.*” The community sets out to participate in new creation, by being with God in the city and its people – just as the Lampedusa Cross symbolises.

first appealed to this social worker – the church’s commitment to being with the disadvantaged and the homeless. “It was that community work, working with the least of these, that really said, This is a place for me.”

As Paul talks about the Nazareth Community, he shares a spirit of staying with. A member since the community’s launch in 2018, Paul’s relationship with God has deepened in community with those he calls companions and family. “I’ve ended up learning from being with my companions. We all have a sense of wanting to share and be with each other, helping each other grow.” Through the community, the Rule infuses Paul’s life, connecting him to God in the world and in others. As he joins online streamed walks, Paul thinks of each member of the community, in silence together while apart. When he shares his experiences with his companions through a WhatsApp group, he reflects on the presence of God in his service in the city. “My life includes every one of [the 7 Ss] in equal parts.”

I’m able to take what I learn from the Nazareth community spiritually and bring it to my social work on a Monday through Friday. It makes for the perfect seven days. Seven different facets.

- Paul

The Rule is flexible around members’ lives, but that does not mean it is easy. “I find that to be really committed, it takes a certain amount of discipline,” Paul says. Staying with community can take particular commitment, in a diverse group. But the challenge is its own reward. In true community, through being with those who are different from himself, Paul’s awareness of the presence of God in others grows. “You can’t hang on to some of the same opinions or ideas you used to have before because you’re in a group that [expresses] things you may never have taken the time to be thoughtful or reflective about,” he says.

As the Nazareth Rule helps Paul to find the holy in the everyday, a sense of the presence of God is woven through his life. “I’m always looking for a spiritual experience that doesn’t end the minute the service ends on a Sunday,” he reflects. “That is what the Nazareth community does.” Bringing silence into his busy job as a social worker, for example, has allowed him to listen to his clients with a more profound compassion.

THE COMPANIONS OF NAZARETH

In November 2020, 37 people signed up to become Companions of Nazareth. To give a framework to their Rule, Companions are encouraged to join with their scattered friends for times of connection, currently run by Richard and Catherine from London.

- A weekly hour of silence in natural settings, streamed online
- A monthly half hour of silence on Zoom, shared as a community
- 4 mornings of sharing a year
- An annual in-person retreat

Encouragement to attend a weekly form of sacrament, with a welcome to join Bread for the World streamed from St Martin-in-the Fields, followed by Zoom sharing groups.

Companions receive the same monthly e-newsletter as the London Nazareth Community, helping to create a sense of solidarity across one wider community.

Although the Companions primarily come together virtually, making the most of a connected world, the Nazareth philosophy is about local contexts. Companions are seeding the Nazareth Rule into new communities focused on the people and places around them. Interest in the Companions of Nazareth is growing. 95 people joined an introductory workshop in February 2021. *“What we’ve found is that people are really hungry to become associated with a national or central resourcing hub of Nazareth’s philosophy and theology,”* Catherine Duce says. As Companions of Nazareth, they are resourced in their seeding, across the country and internationally – right where they are.

This way of life is helping Paul to encounter God in the people he serves in the city, beyond the walls of the church.

Rooting and seeding the Nazareth approach

The Nazareth Community has been receiving enquiries from those outside London since launch, but until now, there has been no way to include them. But the Nazareth model was always about seeding. Richard and Catherine had been thinking about ways to resource new communities, so that others could take the Nazareth philosophy and Rule into their own parishes. But the movement of the Holy Spirit can be hard to predict, and 2020 was to be a year of unexpected encounters.

In March 2020, as the pandemic limited the Nazareth Community in meeting face-to-face, Richard and Catherine began sharing contemplative walks online, from the streets and parks of London. They were surprised by numbers of people joining the streams – up to 3,500 pray-ers each Saturday morning. These windows into a contemplative life have raised the profile of the Nazareth Community and its Rule in a year when it has been much needed. “There’s an intimacy which is very special,” Catherine reflects, “and a connection with creation, as people are locked out of their churches at the moment.”

It was touching something very deep in people. There is a huge hunger for contemplation, for a deeper attentiveness to the world in which we live, to silence, to stillness, to beauty, to a more compassionate Christian faith, to a deeper wellspring.

- **Richard Carter**

Among the many people connecting with these walks were a number who expressed an interest in the Nazareth Community. In response, Richard and Catherine have launched the Companions of Nazareth. The network brings people from around the country together in contemplative community. Being with is at the heart of the Companions of Nazareth, as much as it is for the original Nazareth Community. There is a thirst not just for the Nazareth model – which is shared in Richard’s book – but for a contemplative community where people can be rooted, before they take the Nazareth model out into their local church contexts.

But rooting leads to seeding. The pandemic has uncovered a growing hunger for spirituality, connection and community – the same hunger to reconnect that Richard has long been pondering. Through the Companions, new Nazareth Communities may seed the Nazareth Rule and philosophy into new parishes and contexts. But the group is waiting on God to see what will come next. It is important for them to hold onto the “learner’s mind” that has always shaped the community, Catherine says. The Companions are beginning just as the original Nazareth Community did – living the Rule, as they discern what God will do with it in their context, right where they are.

We are all a combination of needs and gifts, and when our needs are met, our gifts can flourish.

**- Fiona MacMillan,
Chair of the Disability
Advisory Group,
St Martin-in-the-Fields**

A ministry of disabled people transforming the church

The Disability Advisory Group

At St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, a Disability Advisory Group is changing the way the church thinks about disability. The group gathers to resource each other and the church. The group first came together through open meetings in 2011, where disabled people shared concerns about a church building project which – despite advice from professional disability consultants – left disabled congregants still struggling to get in and join in. The shared lived experience challenged the idea that St Martin-in-the-Fields was inclusive. A task group was formed to explore the issues further. By 2014, they had become the Disability Advisory Group. They currently have 25 members, sharing their lived experience with the church. “There is a gathered wisdom in that group, like being the grit that produces the pearl,” says Fiona MacMillan, Chair of the Disability Advisory Group.

The church has come to see the group as an asset in their midst. Members were once seen as people in need, for the church to look after. Today, the DAG is a specialist focus group, offering their expertise as a resource for the church. Five years of experience and ideas shared through the DAG have become a framework for change across the organisation. In one example, in 2019 the group contributed to an

access audit of the physical, sensory, cognitive and participatory aspects of St Martin-in-the-Fields, working together with professional access consultants – a wider audit than Fiona thinks has ever been done in a church context. Making a building accessible is just one part of ongoing cultural change in a church, Fiona says, where it is vital for a church to listen to disabled people’s voices. “Disabled people are like the canaries in the coal mine – we will feel an issue before it becomes apparent to others.”

The DAG is salt in the St Martin-in-the-Fields congregation. “I’ve often said, we are something of a salty group,” Fiona says, “not many members, but our influence has spread through the whole St Martin’s community.” As they have been encouraged to share their values, the group has helped the rest of the church understand that they can all belong, just as they are. Disabled people often live with the knowledge of their own vulnerability. The group offers that ministry to the church. “People are often discouraged from showing needs, or they feel their gifts are overlooked,” Fiona says. “We are all a combination of needs and gifts, and when our needs are met, our gifts can flourish.” As more church members bring their needs when they might never have shared them before, others are enabled to share gifts that might have gone unnoticed in the past. The whole congregation flourishes, as a result.

At St Martin-in-the-Fields, disabled people are not recipients of care or charity, but participating members of the community. For the congregation, worshipping and living alongside disabled people – being with them – is leading to cultural change that renews the church. And, through publications, the media and an annual disability conference, the DAG shares this model with the wider church.

Principles of congregational initiatives for church renewal

based on experiences at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church

At St Martin-in-the-Fields, **a culture of being with people – not just doing things for them – transforms the church as it transforms the world around them.** Congregational renewal comes from being with

THE DISABILITY ADVISORY GROUP MODEL

The Disability Advisory Group brings together people with insight into physical, sensory, cognitive or mental health issues or neurodiversity, whether from our own lives or from a support, caring or professional role (paid or unpaid).

- Fiona MacMillan, 'Something Worth Sharing', p.25

The DAG is a group of people with lived experience of disability, gathering to resource each other and the church. Their approach is simple. They centre disabled people's lived experience, ask what they need, and encourage them to suggest solutions. As the DAG helps to build an understanding of disability access and participation in the church, they shape cultural change together with the congregation.

At termly open meetings, members identify issues and share ideas. Meetings begin with a practical focus – barriers that members have encountered in the church, an area of consultation, or a guest speaker. After gathering around the table for lunch, they often prepare

creative ways to share ideas and expertise with the St Martin-in-the-Fields community, from leading liturgy for St Luke's Day and informal Eucharists, to activities for the St Martin-in-the-Fields marketplace.

The DAG is not a support group, although they resource each other by being with one another. But it is through their presence in the church that members bring their gifts from the edge to the heart – through meaningful participation in church life. The church is working with the group towards an accessible culture that goes much further than

Expertise shared through meetings has been used in training, access auditing, and church renewal projects. In Fiona's words, *"access is about joining in, not just getting in."*

each other, in communities that value the active participation of those on the edge.

They see problems as opportunities and respond with new initiatives, arising from the bottom up, not the top down. The Nazareth Community has met a need for contemplative spirituality for modern life, beginning when a group came together to explore what God might do with this seed. In the Companions of Nazareth, the community is responding as the pandemic brings people from beyond London to their gates, expressing a need for contemplative community and finding it through new online links. The DAG, too, was formed when people in the congregation expressed a need – transforming it into an opportunity for the group to resource the church and each other.

The congregation seek to recognise the assets in their midst and on their edges, learning from their gathered wisdom. “A community seeking regeneration has already within it most of what it needs for its own transformation,” Sam Wells writes.³ The Disability Advisory Group exemplifies this asset-based approach to congregational renewal, drawing on disabled people’s experience and seeing it not as complaint, but as insight that can benefit the whole congregation. Through service with the Sunday International Group, the Nazareth Community have seen homeless people join the group and worship alongside them, whose life experiences regenerate the church.

Initiatives and groups that grow from the congregation become salt and light in the congregation. Reciprocity is transformative. “There is a culture of church compassion, of one group ministering to another,” Richard Carter says. As the Nazareth Community shares contemplative spirituality and the Rule of Life with the church, the congregation is blessed. Through the Nazareth Community’s service in the Sunday International Group, guests become hosts, and homeless people join the community and regenerate the congregation. The DAG has helped transform St Martin-in-the-Fields into a church where disabled people minister to the congregation. And, like so much of congregational life at St Martin-in-the-Fields, this reciprocity is grounded in being with each other.

Last Word

At St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, unexpected encounters open up imaginations. Radically different kinds of communities bring people together. As they seek new ways to be with and minister to each other, these communities renew congregational life. Sharing each other's lives, they are changed by and with their companions – those beside them in the pews, and those in the city around them.

“Engagement is... the thing that changes you. That's when you begin to realize people are not a category but have got gifts to bring. It transforms the church. It transformed the Nazareth community. If you said to me, Why is the Nazareth community at St. Martin's such a strong community? I'd say, Because it is truly inclusive. There's someone who's a lawyer sitting down next to someone who spent the night on the street and they are totally equal in that community.”

- **Richard Carter**

“The DAG turned five in September 2019, and it was like we had come of age. We began by wanting to make it easier to get in and join in. We were able to celebrate with a booklet, which tells the story of the DAG and encourages other churches to do the same. We can share that resource with the wider church.”

- **Fiona MacMillan**



¹S. Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being With God* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. 2015), 29. ⁴St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, *The Nazareth Community launched at St Martin-in-the-Fields* (2018). Available online: <https://www.stmartin-in-the-fields.org/nazareth-community-launched-st-martin-fields/> [Accessed 1/3/21].

²S. Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being With God* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. 2015).

³S. Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being With God* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. 2015), 24.

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Norwich

Norwich

T H E C H U R C H T H A T C A R E S
F O R T H E C O M M U N I T Y
T H R O U G H A C A F É

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ST STEPHEN'S

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When

I first started, I thought it would be about, How do we get customers in so that the café can be self-funding? But the reality was, there were already people there. There was that holding together of some quite diverse groups of people within the café. It did draw some of the people on the fringes.

BECKIE WARD

Café Manager



THE CHURCH THAT CARES FOR THE COMMUNITY THROUGH A CAFÉ

St Stephen's, Norwich

For many years, the café at St Stephen's Church was in a small, dark corner at the back of the building, bringing just a few older people into the warmth of the church. But when the church was renovated due to a chancel leak in 2012, the café was redeveloped. Suddenly, St Stephen's had the facilities to reach the community on their doorstep. But they could not have foreseen how God would use the café, as it grew into a ministry to Norwich's poorest people.

In the past eight years, the café has become the way that St Stephen's cares for the community. Establishing a payment policy based on grace, they have seen a community grow around the business, becoming a place where the church can support people through relationship. In the supportive café environment, many of those who originally sought their help have given back as volunteers. And the café now pays for and hosts a community worker, offering more structured support to those who need it. Over the years, the café's purpose has grown. It now brings in people dealing with mental ill health, homelessness, addiction and isolation. But the café still serves the original clientele of older people, holding them together with people from very different backgrounds – through grace.

A community café shaped by grace

When current vicar, Madeline Light arrived at the church in 2009, the church's small café had just expanded into weekday morning opening, serving homemade cakes to older people. She saw the potential in this "tiny, warm corner in a very dark church." But with limited space and facilities, the church did not yet have the opportunity to make the most of it. That would come soon afterwards, when building work turned a crisis into an advantage. "The chancel cracked due to a water leak on the day that I was installed," Madeline remembers, "which was just such a blessing." Remodelling the church as part of the building work, by 2012 they had heat throughout the church, a new kitchen and an expanded café space.

A recent redesign of the nearby shopping centre was already bringing high footfall past the church. Now, a new glass front and large café

It's all about the relationship. And that's what the cafe enables, because you've got something that's open six days a week. People can build friendships there, and they can be in that environment very easily. And we can then carry on supporting with those ongoing needs.

**- Clare Melia,
Community Worker**

space were attracting the attention of this Norwich community. But the same small team of church volunteers was still running the café, overwhelmed by customers. Madeline took the opportunity she had imagined a few years earlier. She employed a café manager.

New manager Beckie Ward began in 2014 with a vision of a transformed café that would run on principles of grace. She introduced a guide price on all food and drink, as part of a new café policy – ‘eat, drink and share, pay what is fair.’ They aimed to encourage customers who could pay more to donate to support those who could not. “It did feel very much like that was something that God put on my heart,” Beckie remembers. She wanted to see “what grace could look like in a café.”

There was some concern from volunteers that the policy would bankrupt the café. If customers took the guide price as an invitation to free food, why would anyone pay? Beckie and Madeline took time to help the team get used to the changing vision of the café. Their aim was to be relevant to the people of Norwich, not to make money for the church. Asking volunteers to give the policy a month, they watched as the shortfall from those who paid less was covered by donations. “It was this incredible way of watching how that was taken care of,” Beckie says.

The policy is still in place at the café today, with the guide price now a minimum charge of £1 – and grace remains at the heart of what St Stephen’s do there. But the vision for the café would continue to grow organically, as Norwich changed around the church.

The emergence of café-based community work

Everything changed at the St Stephen’s café in 2016, after a sharp rise in rough sleeping in Norwich.¹ A perception of a free meal brought many of these homeless people into the cafe. At the same time,

customers from all backgrounds were drawn in by a café culture that valued everyone. At first, the café was able to hold together these very different kinds of people, as older people and homeless people ate together. "This doesn't happen anywhere else," Beckie remembers thinking. "And we established a bit of a culture within the café of how people would respond to one another."

But, from a small café with a volunteer staff, it was a challenge for the church to support the influx of homeless people and those struggling with addiction. This group was beginning to feel threatening to other café users. "Instead of them coming in and adopting our culture, they brought their culture with them," Beckie says. "It changed the dynamic." The profitability of the café was not the issue with the guide price policy. Local people valued the church's work with homeless people, donating more than enough to cover others' food. The challenge was to create a space that was safe for everyone who came to them through the payment policy, whether they were older, homeless, or dealing with any of the other needs that brought people through the café doors. The team trusted God for answers and kept working to build a culture that held all these people together.

It's all about the relationship. And that's what the cafe enables, because you've got something that's open six days a week. People can build friendships there, and they can be in that environment very easily. And we can then carry on supporting with those ongoing needs.

**- Clare Melia,
Community Worker**

Employing Clare Melia as a community worker made all the difference. Clare was working in an administration role at the church, with a background in a local homeless charity. She began to help on an ad-hoc basis in the café. As she built relationships in the café community, more café users shared their needs with Clare, from housing to debt. Clare knew where to signpost people for help. "The obvious needs would be presented daily," she remembers, "but there were all these hidden needs as well. But they only became apparent when you built relationships with people that were just regular customers of the café."

Madeline noticed not just the impact of Clare's intervention, but her connection with those in the café. "She had a heart for the homeless,"

Madeline remembers. The church created a paid post for her. With Clare taking on the role of a professional friend in the café, they were able to rethink their policy. The guide price of £1 remained, but anyone who could not pay would need to talk to Clare. She could then identify their needs, signpost to services, and support people to move beyond their current situations. The staff began to see the impact. Gradually, they found that more people who would once have asked for free food were willing to spend £1 on a drink so that they could be part of the café community.

Some of the real miracles that God has performed in people's lives [have] been a six or seven year journey, and there's been an unravelling.... We've committed for the long haul.

- Clare Melia

Presence in practice

Today, St Stephen's works in the cracks in the community, with those seen by local statutory services as difficult to reach. Through relationship, with people with complex mental health histories or addiction problems, the café team can build trust. The church has seen practical change in these people's circumstances.

And their ministry goes beyond the paid café team. A team of up to 40 volunteers is at the heart of the café, made up of people from church and community who have seen what the St Stephen's café is doing and want to be part of the work. Befrienders help the team to form relationships with more of the people who use the café. More informally, many want to come and be with those in need. Clare remembers a retired nurse who would sit at the community table, just to listen. With the café community thriving and supported, Clare and her team are often freed up to sit in a corner with a laptop and help people with benefit or debt issues.

Many of the volunteers are people who originally came to the café for support. Volunteering gives them a chance to give back to the café, in the safety of a community where they are valued. As staff invest time and support in the volunteering team, they see people's confidence grow. "It's a step to recovery," Clare says. For one rough sleeper with addiction issues who joined the team, "it was the first job he had

ever had in his life" – he thought of the unpaid work as his job. "In terms of his wellbeing and giving him something to do, that was quite remarkable." Isolated people benefit from volunteering, too, from retired to unemployed people. Relationship-based volunteering works for both café and the volunteers. The volunteers can access training and meaningful work experience. For the café, costs stay low, allowing them to use the profits to support the church's ministry.

The café team have seen lives change through community. For one man, experiencing complex mental ill health, the whole church came alongside him in relationship. Gradually, he began volunteering, and became a regular attender at St Stephen's services. He now sits on the PCC. "He's a totally different person," Madeline says. "He's moved on from being somebody in the cafe, but he was cared for by a whole community of people." No one person can support people in that kind of need, Madeline thinks. But a community like the St Stephen's café can make a difference.

The café is used by other groups offering support, who see it as a mutually safe space. Mental health support groups and asylum seekers' collectives meet there. Community Chaplaincy Norwich, which serves local prisons, has a corner of the café, and the local food bank uses the space. These informal partnerships have grown out of the café ethos, and they contribute to the café ministry.

You can come and sit and look peculiar and nobody takes any notice.

- Madeline Light, Vicar

The first mission of the café is still to hold different people together. This works through both simple presence – being with people – and more coordinated support – working for people.² As St Stephen's have gradually found the balance between the two, the vision for a café run through grace has been realised. Today, the café is a safe community that values everyone, where those with very different needs can share in meaningful relationships.



The Archbishop of Canterbury worked as a volunteer for a day at the St Stephen's café in 2018. Among other café regulars, he met the first person to come out of homelessness with church support.

Funding the café and community worker

In 2019, the café took £100,000. After paying salaries and bills, it gave a tithe of £10,000 back to the church. Key to the café's profitability is their large church building, allowing them to seat 50 at a time. This has helped them to stay open for reduced hours during the pandemic. But they must balance this against their small kitchen, limiting the numbers they can serve. The higher their profits, the more pressure there is on the café team – who are still mainly volunteers.

People really like supporting the work. It's the foundation of how it works. People know that when they eat in the cafe, they're serving the wider community with that money that they're giving.

- **Clare Melia**

But the church is no longer taking a share of the café's profit. Acknowledging that the café is the reason they have been able to reach out to the community, they are prioritising funding of the community work during the pandemic. They will review this in the future, but Madeline thinks this approach may work for the long term. She hopes it will allow the café to cover its costs, while the team will no longer need to push themselves beyond capacity.

At the heart of the café's success is the 'eat, drink and share, pay what is fair' policy. Local people are keen to support the social business model. Low prices and simple, homemade food bring people in. But when they see what the church does with the café's income, customers often want to pay more. Initial fears that the café would not be able to stay self-supporting have proved far from the reality.

Challenges

There has been a steep learning curve for the church, in this ministry of being with and working with the people of Norwich. "We've thrown ourselves at it, on the understanding that God will be gracious to us," Madeline reflects. "We've learned from our mistakes the hard way, but looked out for each other." Hundreds of "grace responses" to opportunities have made the ministry possible, as it grows out of the church's ethical principles.

Holding people together has been the café's biggest challenge. At times this has not been easy, but they have trusted God to guide them towards a café culture that works. "As different people came to us," Beckie remembers, "it highlighted what we needed to learn and grow, in order to carry on meeting some of those needs." Through the café's principles of grace, they have gradually built a culture that values everyone, made possible through the structured support of the community worker. Today, the church lives out the vision of a ministry that brings people together.

Slow cultural change has been a challenge for some of those that the café works with, over the years. Volunteers at St Stephen's were initially unsure about the employment of a café manager and the pricing policy. A new vision may take work to bring people on board. At St Stephen's, they gave people time to adjust to a new café role and culture. Volunteer management now helps their large volunteer team to work well together. They support the volunteers as a team, recognising their vital contribution to the café community.

PRINCIPLES OF RUNNING A CAFÉ THAT HOSTS AND FUNDS COMMUNITY WORK

based on experiences at St Stephen's, Norwich

At St Stephen's, they have **seen what grace can look like in a church café**. Through a guide price policy, they encourage customers to support each other, as one community. That principle of grace has transformed the café into ministry. It has helped them to create a space where change happens in relationship. As friendships and trust are built through the café community, they can do more.

They do not assume what people need, but respond to the needs that God brings them. The St Stephen's café has grown organically into the ministry it supports today. "If there's a need that comes and you have the resources to meet it, then you can work your model around that," Clare says. "But sometimes, if we assume what the needs are, we get it wrong." For Clare, this is about making space for God to shape the Kingdom around them.

They have responded to opportunities, developing the cafe strategically and prayerfully. Being with people is vital to what they do – but to build a community, the café had to be a safe, supportive environment for all the people who used it. Through thoughtful appointments of staff and changes of policy, they have been able to support needs that were beyond the capacity of their volunteers.

They see people as assets, not deficits. "Our philosophy has been to let people do what's on their heart," Madeline says. They supported Beckie's vision for a payment policy which could have been unsustainable, and all their work has been built on its success. They noticed community worker Clare's heart for their growing café community, and employed her to offer the support people needed. Through a volunteer team, they give meaningful work opportunities to people who use the café. Developing their own people has allowed the church to reach more of the local community.

The local community values what they do. This is central to their profitability as a café. It has given the church opportunities to work in partnership, as the Norwich community have come to trust the church and their approach. Their work is changing local attitudes towards church and Christianity.

Last Word

The ministry at St Stephen's is made possible through the café. Here, as commerce is guided by grace, it has grown into compassionate outreach. The central Norwich location may be what brings people into the café, but it is the community that holds people together. At St Stephen's, change happens in relationship.

“People have come to faith and are now pivotal members of the congregation. They came because they were aware of their needs. Being with and working for took many different forms, walking the streets to give a purpose to pacing, endless phone calls, times of prayer and much more. Now they are firmly embedded and are an essential part of our community. Now we are disciples who stand alongside each other.”

- **Madeline Light**

⁷This rise in homelessness was partly a result of chaotic local prison discharge arrangements. St Martin's Housing, Official figures on rough sleeping in Norwich released (2018). Available online: <https://stmartinshousing.org.uk/official-figures-rough-sleeping-norwich-released/> [Accessed 5/1/2021].

⁸A Nazareth Manifesto

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Inverness

Inverness

T H E P A R T N E R S H I P F O O D
P R O J E C T B U I L D I N G
I N D E P E N D E N C E I N
C O M M U N I T Y

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**NESS BANK
CHURCH &
INVERNESS
FOODSTUFF**

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We

have community nurses that come in and have their lunch. So they come along and build rapport with these guys. And before you know it, they've got an appointment with somebody who can be trusted.



JUNE MACLEOD

Ness Bank Church and Inverness Foodstuff

For many years, Ness Bank Church saw the impact of poverty in their parish and beyond. They wondered how one church could make a difference in a community dealing with food poverty and hidden homelessness. But when building work revealed a space under the sanctuary, a vision took shape for a new kitchen to revitalise the church's mission to the community – in partnership.

The result was Inverness Foodstuff. Established in 2014, the independent charity is a shared project of church and community organisations. In keeping with the earliest vision for the kitchen, Foodstuff still offers nutritious hot meals. But partnerships have allowed them to share much more than food. They aim to tackle local poverty at a systemic level, linking people with statutory and support services – visiting community health services, an employability advisor, a hairdressing service, listening support and more. Through donations of surplus food from local supermarkets, they reduce food waste as they challenge food poverty. And they do all this in relationship. As they get to know participants, they help them move beyond dependency on food services.

Foodstuff's Vision:

To be a vibrant community, providing food, friendship and support to all who face significant challenges – including financial hardship and homelessness.

Today, Foodstuff is responding to a changing Inverness and a changing world. To help with the impact of the pandemic, between March and October 2020 they served 12,000 community meals from a gazebo outside the church. But while crisis response is vital, it is a short term solution. Foodstuff is also playing a role in long-term community transformation. Working together with the community, they can contribute to more local change than one church alone ever could.

A vision to address food poverty in partnership

Food poverty and nutrition have long been at the top of the Ness Bank's outreach concerns. Through the church's work with the local winter night shelter, minister Fiona Smith was becoming increasingly aware of the problem of hidden homelessness in Inverness. Most of the

homeless people in the city are housed in temporary accommodation, for years at a time. They have poor access to cooking facilities.

Surrounded by others in the same situation as them, they often lack the supportive community they need as a springboard for change.

The Highland Council say that the clients are very hard to get hold of, because they have chaotic lives. But if they come on a Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, you guarantee they'll be at Foodstuff. So they'll have a captive audience.

- **June Macleod**

So a kitchen was the church's top priority when building work gave them the gift of space under the sanctuary. "The kitchen is the heart of the home," as Fiona put it. New facilities could allow the church to share hospitality with Inverness. With no sense of how they would fund the project, it felt to Fiona like "taking a leap off a cliff and trusting that God's hand was going to catch you." But the idea made sense to local people and congregants, who were all too aware of local food poverty. By November 2011, a fundraising campaign had raised £140,000 and the new kitchen was open.

Ness Bank got together a group from the church and community – a local council housing officer, a counsellor, the GP for homeless people, and others with a vision for change in the community. They developed a plan for a safe, staffed place where people in financial difficulty could come for a good meal, using surplus food from supermarkets. The hope was that this would become more than a food ministry. Working in partnerships with health services and other statutory agencies, relationships of trust could be built, helping people to move beyond reliance on food support.

Building effective community partnerships

The first challenge was persuading the community partners that a project like this could work in a church. The partners could not see why people would not use a café based in a church. Fiona was sure they could make a success of a drop-in at the church hall, but she knew they could not do it alone. At the same time, the idea was finding little support among the local supermarkets, who were crucial to the plan. Undeterred, Fiona and the group set about building long-term

partnerships. To ease the concerns about meeting in the church, the project was initially based in a Christian café on the other side of the city. The support of small local shops was vital in these early days, so that Foodstuff could run using surplus food. But in the small space, they could only reach a limited number of people. After six months, the board agreed to bring the project into the church.

Suddenly, Foodstuff had the facilities to show what they could do in partnership. “We were reaching the most chaotic group of people that the professional services always found it very difficult to engage,” Fiona remembers. As the church’s reputation as an effective partner began to grow, other statutory services joined the partnership. Foodstuff began to work with the council and housing services, employment and benefits advisors, the NHS and more.

Finally, after about a year of struggling to meet the food demand that came to their door, Foodstuff won over the supermarkets. One at a time, as supermarkets saw what local shops were doing, they were persuaded to share their surplus food. Today, all the local branches of major supermarkets donate their surplus food to the project, including Morrison’s, Tesco and Lidl.

Relational community built around food

Foodstuff is a centre for wellbeing, based at Ness Bank’s kitchen, serving vegetarian meals 3 days a week. As a community hub, Foodstuff can bring services to participants, sharing more than just a meal. But it all starts with the food. Gathering around a meal is the first step in helping people feel safe enough to access other services at Foodstuff. “It’s all about the food,” says June Macleod, Operations Manager, who believes good food creates community. Through the food they offer, Foodstuff aim to show they value their participants. A lead chef works with a team of volunteers to share fresh, nutritious meals. This is vital to people whose life circumstances mean good food can be hard to come by. “When somebody comes and takes a meal,” June says, “not only are we making sure that their nutritional needs are looked after, but it’s made with a lot of love. And I really believe that our participants feel

It is a lifeline to me.

- **Adam, participant**

that.”

Reducing food waste is one of Foodstuff’s charitable aims. Using supermarkets’ surplus food, they are able to offer more fresh food to participants than food banks, which are more restricted in what they can offer. Aiming to pass on all the food that they receive, the Foodstuff kitchen team make leftover fresh food into packs from that participants can easily use at home. They send on any of their own surplus to local food banks, so that nothing at all is wasted.

Inverness Foodstuff saved me. I love coming to see my friends and getting my lunch. Everyone is so helpful and kind.

- Sarah, participant

Breaking cycles of dependency

Foodstuff’s relational approach has grown out of an awareness of the causes of poverty. For many of the homeless people in the area, a complex set of circumstances often leads to dependency on support services. To help, Foodstuff aim to develop resilience and develop participants’ skills. As they get to know the people who come to share food, the team can identify the issues participants may be facing. And,

by working with partners in a shared community space, they have been able to build trust between hard-to-reach groups and local statutory services.

We have community nurses that come in and have their lunch. So they come along and build rapport with these guys. And before you know it, they’ve got an appointment with somebody who can be trusted.

- June Macleod

This can only work relationally. Based on the premise that there is no ‘them’ or ‘us,’ Foodstuff aims to be a place where everyone is accepted. “It has created a community,” Fiona says. “The folks that come are called participants, not service users, because we all participate in the project.” A team of three staff and over 100 volunteers get to know participants as members of their community. This personal understanding of people’s needs helps the team signpost them to the right services.

And the relational approach is successful at connecting people with services. Participants’ backgrounds often mean they have difficulty

trusting service providers. In the safe Foodstuff environment, participants are more willing to work with them. “Because they’re trusted by us, it’s almost like they’re welcomed into the fold,” June says. More than that, the participants build personal relationships of trust with service providers. As they get to know dentists and employment advisors as people, it can make all the difference. Seeing the success of this approach, the Foodstuff team have encouraged more service providers to participate in community. Inviting in advisors from the Rape and Sexual Abuse Service Highland, the team were aware this could be a sensitive topic for participants. They asked the advisors simply to share lunch and wait for participants to ask them about their role. By the end of the day, several participants had requested a referral to the service.

This model of partnership working in community is vital to reducing dependency. The team want to see their participants do well and move beyond a need for the Foodstuff service. They have made a conscious decision only to open on three days a week, to encourage people not to depend solely on Foodstuff’s provision. And they aim to help people to value themselves and what they can achieve – which all starts with the food. “We provide fresh food to people to encourage them to look after themselves,” June says, “and we promote independence at every turn.”

Developing participants as volunteers

Encouraging independence is also about valuing and developing people, as assets to the community. “We believe in people,” June says. “We don’t look at people as a problem.” Together with a volunteer team, June works to grow Foodstuff’s own volunteers. She has the flexibility to create roles to make the most of the skills people can bring. “Everybody’s got capacity,” June believes.

I love my voluntary work here, helping people. I love the team and being part of it. I have made new friends and learned to do new things. I don't like it when I can't come.

- **Donnie, participant/
volunteer**

For some, Foodstuff can build their experience towards future paid work. Working with a homeless man with catering experience who was struggling with addiction, they have given him a role in the kitchen preparing the

next day's food, while the centre is quiet and closed to participants. "The hope would be that we would build his confidence sufficiently that he would be part of the regular team," June says. Other participants are unlikely to move on to employment, but they can still contribute. For a partially sighted participant, a role folding napkins has begun to build her confidence and sense of self-worth. While she may never apply for paid work, volunteering is giving her the chance to make a meaningful contribution. With a volunteering model that works in community, Foodstuff can help participants develop the skills they each need, whatever their next step forward looks like.

I have grown so much since I started volunteering. My confidence is greater, and my skills have increased and will help me when I start to look for work. I have made so many new friends too.

- **Dave, participant/
volunteer**

Their 100-strong volunteer complement gives Foodstuff a sense of how much the wider community values their work. June estimates that between 10 and 20% of their volunteers are participants. Some volunteers came to them through the criminal justice system, staying on after serving their community service hours. Others come from Ness Bank church and other local churches. With such a large and diverse team, volunteer management could be a struggle for Fiona before June's appointment. Appointing a manager has allowed them to do more to develop the Foodstuff community.

Being with the community

Fiona is seeing the impact of Foodstuff on the wider community. It is not only changing local people's impression of churches and Christians, but it is also shifting the way poverty is understood. Fiona believes Foodstuff's work raises the question, "What sort of society do you want us to be living in?" The sphere and influence of that transformational work is growing in Inverness.

Inverness Foodstuff is seen locally as a project that works in effective partnerships. "Through our work we have built phenomenal relationships," Fiona says, "where we're seen as not just do-gooding Christians who don't really know [the local situation]," but as a

constructive player in local solutions to problems of homelessness, poverty and social isolation.

The partnership work is helping the church to be part of “a bigger story” of structural solutions to local issues. In 2019, in a Conversation Café initiative, they brought local service providers together to talk about the challenges of homelessness and poverty in the area. As a contribution to the No Wrong Door approach to homelessness in Scotland, the conversations included representatives from the NHS, Police Scotland, Highland Council, and local third sector organisations. In initiatives like these, Foodstuff is in a position to critique statutory agencies – they are not just another agency, but a new kind of partnership. While this work of transformation in the community would

I think that’s the key – knowing what your communities actually need, and getting alongside people and breaking down barriers, because that’s where that’s where transformation happens.

- **Fiona Smith**

never have happened without Ness Bank Church, Fiona knows that the church can never be the sole answer to social problems. As they work together with the people and organisations of Inverness, they are learning what Inverness needs.

As part of their vision for a project like this, Fiona believes churches need to question what they are aiming to do, and why. Churches can too easily start from a naïve position where they assume they know what their community needs. “The most important thing is that you know your community, [and that] you’re already working out what are the core needs, not assuming them.” A church will then have to learn

to live out the reality of working in partnership with community. This can be challenging at times, as churches learn to share facilities and understand conflicts of interest.

For churches that want to work for change together with their communities, Fiona advises questioning motivations for compassionate mission. Are you doing this for the good of the community, or to make the church look good? “I think we have to challenge ourselves as to what it is that we are giving and why we are giving it,” she says, which includes looking at how power can be shifted and shared. A being-with approach may also lead churches to question what evangelism looks like. Foodstuff has led a small number of people to join Ness Bank

Church, but this was never its aim – and cannot be, as an independent community charity. “How do you understand what faith in action means?”

Making a partnership charity a success

Ness Bank Church’s initial vision has been essential to the project. Without their willingness to step out in faith and develop their kitchen, Foodstuff would never have had the facilities to do their work in the community. Ness Bank Church is supportive of Foodstuff, and many of the volunteers come from the congregation. But, given Foodstuff’s early aim to work in statutory and community partnerships, it made sense to establish an independent charity. This has opened up more funding avenues than a church project could attract. But forming a charity involved significant work, with management implications beyond what Fiona could balance with her ministry.

Foodstuff solved some of these problems by drawing on assets in Ness Bank’s congregation. An experienced congregant was crucial to the success of the first funding applications. Today, Foodstuff’s Operations Manager is funded by Robertson Trust, a secular Scottish trust, and Go For It, Church of Scotland funding. She is able to make ongoing grant applications, and has a heart for the project and its aims. “If you’ve got the vision, you’ll get the right people,” Fiona advises.

Challenges

Practical challenges for Foodstuff have included **volunteer and staff management**, where appointing a paid manager and catering manager has made a difference. For Ness Bank Church, **learning to share facilities with a large community project** has been a challenge. Fiona has sometimes had to manage the sense that Foodstuff is taking over or disrupting church activities. Fiona has worked to communicate the importance of the project to the church, showing how this is faith in action.

Today, **Covid is their most pressing challenge**, limiting what they can offer in the church. But they have adapted to do more in the

community. Partnerships and facilities have been essential in their provision of over 12,000 meals, shared through takeaway and delivery services, meaning they could be quickly cleared to continue as an essential service. They were able to feed everyone in local homeless accommodation during lockdown, as well as keyworkers. Extra volunteers have joined them in the café and kitchen, including furloughed chefs. A telephone helpline is connecting them to more people in need, while partners refer vulnerable people to Foodstuff. The pandemic has shifted the demographic of those seeking help – they are seeing more young families and furloughed workers. They are working to adapt to the needs of these groups, with plans for an outreach worker.

**I N V E R N E S S
F O O D S T U F F :
T H E
F I G U R E S**

In 2019, Inverness Foodstuff received
over

£50,500 in funding, including:

£41,300 in grants

£1500 donated by organisations

£7800 individual donations

and cost just over **£30,000** to run.

Foodstuff ran with the help of:

2 paid staff

about **100** volunteers.

PRINCIPLES OF RUNNING A COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECT

based on the experiences of Inverness Foodstuff

At Inverness Foodstuff, they learn – they don't assume. Fiona emphasises the importance of finding out what your community needs, rather than assuming you know best. This can transform a church's understanding of what they can do in a community. With the right partners, churches do not need to go into compassionate ministry ignorant of what communities need.

They work in effective local partnerships. Working with local statutory authorities and professionals has been vital to making Foodstuff a hub that offers more than a meal. Local supermarkets share surplus food, making it possible for Foodstuff to share fresh food with those who need it.

They are a community, and that makes all the difference to what they can achieve. They have created an environment where participants feel valued. They get to know them individually, identifying needs. And through partnership, they can do more than signposting. In a safe community setting, they can build trust, linking hard-to-reach clients to health and support services.

They work towards reducing dependency on their service, by linking participants with services that help them to address the root causes of poverty. Other services help participants build confidence and skills. By focusing on potential, Foodstuff develop participants into volunteers, giving them a chance to develop their skills and experience towards paid work.

They have built community partnerships and relationships slowly. It may take time to learn what a community needs and form partnerships that can help, Fiona advises. They formed Foodstuff one step at a time, building trust with partners, only bringing them into the church hall when trust was established. Ness Bank's parish includes an area of multiple deprivation where the church has spent many years trying to work with local people and projects, but that work has not blossomed yet.

Last Word

Foodstuff is how Ness Bank Church offers hospitality to Inverness. They share God's love through food. As they show people that they are valued, lives change. And, in partnership, Foodstuff helps the church play a unique role in addressing the causes of poverty and food insecurity. As they make a difference in people's lives, they are helping to create broader change in the local community.

I'd like to think that when people come in, they feel wanted, valued. Inverness Foodstuff is all of us. We're all in it together. And I think it's all about that sense of community, that sense of belonging. Everybody wants to belong. And I think that's what we do best – we include people.

- June Macleod



Orkney

Orkney

T H E E C O C O N G R E G A T I O N S
A C T I V E I N G L O B A L
C H U R C H P A R T N E R S H I P S

■

WESTRAY AND PAPAY KIRKS

■

The

one curse here is the wind. You've rarely got a day without some breeze, and sometimes it can be very stormy. It's just great to turn something that's a curse into a blessing, almost – an opportunity.



IAIN MACDONALD

Minister, Westray and Papay Kirks

ECOLOGICAL STEWARDSHIP

Westray and Papay Kirks, Orkney

For the kirks in the Orkney islands of Westray and Papa Westray, ecological stewardship is not just central to church life – it is at the centre of their mission. Located on islands that are home to fewer than 700 people, these small churches are doing big things in renewable energy. Turning their challenging climate into an asset, the churches have pioneered wind turbines and ground source heat pumps, raising income and encouraging community wind turbines on the islands. Today, the churches are Church of Scotland Eco-Congregations, as they inspire other congregations with their work in renewable energy – all driven by the churches’ eco theology.

Eco-theology calls churches to understand their impact in a global society, and these isolated but interdependent islands have a growing understanding of their role in world ecologies and economies. Westray and Papay Kirks have taken a leading role in a Covenant of Partnership between the Orkney churches and the Thyolo Highlands Presbytery in Malawi, building relationships and working together on grassroots projects. In a global world, the Malawian and Orkney congregations are being global church together. The partnership is part of the church’s growing understanding of their role and responsibilities in God’s interconnected world.

Award-winning Eco-Congregations

For the islands of Westray and Papa Westray (called Papay), the wind is a constant companion. Orkney’s Gulf Stream climate means daily winds and gales of up to 100mph in winter. But by drawing on renewable wind power, the small congregations of Westray Parish Kirk and St Ann’s Kirk have turned this curse into an asset.

Minister Iain MacDonald and his congregation first saw the potential for renewable energy in 2003, during a major renovation of the 170-year-old Westray Parish Kirk building. One of their priorities for the renovation was community benefit from the church building.

When an elder suggested putting in a wind turbine and ground source heat pump to heat the building, it made

Folk involved in tourism here know that they need to generate income and attract people and keep the place clean and green.

- **Iain MacDonald**

perfect sense. Eco-theology has long been a part of the churches' worldview, influenced by their rural location, dominated by farming and tourism. Installing green energy would allow the churches to be more responsible stewards of their beautiful islands. But they did not yet know how this ecological mission would inspire their community. Seventeen years later, the churches are net producers of energy, with four wind turbines and two ground source heat pumps across both churches. The wind turbines have more than paid for their initial costs, and now bring in about £10,000 a year in additional income for the churches. And, through a growing commitment to environmental stewardship, they have led the way on green energy in the islands of Westray and Papay.

A community run on green energy

For the churches, renewable energy is about mission, as much as about income. The congregations' pioneering ecological ministry has helped inspire Westray to install over 80 wind turbines on the island. Larger community turbines generate power for the island. Smaller, privately owned turbines help power homes, farms, the local care home and the youth centre. Today, green energy is all part of Westray and Papay's community identity.

Crucially, renewable energy helps bring income to the islands, benefitting the whole community. Members of the Westray Parish Kirk congregation have been involved in the installation of much larger 900kw turbines, run by Westray Development Trust. Bringing in £350,000 a year for community development, these turbines are helping the islands to address local fuel poverty. In a self-sustaining cycle, the income provides grants for more renewable energy, along with other local projects. The churches benefit from the community grants, too. A relationship between the congregations and North Lambeth Parish has led to enriching Orkney-London youth exchanges, partly paid for by the income from the wind turbines.

Local people have recognised the benefit of the turbines to life and industry in Westray and Papay. Green power makes sense in these

T H E E C O - C O N G R E G A T I O N P R O G R A M M E ...

IN WESTRAY

SPIRITUAL LIVING:

In worship and outreach, the congregation reflect on the role of Christian faith in the wider world, aiming to recognise and improve their environmental impact, locally and globally.

PRACTICAL LIVING:

- Wind turbine-powered heating system and ground source pump heating at the kirk reduce carbon footprint and encourage community building use; wind turbine powers the manse
- The kirk has a commitment to recycling and reducing waste

GLOBAL LIVING:

- Close links with churches in Malawi through the presbytery Covenant of Partnership
- Support for Gogo Olive prisoner knitting group, Zimbabwe
- Youth exchanges with North Lambeth

(C of E) Parish, London

- Fair Trade church helping Westray to gain recognition as the first Fair Trade island in Orkney in 2007.

IN PAPAY

- A wind turbine, roof insulation and energy efficient lightbulbs throughout; planning renewable heating upgrades
- A Fair Trade church
- NHS partnership – a visiting doctor's surgery shares the building; a community room is used by local groups.

rural islands, dominated by smallholder agriculture. At the Noup Cliffs nature reserve, rare sea bird life attracts tourism. The progressive local development trust prioritises sustainable local development, showing people how green energy and sustainability can work for the tourism, the fishing and farming industries. There have been no local objections to any of the wind turbines on the islands.

In recognition of their missional work in ecological stewardship, both churches are Church of Scotland Eco-Congregations. In 2020, Westray Parish Kirk won the scheme's Gold Award for their leadership in church energy conservation, their local promotion of green energy and their international partnerships. But the churches' Eco-Congregation programme is a way of life, not a one-time achievement. "Environmental theology is part of what we do on a regular basis," Iain reflects. "So in a sense it was no big deal." But they have become something of a flagship project for the Eco Congregations scheme, supporting other churches across Orkney to improve their energy conservation. In 2015, a tour of the Eco-Congregation Scotland baton stopped at the islands, recognising the whole community's cooperation in local green energy and international partnerships.

Funding the renewable energy installation

Although the churches did not set out to be income generating, the wind turbines bring in an income of over £10,000 a year while covering all their energy needs. At Westray Parish Kirk, as a community building, 92% of the cost of the first turbine was covered by the Scottish Clean Energy Demonstration Scheme. It was more difficult to find grants for the small turbine at the manse, but it has paid for itself. They set aside 20% of income annually for maintenance and servicing in the stormy Orkney climate, but these costs would be lower elsewhere. The original wind turbine is still heating the church after seventeen years.

The creation story is about stewardship, looking after the planet that we live on. And that's become more and more obvious to many people now, as we head deeper into crisis. And for those who are sceptics about that, you're able to sell it to them on the basis of income generation.

- Iain MacDonald

For other churches considering renewable energy, Iain points out that local climates matter. “Wind is really the big asset that we have here,” he says. For more southerly churches, making the most of their own resources, solar power might make sense.

Global living through solidarity, not charity

Energy conservation is just one part of the congregations’ wider commitment to ecological and social justice. Through international relationships, the congregations are growing to understand their roles and responsibilities in a global church and a global world. There is a growing awareness of climate change in the islands, with more severe winters and drier summers. But the congregations see far more impact of the ecological crisis in the lives of their friends in Malawi.

In 2008, Orkney Presbytery set up a Covenant of Partnership with Thyolo Highlands Presbytery in Malawi. Westray and Papay Kirks are active in the partnership, with Iain as Convenor on the Orkney side. This is not one-way charity – it is about being global church together. Relationship is at the heart of the partnership. Each Orkney congregation is paired with a group of congregations in the Thyolo Highlands, and there are growing community group links. As the Westray and Papay congregations share news with and from their partner churches, they pray for each other and inspire joint fundraising.

The partnership supports grassroots projects in the Thyolo Highlands, in a bottom-up approach to community development. Local partners decide what the Malawian communities need and take ownership of projects. The projects work to improve churches, community facilities and education, and many are income producing. A first maize mill was built with the help of the partnership, generating income to pay for a second mill without the need for other support. Both mills free up hours of time that would otherwise be spent pounding maize. A special project group has been set up to plan more mills in each of the nine parishes. Smaller self-help projects create income on a more personal scale. The partnership recently helped a women’s group to buy sewing machines for home repair and small businesses. In a project so

T H E C O V E N A N T O F P A R T N E R S H I P

from the perspective of the Thyolo Highlands Presbytery, Malawi

For the Thyolo Highlands Presbytery, their partnership with the Orkney Presbytery is rooted in their faith in Jesus Christ, their love for others and their mission to the world. It is “a mutual and enriching relationship of sharing, solidarity and understanding,” says Thyolo Highlands Partnership Convener Kelvin Matola. Their hope is that it will lead to spiritual enrichment and action for social justice, in all the churches involved.

As they share in equal relationships, the Thyolo and Orkney partners move away from paternalism and dependency, together. “The celebrations of each other’s gifts, insights, ideas about faith, church and community life are important ways of developing confidence in one another,” Kelvin says. Friendships are growing through communication, international visits, and especially through prayer. “Prayer provides the energy and connection for relationships,” the Thyolo churches believe – and sharing in each other’s lives is “a way of praying.”

The Thyolo Highlands Presbytery believes that the Orkney churches can benefit as much from this partnership as they do. They know that Western forms of Christianity can be taken for granted by people in Europe, and that seeing first-hand how Christianity is practiced in other countries can bring a global church closer together. Through skills exchange, both sides share good practice – the Thyolo partners hope that their friends in Orkney will learn from their bottom-up community work. And the partnership is mission from the Thyolo Highlands Presbytery to the Orkney islands, helping to develop prayer and discipleship in the Orkney congregations.

important that the Malawian partners call it a “bore hole ministry,” 15 water bore holes have been built through the partnership, giving Thyolo communities access to clean water. And over £10,000 in emergency support was sent by the Orkney congregations for COVID prevention efforts in 2020, to help provide soap and buckets to wash in for churches without running water.

As the partnership supports church projects, churches and communities support each other. The large Thyolo Highlands Presbytery has 35 congregations and over 75 Prayer Houses, but only eight full-time

The intention is to reach a stage where we can start projects without having to depend on our partners to fund us.

- **Kelvin Matola**

ministers, with many inadequate and unfinished church buildings. Efforts to get the Makwasa Church building ready for a new minister were supported by the entire community. They managed to get the church roof up in time, and are now working towards plastering, seating and windows for the church. Installing renewable sources of electricity benefits whole communities – solar power installed in Matumbo Manse now saves the minister a 20km round trip to charge her phone. And, as part of a long-term plan to improve local educational

facilities, a new classroom block has been built through an award-winning partnership between Thyolo and Westray schools, to be used for both Sunday school and primary school classes.

The Malawian partners themselves have established a rule that none of the projects can be more than 80% funded by Orkney, so that local congregations and communities must contribute. The local contribution comes through building materials and volunteer labour. The rule gives the partners active ownership of projects. On the Orkney side, there are fewer concerns about dependency on financial aid when people see the work that the Malawian churches and communities put into the projects. “It’s not a dependency culture,” Iain says. “Folk aren’t holding out begging bowls to us. They’re just suggesting projects, and we’re trying to help where we can.” And there is strong financial accountability between partners. The Thyolo partners show how the work has progressed, with a paper trail that quells any possible concerns about where money is going.

In tune with the churches' Eco-Congregation work, sustainability and relationship are at the heart of the partnership. The congregations in the Thyolo Highlands are not asking for a single injection of money. Instead, they want to share community with the Orkney congregations. The churches value the friendships developing through the partnerships, supported by themed services and exchanges of news. Westray and Papay Kirks' ecumenical links have grown through shared fundraising with their local Baptist church and Quaker meeting. The scale of the work they can do from Orkney is relatively small – the congregations sent about £30,000 to Malawi in 2020. "You can only do what you can where you are," Iain reflects. But people are generous in response to relationship, giving sacrificially, even though incomes are lower in the isles than on average in Scotland.



Challenges

Communication with the local community has sometimes been a challenge for Westray and Papay Kirks, through almost two decades of ecological stewardship, community partnerships and Fair Trade work. Iain suspects there will always be some cynicism about renewable energy, but Westray is increasingly buying into the concept, as they see more local benefit. Iain emphasises consultation and communication, and the church works in local partnerships to bridge into the community. “You want to carry folk with you,” he says. Iain stresses the Biblical social justice message at the heart of church ecological and social justice action.

Financial accountability is important in any overseas partnership, Iain advises. Particularly at the beginning of the partnership with the Thyolo Highlands, it was important to demonstrate that money was going directly to projects, and not misspent on administration fees. Westray and Papay Kirks have been inspired by Christian Aid in their focus on communication, sharing reports on the projects in the Thyolo Highlands. They use church newsletters and local radio and newspapers to keep the community informed, emphasising the grassroots management of the projects in Malawi.

Community isn't just about what goes on locally. It is also about acceptance and generosity towards others.

- Iain MacDonald

Costs of installation for renewable energy can be high. The Westray and Papay congregations installed their turbines with the help of grants, but there are fewer available today. Churches will need more initial capital – a smaller turbine costs £35-40,000. But, even without a grant, a community-sized wind turbine will be making income within 5 years of its 20-year life.

PRINCIPLES OF AN ECO-CONGREGATION'S ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP MISSION

based on experiences at Westray and Papay Kirks

At Westray and Papay Kirks, **they believe it is important for churches to engage with the world around them, both locally and globally.** The sacred and the secular are not two separate spheres. From economic systems to ecological impact, churches have a footprint in the wider world. Westray and Papay Kirks serve their communities more effectively when they play an active role there.

As they engage in the world, **the churches' work in their local community and global society influences their eco-theology.** The more the congregations are active in Westray and Papay, the more they understand their impact on the islands. And as their partnerships in Malawi and Zimbabwe have shown them the international impact of climate change and economic injustice, the churches have been energised to act more justly in a global society.

They are ambassadors for renewable energy and environmental stewardship with other churches and the wider community, as part of their mission. They were the first organisation in Westray to install renewable power, and congregants have continued to be involved with green energy expansion in Westray. Through the Eco-Congregation scheme, the churches' ecological mission has inspired other churches and communities to consider renewable energy.

Their compassionate action in local and global communities is based on reciprocal solidarity,

not charity. In their international partnerships, they support grassroots work led by partner groups. Relationships with their Malawian partners are developing prayer and discipleship in the Westray and Papay congregations. Orkney's community projects are learning from the bottom-up approach to community development in the Thyolo Highlands. Locally, the churches work together with their island communities on projects that benefit everyone, from Fair Trade to renewable energy.

They put energy into communication to help them make a success of both local and international partnerships, as they build relationships and trust.

By turning a problem into an asset, they generate income ethically for the congregation and community. While they would not want income generation to become their main focus, green energy has led to financial opportunities. And as the islands have followed the church in installing wind turbines, these have brought in renewable energy income, creating grants that the whole community can benefit from – including the churches.

Last Word

The Eco-Congregation mission at Westray and Papay Kirks grows from an understanding that the congregations are part of their communities. The more they are active in God's world, the more they recognise their ecological footprint and their participation in global economic systems. And it is through relationships with those around them, locally and internationally, that they seek to make a positive contribution to God's world – through environmental stewardship and social justice.

“The bottom line, for anyone of a Christian faith, is that Jesus lived and walked and taught and healed in the world. We can't just pull ourselves out of communities. The sacred and secular overlap a great deal.”

- **Iain MacDonald**

“Partnerships afford us an opportunity to participate in God's mission based on the understanding that we all have gifts to offer and experiences of life and faith to share. The world is fast becoming a 'Global Village' in this century and our Presbytery has come to the realisation that God invites us to participate in His mission in the world; a mission that is not confined to the locality in which we live, nor to the boundaries of our nation.”

- **Kelvin Matola, Thyolo Highlands Partnership Convener**

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South London

South London

T H E U R B A N C H U R C H
A N D C O M M U N I T Y
T R A N S F O R M I N G
E A C H O T H E R

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COPLESTON CENTRE & COPLESTON CHURCH LEP

■

We

aim as a community centre to reach the vulnerable isolated people in our community and to include them in our decision making, to grow people into trustees and volunteers.



JO PATTERSON

CRCW

A PLACE OF RADICAL HOSPITALITY

Copleston Centre and Copleston Church LEP

In Peckham, south London, Copleston Church has always aimed to reach local people through its linked community centre. But now, working with a Church-Related Community Work Minister (CRCW), the church has committed to creating a place of radical hospitality at the centre, where they live out the church's calling in their neighbourhood.

The local impacts of gentrification are clear in the parish, where high-density housing estates sit alongside terraced houses worth millions of pounds. But Peckham is a flourishing community, and those who come to the centre have gifts to share. Working in local partnerships, the centre aims to empower people to discover these gifts for the benefit of their community. They help to improve access to mental health support, through inexpensive counselling and art therapy. Their funded Silver Linings programme is aimed at a thriving multi-cultural community of people over 65. In response to the pandemic, a Real Meals on Wheels service has been set up in partnership with local cafés. And the centre hosts Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers, who hold an advice service and food bank there. With the CRCW's help, Copleston Church is seeking to gain confidence in expressing a theology of generous hospitality and social justice at the centre, in relationship with those around them.

It was frustrating and curious. So many church members said, 'Oh, I don't use the centre.' But they do. And every time they walk into the church, they're using the centre, as well – it's the same building.

- **Edward Collier, Vicar**

A community centre in a Local Ecumenical Partnership

In the 1970s, the vision for the Copleston Centre was at the heart of the decision of two neighbouring churches in Peckham to join together in a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP). "Instead of having two half empty buildings, just used on a Sunday morning," says Edward Collier, vicar of Copleston Church, "if we agreed to share one building, we would have the resources to create a community resource within that building." Establishing the Copleston Centre as an independent charity in 1979, the LEP had the needs of the local area in mind – especially young people, who were not well served in Peckham in the 1970s.

But local needs change, and funding opportunities change with them. As the centre grew to meet the most pressing social needs, church and centre were becoming more disconnected. “People who came to

activities would readily say that one has little to do with the other,” Edward says. But the church and centre were integrally linked, through volunteering, shared activities and a shared vision.

We talk about the love and grace and generosity and hospitality of Christ.

The congregation live like that, so it's not a leap for me to do that work at the centre.

- **Jo Patterson**

The church turned these problems into an opportunity. Could the church be more strategic in their work at the Copleston Centre? They wanted someone to head up the centre – someone who could make the church's existing links with the community more visible. They wanted to understand problems in the area and meet real need. And they wanted to be part of local solutions to systemic problems in the area, in partnership with local council and other voluntary organisations.

Appointing a Church-Related Community Work minister for the centre

The church hoped that a Church-Related Community Work Minister could be a linchpin to strengthen the partnership between church and centre. CRCWs have a unique role as lay ministers in the URC, recruited by churches to work on accredited local projects. But their role involves more than church outreach to the unchurched. They are “commissioned to help the church live out its calling,”¹ as church and community transform each other.

Copleston Church put together an accreditation plan to develop the centre, appointing Jo Patterson in 2019. The CRCW appointment process, Jo says, is about “discerning where God is” in a project like the Copleston Centre. The CRCW's approach must be a good fit for a congregation, who may be challenged to rethink community outreach. The diverse, inclusive congregation already had a theology rooted in social justice. They embraced the CRCW approach – relational mission, that would grow from being with their community.

WHAT IS A CHURCH-RELATED COMMUNITY WORK MINISTER (URC)?

Church Related Community Work is a distinctive URC lay ministry. CRCWs are trained in both theology and principles of community development. They are commissioned to help churches broaden their local mission. A church and CRCW together [shape] a time-limited project in the community.

CRCWs bring “a social justice, radical view” to community work, as Jo Patterson puts it. They work with churches to:

- understand and respond to an area’s needs
- support local people’s wellbeing
- empower people to transform the places where they live.

This is more than social work – it is Christian leadership connecting churches and their communities, grounded in theology. “There has to be a theological underpinning,” Jo reflects. “It’s about churches widening their reach and looking at things from a different perspective.”

For Jo, this is “a Kingdom approach” to ministry, where church and community can impact each other. A CRCW challenges a congregation to think radically about outreach, and a community to think differently about the church. The result can be mutual transformation. “*The learning can go both ways,*” Jo says.

For over a year, Jo has been working to marry church and centre together more closely. On the centre side, she manages the Copleston Centre with the vicar and attends trustees' meetings. As she works in partnership with local services and participates in civic meetings, Jo gives the church and centre users a voice in the community. At the church, Jo is a minister to the congregation, and has led several Vision Days to help the church root their mission for the centre in their values. A commitment to two-way transformation between church and community has grown out of their vision for social justice. In a church-owned centre where the church's actions speak of God's love for their neighbourhood, the result is a different kind of outreach. "We want people to understand why we think the way we do," Jo says.

The Copleston Centre's community programmes

The centre takes a holistic approach to community work. By listening to and learning from local people, and working in partnership with groups and services, their programmes aim to help meet real needs.

1 in 5 adults in Southwark has a mental health condition², and there are issues of access to mental health services for BAME residents.³ The centre's Creative Therapies project makes mental health support more accessible and culturally sensitive. The programme runs in partnership with the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust. Inexpensive counselling and art therapy services accept self-referrals from the community, and referrals from local mental health services. Free mindfulness courses create a link with the church, with input from the vicar. And a weekly community café aims to create a safe, welcoming environment for people who use the centre's mental health support. To build the centre's relationships with mental health service partners, Jo sits on Southwark Social Prescribing Network. She can offer a community perspective informed by the centre's Christian vision.

As the centre has come to understand the specific needs of Peckham's multi-cultural older community, they have developed the Silver Linings project for over-65s, in partnership with local groups. With a

THE COUNSELLING SERVICE AND CREATIVE THERAPIES

at the Copleston Centre

The Copleston Centre is helping to make therapies and wellbeing support more accessible in Peckham, at a time when local mental health services are often stretched and private counselling is expensive. The Counselling Service can offer 8 sessions of subsidised counselling, on a sliding scale starting at £2 an hour. A parallel Art Therapy service has two streams – the drop-in Art Café, open to all, and a closed art therapy group. The lead therapists in each service are fully qualified, while other counsellors are in training on placements at the centre.

Beginning in February 2021, a new Immediate Emotional Support Service will fill a gap for those looking for drop-in support. Through this pioneering service, a volunteer trained counsellor will facilitate one-off sessions for 30 minutes. *“It’s more a listening service than a counselling service,”* says Edna Ogundare, Associate Therapist at the centre. For those who then decide they are looking for longer-term counselling, the Counselling Service is ready to take referrals.

The centre can help bridge the gap when local NHS waiting lists are long. About half of their clients come via NHS referrals. To encourage self-referrals from all sections of a multicultural community, they promote the service locally. *“We are a part of this community,”* Edna says. The new mindfulness courses are one more way they support wellbeing locally. The community values the centre’s accessible counselling service, helping to meet mental health support needs across Peckham and beyond.

programme including Caribbean dance-fitness, Tai Chi, and cultural visits around London, Silver Linings helps to reduce isolation and promote wellbeing. The programme has gone from strength to strength in response to the pandemic, as the centre has brought in more funding to reach older people locally.

Evolving community support in lockdowns and beyond

The Copleston Centre was well-placed to help as the pandemic began to impact the area, with their track record of partnerships with local services. They partnered with Level Six Foods, a local vegan café that had closed in lockdown, to deliver a Real Meals on Wheels programme that continues into 2021.

As the centre moved programmes online, an issue was highlighted – the digital divide in the community. Many needed help with technology so that they could continue to access the centre’s programmes. Seeing this is an opportunity, the centre applied for and received funding for computer training with older people. As well as benefitting the people they work with, the training programme is creating jobs at a difficult time for financially insecure Peckham. “We’re hoping to be able to send employment people’s way, when they’ve been furloughed or made redundant,” Jo says.

The first thing that often goes is people’s broadband and their smartphone. And if you’ve got four children and one laptop, and they’re all doing secondary school education, it’s not easy. So it’s not as easy as you think [to reach people online].

- **Jo Patterson**

By the summer, centre users were clamouring for a physical return to the building. Age and poverty continued to make digital access difficult for some, and isolation was a growing issue. As with all their decisions, the centre approached reopening through community consultation, especially with those more at risk from coronavirus. Older people’s programmes gradually moved back into the building, with online access for those who were shielding or did not feel safe to return. Flexible funding has allowed the centre to support people through later lockdowns, through multiple forms of online contact, telephone calls and partnership working.

The centre's philosophy of community empowerment has made a difference locally during the pandemic, too. They set up a mutual aid group for the parish early in the first lockdown of 2020, with safeguarding support from Jo. The group was quickly taken on by local streets, where mobile phones were passed around to help the project continue. "It was running after about six weeks without needing any of our help," Jo remembers. And the centre continues to benefit. The WhatsApp groups are now bringing in contributions to the food bank based in the centre, run by Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers. Through this informal project, the centre has been able to engage local people who have never volunteered before.

Empowering the community through a space to grow

Peckham is a neighbourhood of contrasts, where poverty sits side-by-side with wealth. 71% of the population comes from BAME groups⁴, but incoming young white families are displacing longer-term African-Caribbean residents, leading to deepening marginalisation. And, in the midst of gentrification, Peckham remains one of the poorer areas of the borough of Southwark.⁵ The inequalities have implications for local people's mental health and life opportunities.

*As a centre and a church,
the door is always open.
The possibilities are
endless, because people
are people, and they're
gifted in all sorts of ways.
And no gift is obsolete or
unimportant.*

- Jo Patterson

But at the Copleston Centre, they know that people are the experts in their own needs, with gifts that can transform their own communities. The aim at the centre is to develop users into volunteers and staff who can use their gifts in the centre and wider community. "We give people a space to grow," Jo says. The centre aims to help the community to develop their own programmes.

Centre staff supported a nervous parent who was interested in setting up a toddler group at the centre, gradually making themselves redundant as the group leader's confidence grew. Today, that nervous parent is a trustee of the Copleston Centre. Another user of the centre's mental health support moved on to employment with statutory mental health services.

As the Copleston Centre brings together a community that spans rich and poor, they aim to play a part in decreasing social divisions in the area. “We’re trying to make our building useful and attractive to the whole range of the local community,” Edward says. Creating a socially just centre does not exclude using the building for hire, but it means thinking about how to do this responsibly.

Funding and operating the centre

As an independent charity, the Copleston Centre’s trustees come from both church and community. Gradually, this is helping to build a closer relationship between the two. “We now have on the board of trustees a number of people [who] have caught the vision,” Edward says. The interdependence between church and centre is becoming clearer to both partners. The church is reliant on the centre to generate income to support the building and maintain their presence in the area, while the centre benefits from the shared building, volunteering and vision from the church.

The centre is self-supporting through combined funding and hire. All surplus goes back into the centre, rather than to the church. A team includes grant-funded staff and volunteers. City Bridge Trust funds the Silver Linings programme. The Creative Therapies project was initially funded by the Big Lottery Fund. It continues through smaller grants and donations, now that the centre can show the impact of affordable mental health support. More recently, funding from the London Community Foundation and Southwark Community Response Fund has allowed the centre to respond to the pandemic locally.

It’s the first time I think there’s been such a positive and clear recognition of that relationship [between church and centre] and desire to make it more public.

- Edward Collier

Keeping the church and centre connected

Jo believes that church cannot be church in isolation. Partnership working is good for the whole community – and church is

C O P L E S T O N
C E N T R E :
T H E
F I G U R E S

In 2019, the centre brought in:

£42,000

in funding and
donations for community
programmes and over

£82,000

in centre hire.

The centre has been awarded

£127,300

over three years

from City Bridge Trust
to deliver the Silver Linings
programme for over-65s.

*The busier the building
gets, the more staff
you need and the more
volunteers you need. You
have to manage them
properly.*

- **Edward Collier**

part of community. "Working with all these people creates a variety of opportunity for everybody," Jo says. And there are signs of growing church-centre cooperation at Copleston, from the mindfulness courses that Edward leads there, to work at the centre by the Wellspring Community, a New Monastic Order linked to the church. But it is Jo's role that gives the church a real insight into how the centre is developing their shared outreach, Edward thinks. "She's been that voice which underlines the fact that the church and the centre are the same thing."

And the centre is impacting the church in return, as they consider how different church services could reach people who encounter them through the centre. While Copleston Church is representative of the community, they do not have a large congregation. Opening up ways for more people to join them might involve reimagining church. Two-way transformation in action.

Challenges

It may take gradual cultural change to bring a congregation on board with a church-linked community project. Edward believes that the Copleston Centre is helping the church become more outward looking, but it is not enough that a centre is hosted in a church. Cultural change needs a strategic approach. That's where Jo's presence and Vision Days are making a difference. But change can be challenging. Jo understands that the Copleston Centre might not be every congregant's reason for going to church. She aims to hold her perspective and theirs in tension, continuing the conversation about transformation "without telling them that they're wrong."

Equally, not everyone who comes to the centre will want to engage with church. "They will have had a certain life history or experience of church," Jo reflects. "Some of that comes from difficult places." But as church and community grow closer, the hope is that both will be changed in ways that make more space for each other.

The story of Copleston Church underlines that **a vicar cannot be expected to manage a busy community centre alongside the demands of ministry** – especially when that centre aims to do more than bring in income for the church. As the centre has grown Edward has struggled to run it effectively. Appointing Jo as a CRCW with management responsibility was the answer. She can commit time and energy to the centre, and has the right experience to manage staff and build community networks. And, as funding grows, so does the team managing programmes at the centre.

It's about consulting people, before you just say, 'This is what we think you need.' Ask people what they want in their community, rather than doing it for them.

- Jo Patterson

PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK

based on the experiences of the Copleston Church and Centre

A partnership between church and community can empower people to do more where they live.

Using an asset-based community development approach, the Copleston Centre aims to help people discover their gifts and use them for everyone's benefit. Partnership working – with the NHS, community organisations and informal groups – is helping the centre to play a role in systemic solutions to the local problems they encounter. And, with a vision for community in everything they do, the centre can solve problems in ways that benefit more people locally.

A church-owned community centre and church can help each other to be more sustainable.

Jo has been a voice that reminds the church that they and the centre have always been interdependent, with a vision in common for social justice and local outreach that builds God's Kingdom. As funding grows, allowing the church to do more through the centre, it becomes clearer that church and community are one and the same.

Community work can make space for two-way transformation between church and community.

At the Copleston Centre, this is a new kind of outreach, as the church lives out its faith and commitment to social justice through the centre. And it is not just the community that benefits. By working with those who are different from themselves, the congregation is enriched.

Local people know what their own community

needs. At the Copleston Centre, consultation guides decisions – they ask about local need, rather than assuming they have all the answers. Local knowledge develops through long experience of work in the community and in partnerships, as the centre's pioneering mental health support services are showing. They also consult with the congregation, who need to feel heard in a partnership like this.

Everything has a season, and programmes may not last forever. "If it doesn't work, it's okay to stop," Jo advises. She recommends having an "assessed go" with new ideas, in consultation with the community. At the Copleston Centre, this includes taking opportunities as they arise with problems, as they have in response to the pandemic.

A church-based community centre needs to be strategically operated, if it is truly to be useful to a community. Copleston Church has turned a strategic vision for the centre into practical action, underpinned by their theology of social justice. The CRCW's role has allowed the Copleston Centre to bring in more funding, expand the team and develop more services that the community values.

Last Word

“It’s about churches widening their reach and looking at things from a different perspective. We’re not necessarily asking people to become more like us. The transformation is a two way thing. It enriches Christian congregations to be working with other partners who are not like them. The learning can go both ways. And that’s what we should all be doing – learning in both ways.”

- **Jo Patterson**



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Lanarkshire

Lanarkshire

D E M E N T I A
S U P P O R T
P R O J E C T

■

ST ANDREW'S, CARLUKE

■

To

share our Christian faith in word and action; reaching out to support those in our community and beyond who are in any kind of need. To develop support services to older people and people with dementia and their carers.



MISSION STATEMENT

St Andrew's Carlisle

A CUP OF TEA AND FRIENDSHIP

The dementia support project

In the small Lanarkshire town of Carluke, the Church of Scotland congregation of St Andrew's has found new purpose through direct outreach to their elderly community with dementia. A simple offer of a cup of tea and friendship has always been at the heart of the project, which they call the St Andrew's Drop In. Today, they run a programme of activities to help people with dementia to live a full life, in partnership with the local Community Mental Health Team for Older People.

The Drop In has become central to the church's identity, now enshrined in its mission statement. The project has revitalised a congregation, showing them how much even a small church can do, simply by being with those with dementia in their community.

The story of the Drop In

"We offered what we had to God, which we didn't think was terribly much, which was basically tea and coffee and cake and a friendly face, a welcome, a place to go... and people that actually were interested in other people and cared."

- **Helen Jamieson, Minister**

The seeds for the Drop In were planted around 2012, when the lived experience of a congregant brought the impact of dementia home to the St Andrew's congregation. As the congregation became more aware of dementia in the parish, they felt helpless, at first. They had no expertise to help with a local issue on this scale, and almost no financial resources.

But once they had recognised the problem, it was quickly reframed as a challenge for the church. What if they could see the large church building not as a drain, but an asset? Could they help simply by being with people, seeing what might develop from that modest beginning? They were moved to offer what they had to God, however small, to see if it could make a difference.

Through congregational links, Minister Helen Jamieson was introduced to the local Community Mental Health Team for Older People

(CMHTOP). With their support, she gathered a small group of people with a diagnosis of dementia and a few volunteers from the church. Their aim was to share God's love with in a simple, practical way. At first, all they could offer was a cup of tea and friendship. But as they came alongside people, they found that friendship was the most valuable thing they could offer.

From these small beginnings, the Drop In has grown in ways that have surprised and delighted the church, expanding so quickly that within the first year they outgrew their small church hall. "We've just offered what we've got, and God has used that in the most amazing ways," Helen says.

In 2020, the Drop In worked with 83 people with dementia and their carers. They are still very much part of the church, operating under the supervision of the Kirk Session, with a management group made up of volunteers, carers and Kirk Session members, and a small Governance Group.

Being with people with dementia

What do people want? They just want somebody to sit down with them and be there, a listening presence, a supportive presence.

- **Helen Jamieson**

The project's core activity is the popular monthly Drop In Support. At its height, Drop In Support has seen 50 to 60 people at some sessions, supported through a partnership with the Community Mental Health Team.

Early success encouraged St Andrew's to develop a more comprehensive service. Their first step was to launch a monthly Drop In Activities session, which started as a small group but grew quickly. They offer a programme of activities led by a mix of volunteers, professional performers and artists, and organisations. A Heart for Art dementia art group now runs weekly, in partnership with national organisation CrossReach, who provide a specialist art teacher funded by St Andrew's.

**T H E M O N T H L Y
P R O G R A M M E**

at the St Andrew's Drop In

DROP IN SUPPORT

Last Friday of the month. The core project activity, welcoming people with dementia for a cup of tea and friendship, supported by the CMHTOP.

DROP IN ACTIVITIES

Second Friday of the month. Activities led by volunteers and in partnership with organisations, from Tai Chi and crafting, to sessions led by the Scottish Ballet and Screen Memories.

MUSICAL TEA

Monthly tea dance for people with dementia, where people participate as they are able – singing, dancing or enjoying the music.

HEART FOR ART

Weekly art group aimed at people with dementia, run in partnership with a national organisation.

HEALTHY WALK

Weekly walking group set up by two carers from the project, supported by Get Walking Lanarkshire. Dementia-friendly walks planned from January 2021.

OTHER REGULAR ACTIVITIES

Outings, a Mainly Men Reminiscing group and a Heart to Heart bereavement support group.

PANDEMIC SUPPORT

Playlist Parties and Carer Catch-Up over Zoom. Delivering activities to homes. Phone support.

Other groups have launched as Helen and the team have developed the skills and interests of people involved in the project.

But even as their groups become more varied, the principle of being with people is still at the heart of what they do at the Drop In. At even the most interesting of activities sessions, there will be people who would prefer a cup of tea and companionship. A listening, supportive presence remains the most important thing the Drop In can offer.

Enabling full lives with dementia

People think that if you're diagnosed with dementia, it seems like the end of the world... But we've discovered that it's amazing what people can do with a bit of support and encouragement. People can still live life as fully as they can.

- **Helen Jamieson**

The groups and activities at the Drop In are all aimed at helping people to live a full life with dementia, from a walking group that helps people stay active, to their work with Playlist for Life to spark memories through personalised music collections. Their Heart for Art group has seen creativity flourish in people who have never painted before. CrossReach has made cards of the artists' work after their death, as a fitting memorial of their full life lived with dementia.

But the project must balance this with sensitivity to the stigma attached to dementia. From the beginning, the project was simply named the Drop In, to avoid mention of dementia, after advice from the Community Mental Health Team. Local people who attend the Drop In often prefer to say they are going to the club, or to the church for a cup of tea. Avoiding the word dementia can make it easier for people to come, wherever they are on the journey to acceptance. *"We don't ask people when they come through the door if they have dementia or a diagnosis,"* Helen says. *"[We] just accept folk."*



Partnership with the Community Mental Health Team

From its launch, Drop In Support has been run in partnership with the Community Mental Health Team for Older People. A community mental health nurse is always on hand to offer specialist support. That might include medication advice, referrals to consultants, or just keeping in touch with people with dementia who are known to the CMHTOP.

This partnership has worked well for both the project and the professionals. For the mental health team, the drop-in gives them contact with people who might not engage with medical services otherwise. There is growing pressure on dementia services in Scotland, where people are guaranteed post-diagnosis support for a year. The partnership with the project makes it easier for the CMHTOP to reach people with the support they need.

For the church, the partnership with the CMHTOP has grown the project in new directions. The nurses can offer medical support that Helen's team are not qualified to give. The CMHTOP signposts people to the project, and Helen visits post-diagnosis support groups to introduce the Drop In. Thanks to these links, the project has brought in people who might never have found them otherwise.

Opening doors through partnerships

The Drop In has grown organically, making the most of links in the community. By tapping in to what is happening locally, they have been able to bring in artists and professionals to give workshops and performances aimed at people with dementia. *“It’s about listening to what’s going on,”* Helen says.

Perhaps their most successful collaboration has been with Playlist for Life, a charity working with the power of music to evoke memories. The Drop In was the first Playlist for Life ‘Information Point’ based in a church. The charity has trained volunteers to create personalised playlists of music that can help people with dementia to reconnect with memories. In lockdown, Playlist Parties on Zoom have helped the project to bring music to people who would usually come to the Drop In, who have otherwise been hard to reach during the pandemic.

The Drop In team often takes a chance and reaches out, seeing if doors will open. When they were struggling with the logistics of taking large numbers of people to Glasgow for a session with the Scottish Ballet, they were able to organise a rare on-site visit from the ballet company,

who brought their Time to Dance workshop. Helen heard about Health:Pitch, who perform touring operas for wellbeing, at a community meeting. A speculative email was all it took for the group to agree to perform a mini opera at Drop-in Activities.

“It’s about building those relationships to find out what’s there. If it’s the right thing, doors will open for you.”

**- Helen Jamieson,
Minister**

Closer to home, community and congregational links have grown the project in more modest but equally important ways. The Heart to Heart bereavement support group was set up by a local parishioner who noticed how many funerals Helen took for people who had shared in the Drop In. Encouraged by Helen, the parishioner has found that the Drop In’s model of friendship and mutual support around a cup of tea works just as well for bereavement support.

Growing carers into project volunteers

"The support we're offering people is... from the time that they come to share with us to through bereavement, and beyond that, if we possibly can".

- Helen Jamieson

Being with carers has always been central to the work of the St Andrew's Drop In. Many carers have stayed involved after losing family members. As they transition to volunteers, they bring invaluable lived experience of dementia and caring to the Drop In. The carers who stay with them are those who buy into the ethos of the project. "They can help support other people, because they've been there, they've been on that journey." For Helen, this is a validation of the Drop In's aim – to walk alongside people through the whole of their journey, from diagnosis to bereavement.

When people have been known as carers, they might need support to help them adjust to their new role as volunteers. The Drop In has been trying simple changes to integrate people into the team. Different name badge colours ensure volunteers are easily identified, for example. But the blurring of the lines between roles is all part of the Drop In's ethos. Everyone is part of the same project family – volunteers, carers and those with dementia.

FROM CARER TO VOLUNTEER: ALICE'S STORY

Alice first came along to Drop-in Support with her husband Peter. There she met Jessie, who was also a carer. As they got talking, the ladies realised they lived in the same village, though they had not met before the project brought them together. When both their husbands died in 2018, St Andrew's minister Helen conducted their funerals. Now close friends, Jessie and Alice have supported each other ever since, forming a bubble together during COVID lockdown and walking together. They both volunteer with the project's many activities.

When Helen heard that Alice and Jessie enjoyed walking together, she was inspired to set up a walking group through Get Walking Lanarkshire. Alice and Jessie now lead the project's weekly Healthy Walks, and have been trained to offer dementia friendly walks from January 2021. Alice's teenage granddaughter volunteered with the project in 2019, inspired by her grandmother's positive experience there.

Through conscious volunteer support, the project values and develops volunteers. At twice-yearly meetings, volunteers share concerns and ideas – with a cup of tea and cake, of course. By listening to those at the heart of the project, Helen has solved problems that a top-down audit might miss. In turn, volunteers feel appreciated and take more ownership of the project.

Volunteer support and training has expanded through partnerships. Inspired by training from funders Go for It, a new draft volunteering policy for the project will soon go to Kirk Session. As well as standard training in safeguarding and basic dementia support, partners can offer optional specialist training – playlist training from Playlist for Life, walk leader training from Get Walking Lanarkshire, and training from CrossReach for Heart for Art volunteers. Links with the University of the West of Scotland have opened up even more training opportunities.

Compassion Transforming Church and Community

The Drop In has reinvigorated the congregational life of the small church, showing them how much even a small, mostly elderly congregation can offer their community. The project comes under the direct supervision of the Kirk Session, who keep it at the centre of church life and identity. Of these 11 elders, six have personal experience of dementia through family. The congregation have been inspired to do more as the Drop In grows, staying involved through fundraising and volunteering. Joint church-project trips build bridges between the congregation and people with dementia.

But the impact of the Drop In goes both ways, changing both church and community. The Drop In's welcome and friendship may be the most significant mark that the church has left in the community. The Drop In's partnerships have changed perceptions of the church in the community, too. For one community mental health worker, the partnership "gave her a different flavour of what it meant to be the church and to reach out to people, and share God's love with them," Helen remembers.

The project has transformed the clergy's ministry with local people. "People know we're there for them," says Helen, who has been asked to take funerals for many people who have shared in the Drop In. Indirectly, the church has been equipped to minister to more people through dementia experience. Helen's Playlist for Life training was invaluable when she was asked to conduct a funeral for a man whose wife had dementia. Using an iPad, they discovered together a traditional Scottish song that the man's mother had sung to him in childhood, using it as the basis for his funeral service.

Funding the Project

The project has always operated without many financial resources. The work is mainly funded by individual giving and funeral donations, but they have been delighted by the community's generosity and support for the project.

The project recently succeeded in a funding application to Life Changes Trust and the Church of Scotland's Go for It fund. Recognising assets in the congregation, Helen asked a church elder with a background in finance to help write the bid. "It's about using folk's skills and talents," Helen says.

Sadly, the funded project coordinator post was made redundant when the project was paused due to pandemic

D E M E N T I A S U P P O R T P R O J E C T : T H E F I G U R E S

83

people with dementia & carers
supported in 2019

24

volunteers in 2019

£45,000

funding from Go for It
over 3 years

£30,000

funding from Life Changes Trust
over 2 years

Other financial support
from Lanark Presbytery
and individual donations.

measures. But St Andrew's aims to turn this challenge into an opportunity. Having had time to rethink their priorities, they now hope to use the funding for part-time administrative roles, including fundraising support.

Challenges for the Drop In

Helen advises other churches to think about the potential pitfalls of transport, communication and the limited time of ministers. But she believes the Drop In's challenges have all been opportunities. For St Andrew's, solutions have come from working with others – from sharing accessible minibuses with other local groups, to reaching out in new partnerships. “We've just had so many blessings out of this project. The challenges are there at times, but they're there to be dealt with.”

Managing the perceptions and stigma of dementia can be a challenge for the project. People's resistance to talking about dementia can make it difficult to share information. They need to manage perceptions of their own service, too. Statutory services can see them as just another dementia service. In its early days, Drop In Support was sometimes overwhelmed by external services. They now limit numbers from services, and ask visitors to share in a cup of tea with everyone else.

The pandemic has limited the project's work significantly. They have been unable to open since March 2020, but this has not meant cutting off all their support. While offering remote support by phone, they have also used some of their funding to send dementia friendly jigsaw puzzles to those they know would benefit. Online, they reach a smaller number of people through monthly carers' catch-up groups, weekly Playlist Parties and Heart for Art. The carers' group has been vital during the pandemic, when most statutory services for carers have paused. Resuming the project will feel like a restart – many of the people known to the project have sadly died or moved into long-term care, in a reflection of the pandemic's national impact on older people. But Helen believes the project's local, relationship-based model will see it outlast these challenges.

PRINCIPLES OF RUNNING A COMMUNITY DEMENTIA SUPPORT PROJECT

based on experiences at the St Andrew's Drop In

At the St Andrew's Drop In, **they offer what they have to God.**

They have found that simple shared presence – being with people – is valued.

They believe that dementia is not the end of life. Aiming to help people to live full lives with dementia, they support people from diagnosis to bereavement.

They make the most of their links in the community. Relationships have been their most important resource. "We've used what we've got and the links that we've made."

They develop their assets in the project and congregation. They shape carers into leaders, developing their skills and ideas. Congregants have shared vital fundraising expertise.

They tap into what's going on around them and reach out to see if doors will open.

They have recognised their church building as an asset that they could open up to the community, rather than a drain on clergy and congregation.

They know their limits. They work in partnerships with people and organisations with expertise. This helps them offer support and training that they could not provide alone.

They value volunteers. A new volunteering policy is formalising volunteer management.

They are not afraid to start small. They started Drop In Activities with just a few people, even when the CMHTOP could not support such a small group. The St Andrew's team felt it was still worthwhile to offer activities and support to these few individuals. Today, the activities sessions bring in just as many people as the main Drop In.

They grow organically by taking opportunities and encouraging ideas.

They share what they have learned with other churches, including a local Episcopal church.

They keep the project cost-effective, but they know that funding is the only way they can do more. They are hoping to use existing funding to bring in more fundraising expertise.

The project works closely with the congregation, and has given new life to a small church.

Last Word

The St Andrew's Drop In is transforming a church and a community. The church is making a difference to local people with dementia, as they offer simple friendship and support through partnerships. And the project is energising a congregation, as it shapes their mission and identity.

"I would just hope that we've been able to offer a bit of friendship and supportive care to people going through a particularly challenging part of their life's journey. And, through us, hopefully people realise that churches are actually a warm and welcoming place, or they can be."

- **Helen Jamieson**





Edinburgh

Edinburgh

T H E S O C I A L
E N T E R P R I S E S
G I V I N G A H A N D U P ,
N O T A H A N D O U T



THE GRASSMARKET COMMUNITY PROJECT & GREYFRIARS CHURCH



We

believe in a world where people reach their full potential, feel positive about themselves, valued and connected to others and the wider community.

We will create an inclusive person-centred environment where people feel empowered to develop skills, build positive relationships and enjoy an ongoing sense of belonging.



**THE GRASSMARKET
COMMUNITY PROJECT**

Vision and Mission

**A HAND UP,
NOT A HANDOUT**

Greyfriars Church

For centuries, Greyfriars Kirk has had a heart for the poor of Edinburgh. The church is located in the Grassmarket, now a thriving shopping district, and is much loved by tourists as the home of Greyfriars Bobby. But until the 1960s, this was an area of multiple deprivation. The Grassmarket Community Project is a partnership between Greyfriars Kirk and the Grassmarket Mission, building on their long history of outreach to Edinburgh's most disenfranchised people. Based on the principle that *a hand up is more empowering than a handout*, what was once a soup kitchen has been transformed into a community project that changes lives through sustainable social enterprise.

Since 2012, the Grassmarket Centre has been the project's base to launch and run seven award-winning social enterprises, giving disenfranchised members the experience and support they need to change their own lives. A bespoke furniture business upcycles wood from reclaimed church pews, growing from a humble start in portacabins. A once-underused café has made such a success of partnerships that it has launched several other catering enterprises. A tartan textiles business produces the unique Greyfriars Tartan, doing international trade in products handmade by a group of project members. And as they nurture talent among members, the enterprises help fund a community of belonging. Many more members benefit from wellbeing activities, accredited courses and groups. This supportive environment brings together homeless people, those with mental health problems, asylum seekers and many others, helping them to realise the assets they bring to change their own lives.

I had come with a bit of vision about what loosely might be described as a kind of 'hand up rather than a handout' culture. It was a recognition that if you just do things to people, it can be quite disempowering.

**- Richard Frazer,
Minister**

From soup kitchen mission to community project

As minister Richard Frazer describes it, Greyfriars is a church with a bias to the poor. The church's history of compassionate work in the community dates back to the Franciscan friary on whose grounds Greyfriars was built. Alongside the church, the non-denominational Grassmarket Mission has been offering services to local homeless people since 1890.

When Richard arrived in 2003, the church's outreach emphasised charity more than change. Up to 600 meals a week were being shared from soup kitchens at Greyfriars Kirk House. The central location brought Edinburgh's homeless to their doors. But Richard had come to the church with a commitment to asset-based community development. Believing that well-meaning charity can be disempowering, Richard instead had a vision to journey alongside people as they discovered their own potential. As the Grassmarket

Mission and Greyfriars began to work in partnership, they saw the opportunity to do more than give away food, beginning with cookery classes to empower people living in poverty. Ideas were taking shape, Richard says, "about community organizing, about empowerment, and about stepping back from being Mr. Bountiful, who had all the answers and solutions to people's lives."

Our success rate has been quite phenomenal, in terms of enabling people to move on to positive destinations.

- **Richard Frazer**

As wellbeing activities were added to the programme at the Kirk House, a vision began to emerge for a place of belonging. Richard and the partnership team could already see how many people brought "extraordinary assets" to the cooking classes. The partnership-run Grassmarket Community Project, established as a charity in 2010, aimed to offer members opportunities to develop their potential within supportive community. "For many of the people that we work with, that's the thing that's been missing in their lives," Richard says, "networks of real support, where they're not judged and where they're safe."

Social enterprise transforming cast-off wood... and cast-off people

An interest in beautiful church furniture led to the project's first social enterprise. Richard had been rescuing cast-off church pews, made of excellent quality timber, but thrown away by churches as they reordered their buildings. At the same time, many project members were interested in woodwork. Richard reflected on how buildings can

lend themselves to aspiration, as those on the edge of society are shunted into the worst environments. Could creating beautiful things have the opposite impact and build members' self-esteem?

The project would need a talented woodwork instructor to bring out the potential of unskilled craftspeople living in challenging situations. Richard asked Tommy Steel, a former carpenter and social worker, to join them as Workshop Manager. Tommy had the right combination of experience to help shape members' confidence as they honed new skills, initially in one-day wood workshops. "In the course of one day, Tommy could transform that," Richard remembers, "because he would enable people to make some beautiful, simple thing, that once you scrape off the years of dirt and grain, you've got beautiful wood." As the wood was shaped from discarded pews into bespoke furniture, the people were transformed with it.

Fourteen years later, Grassmarket Furniture is virtually a full cost-recovery business, selling over £70,000 worth of bespoke furniture in 2019. Like all the Grassmarket Community Project's social enterprises, they offer opportunities to those furthest from employment and education. Some who join without skills move on into employment – one even pursued a Master's degree in furniture design. But for other members, outcomes are more subtle. "Not everyone ends up becoming a furniture maker at the end of it," Richard says, "but it's about building confidence, and it's about preparing people for moving on, out of long-term unemployment, out of the cycle of homelessness, and beginning to have aspirations for other things."

As the project outgrew the Kirk House, they saw the potential of two derelict buildings at the bottom of the churchyard, on the edge of the busy Grassmarket. A successful £2 million fundraising campaign showed that the people of Edinburgh appreciated the community potential for the project, too. They took the long view as they designed the new Grassmarket Centre, with a hall and large kitchen. When the centre opened in 2012, the foundations had been laid for the Grassmarket Community Project to change lives through social enterprise.

Making a success of catering enterprise in partnerships

The Grassmarket Café was launched at the centre in 2013. It would be the first of the project's many catering businesses, but it was far from an immediate success. When Catherine Jones joined them as Catering Manager in 2014, the café was making a loss. They had yet to prove that their philosophy of 'a hand up rather than a handout' could succeed commercially. "The Grassmarket had a bit of stigma still attached to it," Catherine remembers, "because the local community saw it as a homeless shelter, even though we didn't house anybody." That image was at odds with the aim to provide quality services as a social enterprise.

Catherine – who describes herself as "a business person, not a support worker" – believed that working in a successful business would foster

confidence and aspiration among members. She set about moving members, who often had high support needs, into café and catering roles where they would do well. And she said yes to opportunities whenever they arose, even when she was not sure whether the café would be up to the task. Members rose to the challenge.

You need to believe in people and trust them.

**- Catherine Jones,
Catering and Social
Enterprise Manager**

But the café's big moment came through partnership.

The Grassmarket's central Edinburgh location was an advantage they could exploit. Many of Edinburgh's walking tours were passing the Grassmarket daily, on their way to visit the famous Greyfriars Bobby grave in the kirkyard. Catherine followed some of the tour groups around, approaching them in person and emphasising the benefits for both partners. Sandemans New Europe agreed to a trial partnership with the Grassmarket Café.

With just one nerve-wracking week to get the café ready for its first tour group, they had to find a way to offer the customer service partners would expect, while supporting members. "First impressions count," Catherine says, "and we had to prove ourselves." During one

W H Y D O E S T H E
P A R T N E R S H I P
W I T H T O U R
C O M P A N I E S
W O R K ?

For the Grassmarket Café, partnering with tours has meant:

- **Business success through a reliable customer base** – catering (including the café) now makes up 41% of Grassmarket enterprise income
- **Opportunities for members to achieve and build aspiration,** as they learn how to offer great customer service in a busy café
- **A café operation system where members can develop skills** in a supported environment
- **More supported work opportunities,** both volunteering and paid roles
- For tour companies, the partnership has meant:
- **A place to sell tickets**
- **A coffee break stop** in a vibrant café near other tour stops
- **Corporate social responsibility targets** met
- **A marketing opportunity** as they encourage tourists to give back to the local community

memorable unexpected visit from a tour group, overstaffing meant that each member was able to focus on doing one task well, with support. The approach worked. Catherine was delighted to find members and volunteers impressing tour group customers. When members saw what they could achieve in a thriving business, their confidence grew. “Because they were excited to see the customers, the customer service that they were giving was just second to none,” Catherine remembers. “When we told them how much money they’d made in a day, the sense of pride for themselves. They had achieved something.”

The partnership turned the business around, making a difference to project members and partners alike. Overnight, the café created eight paid jobs. The growth allowed them to support members with higher support needs, as they drew in volunteers committed to the Grassmarket Community Project’s aims. And the deal worked well for the tour group, helping them to meet corporate social responsibility targets. Five years later, the partnership is still going strong. Sandeman

New Europe advertise their coffee stop at the Grassmarket Café as a chance for tourists to contribute to the local community.¹

Vulnerability does not fit categories.

- Richard Frazer

Encouraged by the success of the café partnership, Catherine and her team have gone on to launch three external catering enterprises. In an award-winning partnership with Laing O’Rourke, Grassmarket catering provided the canteen for one of the largest building sites in Europe, throughout the redevelopment of Edinburgh’s St James Shopping Centre. They served 800 staff and created training opportunities for 10 project members. “It provides that employment for people,” Richard says, “that opportunity for members of the project to volunteer and train and aspire to.” Together, catering sales brought in over £500,000 in 2019.

The Grassmarket’s smaller social enterprises have grown by taking opportunities that fit their identity, location and members. The Tartan Textiles enterprise produces the award-winning Greyfriars Tartan, designed by a project member and inspired by Greyfriars Bobby and the history of the Kirk. In 2020, the success of the tartan’s online sales inspired a new candle-making enterprise, in another celebration of the centre’s location – on Candlemaker Row. And, like the larger businesses, these smaller enterprises are staffed almost entirely by members.

G R A S S M A R K E T
C O M M U N I T Y
P R O J E C T :
M E M B E R S
A N D
A C T I V I T Y
I N 2 0 1 9

Social enterprise supporting a community project

Social enterprise helps to fund the project in creating a supportive environment for people facing challenges including mental health problems, addiction, insecure housing and social isolation.

About a quarter of members are involved in the social enterprises, but many more engage with the centre's 30-hour a week programme. Here, they aim to enable people to develop the assets they bring. A members' group pilgrimage from Greyfriars to Lindisfarne in 2008 gave rise to a weekly walking group. A herb garden in the churchyard has echoes of the work of the friars on the site 450 years ago – gardening there has been a positive experience for members with mental health problems. Accredited courses, in subjects including literacy and furniture craft skills, give members opportunities to gain qualifications. And wellbeing is still a focus of the project, with mindfulness and creative workshops.

The project aims to support people however complex their needs, filling gaps in other charities' provision. And because they fund the project through their own social enterprises, they can work with members for as long as they need them, without timelines or targets. They know that, for members from chaotic

63

members

23%

of members engaged
in social enterprise

4,340

hours of positive
activity across a 30-hour
weekly programme

95

accredited courses delivered

4

people completed apprenticeships
in catering and woodwork

9

members funded for counselling

387

volunteers

backgrounds or in difficult situations, important achievements can seem small. “It can be coming, and it can be turning up every day,” Catherine says. “We’ve had people here, coming for the last ten years. And they’re

in the exact same place where they were ten years ago, but we’re still here for them.” But the Grassmarket has a track record of changing lives, from homeless people who have succeeded in paid roles in the café, to refugees who have learned English and have moved on to do degrees in engineering. The project’s reputation brings members in through word of mouth and referrals from social services and the prison service.

We started to realise that we should not be categorising people as the helped & the helpers.

- Richard Frazer

The Grassmarket Community Project makes no distinction between volunteers and those who need support. They are all called members, and everyone follows the same induction programme. Volunteers bring just as many needs and assets as those who come for support. “Everyone’s here for a reason,” Catherine says.

Members love the community lunch, bringing together everyone who works and volunteers at the Grassmarket to eat together. It’s just one more way the project helps people to move beyond their contexts.

We don’t use being a charity and supporting vulnerable people as our selling point.

- Catherine Jones

Underlying the project’s success is the original vision – for people to discover their own potential and thrive.

For some churches and organisations, this may be a new perspective. Richard’s congregants were initially “baffled” by the concept for the project, asking where they would find the expertise to change lives. But Richard believes people bring their own assets for change. “We just have to be catalysts,” he says.

Funding the project through enterprise and grants

For the social enterprises to meet their charitable aims, they need to function as successful businesses. Whether they are selling coffee in the café or negotiating for catering contracts, they focus on offering quality products and great customer service. Customers are often

I N C O M E A N D F U N D I N G

*at Grassmarket Community Project**

**I N 2 0 1 9 ,
T H E G R A S S M A R K E T
M A D E :**

70%

of its income from social enterprise

30%

from grants

with over

£1 MILLION

turnover.

**after discounting restricted funds*

**E N T E R P R I S E
I N C O M E I N C L U D E D :**

£511,479

in catering sales

£73,375

in furniture sales

£4,963

in textile sales.

surprised when they find out what the Grassmarket Community Project is a charity supporting members into work. “Because of their professionalism, you would never be able to say they used to be a heroin addict or they were homeless for years,” Catherine says. “I think that’s the beauty of what we do.” The business stands on its own merits, and they have won multiple awards. In 2018 the Grassmarket Community Project won Best Performing Business (11-50 employees) in the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce Business Awards, out-competing Edinburgh Airport for the accolade.

At the same time, long term partners appreciate the Grassmarket Community Project’s reputation as a business that does social good in the community. Their ethical business practices bring corporate customers to their event hosting, from the Scottish Government to the NHS. Café and catering menus use ethically sourced food and VegWare cutlery, and tartan roses are packaged in reused soup cups from the café. Customers expect responsible business standards – especially from social enterprises.

Although the Grassmarket Community Project is 70% enterprise funded, grants help them to do more in the community. Thanks to over £300,000 in grant funding in 2019, they currently employ three apprentices, paid the living wage. Other members have been funded to attend counselling sessions and residential programmes. And grants have helped expand the project’s original cookery course, where this year 70 members learned food management skills from budgeting to nutrition.

Challenges

The project works with members with complex issues, and many have never worked before. It can be a challenge to balance business success, training and support for members. This means creating a safe, supported environment, while believing that people can meet high standards. For many members, this balance works. People dealing with addiction have become senior centre staff. Prisoners on day release come to work in the wood workshop, on trust that they will come back

to volunteer after release. There is a mutual expectation that everyone on the project will be able to rely on each other – the social enterprises need the members as much as the members need them. This mutual expectation made a difference in the early days of the café partnership. Without the project’s distinctive support for members, Catherine thinks the café could not have maintained the relationship with partners.

But the approach does not work for all members. Not everyone is ready to commit to the Grassmarket’s high standards, even in a supported

environment. “In no sense are we saying to people, this is an easy path,” Richard says. “If you’re signed up to work with Tommy in the workshop, or you’re coming to help Catherine in the canteen, we need you to perform. We need you to turn up when you say you’re going to turn up. When that doesn’t happen, we have to have difficult conversations with people. What’s really important is that we’re not colluding in low expectations.”

One of the things that one learns about social enterprises that you should never beat yourself up if something doesn’t work. Just keep trying things out and see what happens.

- Richard Frazer



P R I N C I P L E S O F A S O C I A L E N T E R P R I S E A N D C O M M U N I T Y P R O J E C T

based on experiences at the Grassmarket Community Project

At the Grassmarket Community Project, **they know that successful business builds aspiration.**

Members respond to high expectations, whether creating high-quality furniture or delivering excellent customer service in the catering enterprises.

They aim to succeed as a business. Even social enterprises with charitable aims must be sustainable, Catherine emphasises. “At the end of the day, if we’re not making profit, and we’re not putting it back into the charity, there’s no point in us doing what we’re doing.” Knowing that partnerships need to work for everyone, they aim to balance member support and business success.

They do not separate out the helpers from the helped. “Even a good idea, if *done* to people, can be disempowering,” Richard reflects. The Grassmarket Community Project is one community, being with each other. All members bring needs and assets, people are the experts in their own lives.

They create a place for everyone at the Grassmarket Centre. Through what they call *protected employment*, a supportive work environment can fit all members. They know that vulnerability does not fit categories, that people may need support for the long term, and that achievements can be small but still significant.

They seek out opportunities and start small, to find out what works. In the early days of the catering enterprises, Catherine negotiated opportunities when capacity was limited. But they also know when to say no. The herb garden creates products, but it is not yet sustainable as a social enterprise. And they have turned down requests for catering partnerships in 2020, when pandemic measures would have meant less support for members.

They accept that congregations and organisations may take time to understand a project, when moving from a doing-to model to a being-with model. Churches and statutory services may expect expertise to come from leaders and providers, not the people they support. Richard and his team have gradually shown how an asset-based community development model can bring out members’ own potential for change.

They work to understand their context, locally and socially. Activities and social enterprises reflect the Grassmarket Community Project’s identity and the needs of the community. Richard and his team visited 35 local community projects before the charity was launched. This research helped them to avoid replication. They focus on what they can do well, from Grassmarket Furniture to their distinctive tartan.

Last Word

“A lot of people will say, we’ve got no expertise. And I’d say, you don’t need to be an expert. People are the experts in their own circumstances. We don’t have to tell people what’s good for them. We just have to be catalysts. And journeying with people, as co-pilots, in order for people to take control of their own lives and fly their own plane. But we also need to create communities in which people feel safe.”

- **Richard Frazer**



¹Sandemans New Europe, *Tours and Activities in Edinburgh* (2019). Available online: <https://www.neweuropetours.eu/sandemans-tours/edinburgh/free-tour-of-edinburgh/> [Accessed 2/2/21].

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London

London

T H E S U B U R B A N
C H U R C H C O M M U N I T Y
C E N T R E A N D C A F É



**THE OPEN
DOOR CENTRE AT
CHRIST CHURCH,
BARNET**



Don't

think you're ever going to bore the congregation. It's only when people are fed up of hearing the vision statement, that you actually know they've got it.



DAVID PARRY

Chairman of the John Trotter Trust

The suburban church community centre and café

Since its nineteenth century beginnings, Christ Church, Barnet has shared a site with a former primary school. By the early 2000s, the congregation already had a developing mission to older people living in Barnet. The church saw the potential of this outward-facing building, as another way to welcome the community through its doors.

The Open Door Centre opened in 2017, and has seen 40,000 visits to this Centre on the edge of the Christ Church site. Their aim is to live out a vision statement shared by both church and Centre – to *transform lives, build community and shape society* – in a space where the church offers a gentle welcome and reaches out to those in need.

The Centre supports this outreach with a sustainable business model. From the beginning, the trustees knew that, to make a long term success of the Centre, it would need to be self-supporting. Over 70% of their income now comes from the café and community hire. Building on this success, plans are underway to develop an upstairs floor, bringing Christ Church, Barnet's compassion ministries into the Centre, with facilities for the church's existing food bank and winter night shelter.

The story of the Open Door Centre

The roots of the Open Door Centre go back to the 1990s, when the congregation began to consider the possibilities of the Victorian school building on the church plot. The PCC set up a working group to monitor the status of the building, then owned by the Red Cross. In 2003, the John Trotter Trust was established as a limited company, with the aim of buying the building for the use of the church.

The next question was how the church would use this building to reach the community. The PCC knew it would make no sense for the church to run just another café near a busy commercial town centre. But despite its image as a leafy north London suburb, Barnet has pockets of hidden deprivation and need. The church was worshipping in the midst of a growing older population, with many finding it difficult to participate in local community life. Through consultation with congregation and

**BARNET :
AN AGEING
POPULATION**

With one of the largest
older populations
of any London
borough,
14%
of residents are
over 65

The number of
over-65s is set
to rise by
33%
by 2030

(Barnet Council, 2019)

church leadership, a priority to reach these older local people was identified. The Open Door Centre would build on Christ Church, Barnet's current work with older members of the congregation, as part of a wider vision for community outreach by the church.

The new Trust took the long view for the building. It would be bought in 2012, and the Centre would not open till 2017. In the intervening years, a vision for the Centre would be shaped and support would be mobilised in the church. Strategic planning and fundraising would see the Open Door Centre launched with a sustainable business model, as the church's vehicle for outreach into the local community.

A vision to build community

Through a shared vision with Christ Church, the Open Door Centre aims to be a bridge between the church and its community, as a place where the church's mission is lived out. At the same time, they understand that local people will only use a church venue if it meets their needs. The building was designed to be a place where older people and families would feel safe, and where volunteers and members of the church would want to build community alongside them.

With the community in mind, the Centre's informal café environment offers a gentle

welcome to church on neutral ground. Facilities include a reception area and coffee bar, a café area serving affordable breakfasts and lunches from a large kitchen, accessible toilets, a meeting room, and free Wi-Fi. A permanent exhibition of the Barnet Guild of Artists in the café adds a finishing touch to the space.

And it works. Most of the people who use the Centre during the week come from outside the church. Many drop in for coffee or a meal, or to meet with friends. Others come to one of the community-run events hosted by the Centre. These bring in income through hire, while extending the Centre's mission.

The Centre prioritises older people's groups in centre hire. Drawing on the concept of *lifetime neighbourhoods*,¹ the Open Door Centre aims to offer a space where older people can continue to participate in intergenerational community. Over the past three years, the weekly programme at the Centre has included Age UK exercise classes, Dementia Choir rehearsals and University of the Third Age classes. Through other community partnerships and hire, the Centre reaches out to a wider community, hosting NHS parenting courses, partnering with Barnet Citizens Advice for drop-in advice sessions, and collaborating with the local college on a photography project.

**H O W
D O E S T H E
C O M M U N I T Y
U S E T H E
O P E N D O O R
C E N T R E ?**

I N 2 0 1 9 :

55%

of the Centre's visitors
dropped in,
e.g. for coffee or a meal

33%

came to events run
by community groups
or individuals who
hired out the Centre

12%

came for activities
organised by
Christ Church, Barnet.

Informal intergenerational links have grown out of the centre's organised activities. Children from the pre-school based in the church hall spend time with older people from a day centre that meets in the Open Door Centre. One project paired 3-year-olds and 93-year-olds to draw each other's portraits, bringing together people who might never have crossed paths otherwise. With research showing that intergenerational contact can combat loneliness,² this project is helping to meet the Centre's aims of *shaping society* among their older priority group and the next generation.

With the help of these community partnerships and links, word has spread that the Open Door Centre is a place where older people are welcome and respected. On any given day, there are informal groups of older people meeting in the Centre to knit, play mah-jong, or eat lunch together. Young families enjoy the space, too, thanks in part to the pre-school based in the church.

WHY WOULD A CHURCH COMMUNITY CENTRE INCORPORATE AS A CHARITY?

based on experiences at the Open Door Centre

- To maintain financial independence from a parent church and become self-sustaining
- To purchase property to be used for the charitable purposes of the Centre
- To open up secular streams of funding
- To allow gift aid on donations
- To be able to demonstrate transparency in how funds are used.



MARGARET'S STORY



Margaret Dixon has volunteered at the Open Door Centre since it opened in 2017. For Margaret, the Centre “is not just a cafe that welcomes everyone in the community, but a place where Jesus is at the heart of everything we do.” She values the Centre’s outreach to vulnerable people in Barnet, “like the loving arms of Jesus.”

As part of the welcoming and serving team in the café, Margaret has built friendships with other volunteers as they work side-by-side to live out the Centre’s vision. “Volunteering at the Open Door has become a very important part of my life, as it provides me with the opportunity of expressing my faith in practical ways.” The Centre’s gentle approach to evangelism makes sense to her, too. “As Christians it is our hope that we have opportunities to express and to share the hope we have in Jesus with our guests. To be available to listen and, if appropriate and requested, to offer prayer support.”

Final phase of development

The Trust is now moving on to a final phase of development, which will add a first floor to the Centre. The new development will offer amenities for the church's winter night shelter, including showers and laundry facilities. It will include space for the church's food bank, an advice worker and counselling services. Bringing the church's compassion ministries under the same roof as Centre outreach, this development will strengthen the social priorities of the Centre.

Church transforming lives through the Centre

The Open Door Centre is "where the church meets during the week," in the words of David Parry, former Chairman of the John Trotter Trust.³ Like many churches, Christ Church is locked during the week for insurance purposes, following a number of break-ins. The Centre brings the congregation together outside of Sunday services. For the congregation, the café has quickly become what has sometimes been described as a 'third space' in their lives, where they can meet friends, neighbours and others from the church. Encouraged by the church-linked but casual setting, informal conversations about faith often go on. The relaxed environment of the Centre lends itself to café-style Sunday evening services and church discussion groups.

SHIFTING THE BALANCE OF FUNDRAISING

at the Open Door Centre

FIRST PHASE OF BUILDING WORK:

70%

of funds raised from
individual donations and
congregational fundraising

20%

from **grant-making trusts**

10%

from a **bank loan**

FINAL PHASE OF REDEVELOPMENT:

20%

(projected) from
donations/fundraising

80%

(projected) from
grant-making trusts

But the Open Door Centre is at its best when both church and community feel welcome there. As part of its vision for *transforming lives*, the Open Door Centre aims to offer a gentle intersection on the edge of the church, where people can come in on their own terms, with volunteers ready to start conversations with those who want to go deeper. “It’s a kind of soft evangelism,” David says. “You’re 20 yards from salvation.”

Volunteers from the church have bought into the vision of Open Door Centre, taking on shared ownership for the outreach there. The Centre gives volunteers an opportunity for service to church and community, in a setting where some are more comfortable than in traditional church roles. This is “Kingdom work,” David argues, whether volunteers are making coffee or starting conversations. The aim to transform lives is only fully achieved, David says, if the lives of those working and volunteering in the Centre are also transformed by the experience.

Don't think you're ever going to bore the congregation. It's only when people are fed up of hearing the vision statement, that you actually know they've got it.

**- David Parry,
Chairman of the
John Trotter Trust**

Equipped to meet local need during the pandemic

When the pandemic forced the Open Door Centre to close in March 2020, the team stepped up their support of the vulnerable people in their community. Thanks to their experience and assets – a large kitchen, a team of 27 volunteers and a skilled catering manager – the Centre was equipped to meet local need in new ways. By the end of the year, they had delivered more than 2000 community meals to local people in need due to COVID-19. Scaling this back in November, they established new income generation activity by setting up a popular takeaway lunch service.

In December 2020, a free Christmas Market saw seasonal supplies donated to more than 50 families facing difficulties as a result of the pandemic. Fresh food and meat donated by local branches of Waitrose, and new Christmas gifts given by the church and the local community,

set this apart from the average food bank. It was an unexpected opportunity for the Centre team to be with and support their community through the pandemic.

Funding the commercial operation

Three years of operation have made sense of the Open Door Centre's commercial model, in their suburban context. In Sam Wells' terms, the Open Door Centre combines an *instrumental* and a *social* approach to church commerce.⁴ While income has always taken second place to the Centre's vision, no mission can happen there unless the Centre is financially sustainable.

Putting the vision first: The main charitable purpose of the Trust is to increase the impact of Christ Church, Barnet's ministries, for the social, physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing of local people and groups. Together with the vision statement, this purpose has shaped all the church and trustees' commercial decisions, from incorporating as a charity, to fundraising and income generation.

Registering as a Charity: Since a PCC cannot own property, the initial aim of the Trust was to buy the building from the Red Cross. The PCC working group registered as a separate charity as soon as the prospect of buying the building became a real possibility. But there were other good reasons to register. From the start, the aim was that the Centre would be self-sustaining, to avoid becoming entangled with the church's finances or a possible drain on the resources of both the church and the charity. With registration, new funding streams would open up, including secular funding for community projects, and donations could be gift-aided.

Shared mission and vision with the church: As a charity, the Trust would be independent. This risked putting distance between Open Door Centre and Christ Church, Barnet. To counter this, the trustees adopted the church's vision statement as their own. "That was a symbolic way of saying we were about the same business, just in different ways," David remembers. Through an informal agreement, the Trust only appoints

trustees who are members of Christ Church, Barnet, who will share the vision of the church for the Open Door Centre. In the same spirit, the trustees listen to the views of the PCC. For example, the Trust adopted a self-denying ordinance on applying for lottery funding when the PCC raised concerns about the ethical implications.

Approach to fundraising: Henri Nouwen's theology of commerce⁵ has inspired the trustees to lead with a compelling vision. "The money will come if you've got the vision right," argues David, who has a background as a trustee in a number of Christian charities all of which were required to fundraise. Like Nouwen, the trustees see fundraising as ministry that reveals the Kingdom of God.

Knowing the purpose and impact of the Centre has been vital to fundraising, too. Through research into community demographics, trustees have identified sometimes hidden pockets of deprivation. Where new opportunities for service are consistent with charitable objectives, they have worked within the local council's aims for strategic development. As they share evidence of the Centre's impact locally, it supports their applications to grant-making trusts.

Fundraising to buy the Centre: The support of the church was essential to the first stage of fundraising. A high-profile Open Door Appeal was launched in 2010 to raise funds to 'buy back' the former school. The trustees decided not to apply to grant-making trusts until the Trust had a track record of assets and financial support. They relied on individual donations and fundraising events to raise the first £350,000 needed to purchase the building.

Professional fundraising expertise was key to fundraising for building renovation and Centre launch. Initially, a group of congregants gathered to apply to grant-making trusts. This "failed miserably," David remembers. Seeing the need for professional support, the trustees agreed to spend up to £5000, initially, to hire a fundraiser. This made all the difference.

Of course, money spent on fundraising had to be justified. At every

trustee meeting, David reported on progress with grant-making trusts, with a paragraph on money raised versus money spent on fundraising. The ratio never fell below £10 for every £1 spent. For those who were nervous that paying for expertise was a waste of money, the financial facts provided comforting reassurance.

A self-supporting café and centre with a purpose and vision: Today, the café is priced to be self-supporting, while being affordable to a customer base of older people and young families. It should also make some surplus to cover unexpected circumstances. Centre costs have been covered through café income and hire since its first year, bringing in 70% of its total revenue, with the rest from grants directed to the new development. Despite the disruption of closures in 2020, the Centre has received very generous support for its compassionate work during the pandemic – support that shows how much the community and congregation value their Centre.

Although the Centre aims to finance itself independently, the trustees and team continue to put the vision first. The Centre is more than just another café in Barnet. A largely volunteer-run café could easily and unfairly out-compete local outlets. More importantly, they could not recruit volunteers if they were not about outreach to the community. “The purpose of the cafe is to transform lives, build community and shape society,” David says. “If you can’t do that, I think it’s not worth doing it.”

Staffing and Governance: The Centre employs two paid part-time members of staff. A catering manager’s expertise is vital to the café’s commercial success. A team of 27 volunteers - most of whom come from the Christ Church congregation - is responsible for the rest of the Centre’s work. A management committee is chaired by a trustee with Centre volunteers as members. They monitor and review policies agreed by the trustees.

Focusing on grant-making trusts in fundraising for the final phase of development: Now that the Centre has a track record of social impact in the community, it is hoped that the majority of funding for the last

stage of development can come through grant-making trusts. This will prevent donor fatigue among the congregation, who have been faithfully supporting the Centre since 2010. Trusts already supporting the final phase include the Laing Family Trusts, the Bernard Sunley Foundation and the Hadley Trust. Between grants and pledges from these organisations, along with individual donations and fundraising events, more than 40% of the £670,000 needed for the final phase of development has already been raised.

Challenges

Communication has been one of the Centre's most pressing challenges, as an independent entity from its parent church. The trustees have communicated regularly with the congregation about the Open Door Centre as the vehicle of the church's mission, and the shared vision between church and Centre. As they emphasise how the Centre and church can do Kingdom work together, the Centre is blessed with volunteers, prayer and financial support from the congregation. With such a broad vision statement, **achieving the whole vision** has been a challenge for the Centre. *Shaping society* has been the most difficult of the Centre's aims to demonstrate in practice. But there are seeds of this social transformation in their intergenerational work. The final phase of development will offer an opportunity to develop their social role, as the Centre helps to influence society's priorities.



PRINCIPLES OF A SUCCESSFUL CHURCH-LINKED COMMUNITY CENTRE AND CAFÉ

based on experiences at the Open Door Centre

- **Strategic planning begins well in advance** of setting up a centre. The seeds for the Open Door Centre were planted over a decade before it opened, were rooted in existing church ministry, with a vision sharpened through local research and consultation with the congregation.
- **A church community centre needs a clear purpose.** It matters to Christ Church, Barnet that the Open Door Centre is more than just another café. The shared vision with the church keeps the Centre's purpose – as a vehicle for the church's mission – at the heart of their work.
- **Fundraising is missional.** The trustees lead with a strong vision. Rather than asking for money, they have emphasised the vision of the Centre, and how it will extend the church's mission.
- **Fundraising is professional.** Recognise that you are a charity and a business, David advises, and get help from public resources for charity governance. At the Open Door Centre, realising that effective charity fundraising takes expertise, the trustees have sometimes paid for that skill.
- **Churches need to respond to what the community is looking for,** if they want the community to come in. Through research and existing community work, the church and trustees were familiar with the needs of their community. They built the Centre to meet those needs.
- **Shared space makes room for a gentle approach to outreach.** As the church and the community share their space and their lives, the vision to *transform lives* has an impact in both directions.
- **The congregation needs to feel a shared ownership** of a community space in a church. For the congregation of Christ Church, Barnet, the Open Door Centre is a place to meet in the week. This informal church presence is supported by more formal volunteering. A management committee has Centre volunteers as members, so that people involved in the Centre are heard at all levels.
- **An independent community centre will need to maintain links with its parent congregation.** At the Open Door Centre, they have stayed linked to the church by adopting a shared vision, by seeking the views of the congregation, through volunteering, and through prayer.

- **Communication is vital** to keep those links alive. For the Centre, this means emphasising the shared vision with the church and the importance of their outreach in the community. In the generous support of the church and community during the pandemic, the impact of this communication is clear.
- **Good governance is vital, however small a charity.** At the Centre, governance includes trustee induction, training and development for trustees, and regular reviews of trust policies.

Last Word

“There is a verse in [1 Peter], ‘Always be prepared to give an answer for the hope that you have, and do it with sensitivity and courtesy.’ And that to me epitomises what we are trying to do in the Open Door, just by being there... The community comes on its own terms. And we have to then be able to respond in the light of that.”

- **David Parry**

¹ Department for Communities and Local Government, *Towards Lifetime Neighbourhoods: Designing Sustainable Communities for All* (2007). Available online: <https://ilcuk.org.uk/>

² Age UK, *Loneliness and Isolation Evidence Review* (2015).

Available online at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/>.

³ David stepped down in 2021, after 12 years as Chairman.

⁴ S. Wells, *A Future that's Bigger than the Past: Catalysing Kingdom Communities* (London: Canterbury Press, 2019).

⁵ H. Nouwen, *A Spirituality of Fundraising* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2011).

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London

London

T H E S O C I A L E N T E R P R I S E
K E E P I N G A C H U R C H A T
T H E C E N T R E O F T H E
C O M M U N I T Y

■

THE SHERRIFF CENTRE & ST JAMES', WEST HAMPSTEAD

■

The social enterprise keeping a church at the centre of the community

We're

not just a typical
business. For us,
reputation is really
important.

JANE EDWARDS



WELCOMING PEOPLE
EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK

The Sherriff Centre and St James'

It all began with a Twitter exchange. That was where Fr Andrew Foreshew-Cain heard that the West Hampstead Post Office needed a new venue, and offered the church. After many years as a local vicar, Fr Andrew knew the Post Office was vital to community life in the residential north London suburb. But this was a commercial opportunity for the church, too. Facing out into the town on the corner of Sherriff Road, St James' has long had a visible presence in West Hampstead, but in 2012 the church building was closed to the community for most of the week. A social enterprise based around the Post Office could turn the church into a space open for everyone – improving local quality of life, creating opportunities for mission, and contributing to expensive upkeep of the building.

Open for business since 2014, the Sherriff Centre is there for the local community. A debt advice service is the charitable arm of this social enterprise. A soft play area and café bring in people who would rarely enter a church otherwise. And the Centre has kept the West Hampstead Post Office alive for the community for the past six years. No longer open only on Sundays, St James' Church is now at the vibrant heart of West Hampstead, welcoming people every day of the week.

Making a success of the Sherriff Centre

Through talks with the Post Office, a vision to use the building as a social enterprise emerged. The Sherriff Centre was set up as a charity, with a charitable purpose to provide debt advice – a local need identified by the church. The initial plan was for three trading subsidiaries to sit under the charity: the Sanctuary Café with the Hullabaloo soft play centre, the Post Office, and a gift shop. Fr Andrew recognised that it would take business expertise to turn this vision for a commercial centre into a reality. He brought in Jane Edwards, who had business and charity project management experience, to write the business plan. As the community potential of the partnership was recognised by funding bodies, £600,000 was raised through grants from the Post Office, the local authority and charitable trusts.

We're not just a typical business. For us, reputation is really important.

- Jane Edwards

THE SHERRIFF CENTRE BUSINESS STRUCTURE

THE SHERRIFF CENTRE

is a charity with two trading subsidiaries beneath it. Each is a separate business limited by guarantee, so that the PCC is not financially liable for either. A Centre Director has strategic oversight.

Charitable purposes:

- Providing free and impartial debt advice for the community, via a Debt Advisor employed for 20 hours per week
- Improving local quality of life
- Offering an accessible and welcoming community venue where residents can meet and socialise.

THE SANCTUARY COFFEE SHOP

One of two centre businesses, it includes the Hullabaloo soft play centre. The Vicar is Director. A Manager runs day-to-day operations.

WEST HAMPSTEAD POST OFFICE

The business is run under contract with the Post Office, with the Vicar as Post-Master. Employees are employed by the Sherriff Centre.

The Charity has financial obligations to the parish, including 50% of church building upkeep costs. The Vicar and Church Wardens are Charity Trustees.

From the start, the aim was that all profits would go back into the Debt Advice Service. But profits were limited in the first five years of operation, and the advice work was funded by charitable grants. By the time new incumbent Fr Robert Thompson arrived in 2018, the gift shop was a particular problem. It supported local artists and makers, but the venture was a drain on the other businesses. The café was losing money, too. With an eye on profits, Fr Robert and Jane – now Centre Director – set out to restructure the business. They closed the gift shop and streamlined the coffee shop, buying in sandwiches through a partnership with the local bakery. Once the Sherriff Centre could focus on the more profitable Post Office and Hullabaloo soft play centre, the business was turned around. They made £10,000 profit in the first year of restructure.

You provide excellent advice, guidance and support. I am not sure what I would have done without your service, as other advice agencies are overly stretched. It is brilliant that you're so centrally located. Keep up the great work – it is much appreciated and well needed in times of great change and uncertainty.

A social enterprise for community benefit

Today, St Mary's, Kilburn and St James', West Hampstead are a joint parish – and they have far more impact in the community through the Sheriff Centre than they ever did without it. The church building has been transformed into a reordered, welcoming space, with disabled access and modern facilities. With no other soft play in the area, Hullabaloo and the Sanctuary Café offer a unique service to local families and children's groups. As these make the most of passing footfall, they allow the church to support community activities. And, most importantly, the commercial activities support a valued Debt Advice Service, along with other charitable outreach to the community.

Debt advice was always at the heart of the vision for the Sherriff Centre, after the closure of a local CAB service. Advisor Paul is now employed at the Sherriff Centre 20 hours a week. Because he is funded by grants and Centre profits, he can deliver the Centre's vision to give clients the time and support that they need. His outreach work in the community allows the service to reach isolated and at-risk people at home.

- **Feedback from
Camden Council
Housing Support
Services Officer**

I was so desperate and sad with too much problems in my soul, then I found a number for [debt advice] and Paul patiently and kindly helped me to sort out [my] problem. I am very sure when we have problems God sends us his angels. God bless you all.

- **KH (from a handwritten note from a Debt Advice client)**

Paul has built close links with other services, helping the Debt Advice Service to react quickly when people are in crisis. He is partly based at Brent Hubs Kilburn, sitting side-by-side with council staff at this innovative walk-in centre, where he can work with statutory services to get people the help they need. The Debt Advice Service has caught the eye of officers at Camden Council, who have asked Paul to advise them on partnership working. He delivers training sessions for Brent Council, too. “He’s shaping services as well,” reflects Jane Edwards.

The local impact of the Debt Advice Service has led to increased funding – over £29,500 in 2019, allowing an increase in advice hours. Plans for 2020 envisaged that the service would be fully funded by Centre profits. Although this goal was interrupted by the costs of Covid, the increase in grants is helping them to meet more local need every year.

Opening the church for evening concerts in partnership

Now that the Sherriff Centre is a familiar presence in West Hampstead, they are diversifying into evening events. Working in partnership with gig promoter Sofar Sounds, they have been able to turn the church space into an intimate and unique live music venue. And a successful £50,000 grant application to the National Lottery Culture Recovery Fund is allowing the Centre to host their own evening concerts, supported by a bar, with Fr Robert as licensee.

As the Centre brings nightlife to West Hampstead, they can do more to keep the centre commercially viable and meet their charitable aims. “It’s adding another sustainable income stream for us,” Jane reflects, “for us to build on to what we already do. It’s supporting the building, it’s supporting the charity. It’s all one, really.” When the building can safely reopen after pandemic lockdowns, an event season will bring people into the church every Saturday night.

An ethical and sustainable business

Ethical business matters to the Sherriff Centre, as a social enterprise based in a church building. The team ask ethical questions with every new venture. Does it fit their values? Does it meet their charitable aims? Is it appropriate in a church? In Sam Wells' terms, while the Sheriff Centre is a social enterprise, it also aims to run as an exemplary business.¹

This sense of ethical responsibility to the community has had a commercial impact at the Centre. "We're viewed very much as a community resource," Jane says. After Fr Robert was asked whether the £5 entrance fee to Hullabaloo was fair, the team began to think about Centre access for poorer families. Now, a Suspended Hullabaloo scheme encourages those who can pay more to gift a Hullabaloo entry fee, so that families who cannot pay can benefit. On Free Play Fridays, a paid bar keeps Hullabaloo free for all. And on Tuesday nights, another free play session is aimed at children with special needs. In an area where disadvantaged children are not well served, these schemes help meet charitable aims to improve local quality of life and keep the Centre accessible to all.

Ethical business practices are particularly important in a church-hosted business, Fr Robert says. During the business restructure, his priority was to pay all employees the London living wage. An increasing focus on eco-theology at St James' is leading the Centre team to think about the environmental sustainability of the business, from their use of plastic to the building's energy consumption. The ethics of Centre demographics are the next issue on their agenda. The Sherriff Centre is mainly used by white, affluent people, but they are a black majority parish, and there are local pockets of deprivation. The Centre team are working to reach out consciously to a wider community, from gigs to Black Lives Matter events. They are considering policies to make sure congregants can afford to use the Centre, too, such as discount cards.

HOW DOES THE COMMERCIAL CENTRE IMPACT ST JAMES' CHURCH?

THE NEGATIVES

The Centre physically dominates the sanctuary space.

The Post Office counter is a permanent fixture – other facilities move out of the way for Sunday worship. The front of the church is kept free of Centre furniture, maintained as a worship space.

The Centre affects flexibility of services in the church, operating 6 days a week and some evenings.

With children's activities and a café, the Centre can be noisy. There is no longer a quiet space in the church, if people want to pray during the week. There are plans to soundproof the Lady Chapel to compensate.

THE POSITIVES

A once-underused church space is now at the heart of community life. It brings local people into their parish church, building connections. Many are delighted to see evidence of church life in the midst of commercial West Hampstead.

The Centre allows St James' to do more in local outreach. The church's heart for the community is [clear] as they retain the Post Office, offer debt advice, help address food poverty through the Growth Project, and bring much-needed commercial services to local families and children.

There is significant financial benefit for the church. The business pays for utilities and insurance, and covers 50% of church maintenance and building costs. The Centre has installed new facilities and disabled access. Future development plans will allow for more church hire, bringing income for the church.

Church community outreach through a commercial centre

Commercial activities in a church can bring people in to experience parish life. And at St James', church life has a strong social justice focus. Fr Robert recalls a recent concert that brought in 200 guests. A banner was on display, celebrating the church's LGBTQIA-affirming Open Table group. The inclusive message of the banner had a profound impact for

The guy who was introducing [the gig] was gay, brought up as a Catholic. And he said, "This has reduced me to tears, that there's a banner here which says that LGBTQIA people are welcome in the church".

- **Fr Robert Thompson**

a gay man attending the gig. The experience showed Fr Robert how simple information about the church in the Centre could make the most of this bridge into the community. The Centre is allowing the parish to reach out in more conscious ways, too. Black History Month events are a tradition at St Mary's, Kilburn, celebrating the parish's black majority congregations, but the Sherriff Centre allows them to bring similar events out into the community.² As Fr Robert explains, "That is the Sheriff Centre putting on stuff that we couldn't do as a parish, that reflects the values of what we want as a parish, because we have a big commitment to race issues and to gender and sexuality issues."

The Centre's ethical business values grow out of a sense of responsibility to the community. And through the Centre's local links and partnerships, the church can reach the community in new ways. Their new Growth Project is making the most of local Covid response funding, with a £5000 council grant to help tackle food poverty. Set up in the style of an old-fashioned greengrocer's, this community fridge aims to help local people living in poverty to access fresh, healthy food. The project is reducing food waste locally, too, through partnerships with a local bakery and Marks and Spencer branch. Taking over three tables, the project cuts down on space in the Centre that could be used for commercial activity, but it makes sense for the Sherriff Centre and their charitable aims. In a year where Centre services have been forced to close due to pandemic measures, the Growth Project has been vital for their local reputation. "I think 2020 has proved that it's extremely important, how we're viewed by the community," Jane reflects.

Impacting the church as the church impacts the community

There is no denying that commercial activity in a church building can impact church life. At St James', church services can only take place on Sunday mornings, and it can be noisy for visitors coming into the church to pray. But there are significant benefits for the church, not least a financial benefit – the Centre covers 50% of building upkeep costs, thanks to an agreement set out by the PCC at the beginning of the partnership. Both Fr Andrew and Fr Robert have drawn a line between church's worship space and the Centre's commercial facilities, emphasising the importance of sacred space. But it can take work to maintain the sense of St James' as a living church.

And yet, the overwhelming response Jane hears from church and community is that the Centre is positive for both. Congregants and customers alike are comforted by seeing life in the church every day. The visible presence of the church in the midst of the community is a missional opportunity in itself – they see evidence of parish life and worship while they stand in the queue for the Post Office, and they are often curious about the church. As part of this outreach, the Centre keeps customers informed of the Centre's charitable work with the church. "People love the story of what we do," Jane says, "that we're not for profit, and we run other charitable services as well." And when customers offer their support, church mission can coalesce into community partnerships.

The future of St. James' and the Centre are completely interdependent. If the businesses didn't exist, the church would close. If the church didn't exist, the business couldn't exist. That is the reality.

**- Fr Robert Thompson,
Vicar**

Everything comes back to the ability to be flexible and adaptable.

- **Jane Edwards**

Challenges

Business impact on church life has been an issue, at times, at the Sherriff Centre. When Fr Robert arrived, an interregnum had led to governance issues at the Centre. There have been tensions around the way the Centre dominates the church space, and how it is used by a markedly different demographic from the congregation. Clergy work with the Centre team and PCC to build a closer partnership between the church and the Sherriff Centre. In the churches, Fr Robert emphasises the Centre's importance to the mission and life of the parish. It has not been easy, he says, but it has been worthwhile for the churches – and the community.

Communication between church and centre has been vital to this improving partnership. The Centre manager attends PCC meetings and standing committees, giving the Centre an insight into church life. "It's not just about me as the vicar meeting with her – it is about the parish," Fr Robert reflects. "Parishioners' lives are really important." The more the Centre team understands the parish's aims for the Centre, the better they are equipped to participate in the churches' mission in the community.

Turning around a struggling business was a more immediate trading challenge. It meant streamlining, as they closed a gift shop that was a drain on the other businesses. In a centre with a large customer base of families and children, the gift shop seemed like a good fit. But it became an extension of the play area for visiting children, leading to damage, and it was not turning over the volumes needed to make a profit. "We couldn't do it well enough to justify it," Jane remembers. In restructuring, the team focused on the most profitable elements of the business – Hullabaloo and the Post Office. It was the right decision.

PRINCIPLES OF A SUCCESSFUL COMMERCIAL CENTRE IN A CHURCH BUILDING

*based on experiences at the Sherriff Centre and St James',
West Hampstead*

A church commercial centre is a business, and strategic expertise is often crucial to success. At the Sherriff Centre, an expert team developed the diverse range of services. Brought on board to write the business plan, Jane has stayed with them as Centre Director. Paul has shaped the Debt Advice Service. When clergy ask Jane how they can make a success of a church-linked commercial centre, she recommends finding people with the right skills to help a unique business to succeed.

Know your customers and the purpose of your business. “Be very clear on what you are trying to do and what your customer base is going to be,” Jane advises. At the Sherriff Centre, Hullabaloo is their unique selling point – there are other cafés in the area, but no other soft play. They aim to make this facility work the whole community, through links with local groups, subsidised play sessions, and hire for children’s parties.

A community business needs to work for the community. The Sherriff Centre’s Debt Advice Service creates goodwill locally. They keep customers informed about all the charitable services supported by the social enterprise, finding ways to help customers to get involved. And they are always looking out for new ways to serve their community.

Ethical business principles matter, in a church-linked social enterprise. The Sherriff Centre team consider whether new ventures

are appropriate in a church. Charitable aims give them a responsibility to their community, lived out in the way they run commercial activity – such as making Hullabaloo more accessible to everyone – and in their compassionate local outreach.

Working in partnerships, churches can do more in their

neighbourhoods. The partnership with the Post Office has given the business a customer-facing focus. It opened up more opportunities for grants to reorder the building. The high-profile partnership created local publicity around the community impact of the business. And the Post Office brought in customers to the new Centre from launch day.

To succeed, social enterprises may need to do more with less. The Sherriff Centre recognised when they could not make a success of the gift shop, even though it seemed to make sense in a child-friendly venue. They restructured, focusing on what they did well. But they continue to try new income streams, most recently through Sofar Sounds. They are keen to give ideas a go, knowing they can learn more about customer demand even through less successful projects.

A congregation must support a church-linked business. Operating alongside the church has sometimes been a challenge for the Sherriff Centre. They aim to keep sacred space separate from commercial space. Communication between churches and Centre is vital. St James' and the Sherriff Centre know they are interdependent, and Fr Robert emphasises the Centre's benefits to the parish.

Last Word

The Sherriff Centre is a bridge between church and the local community, welcoming people into the church building every day. As local customers live their daily lives in the church – as they post a parcel or their children play – they are surrounded by signs of a living, worshipping church. And as the church impacts the area through ethical commerce, so the business supports the church. It is a model of the Kingdom that puts the church back at the heart of community life.

Most people come in and say, “Wow, this is amazing.” And it is still a church. There are important services here, and the colours change, and the Nativity is set up. People who are really not interested in the religious side of things are interested in why things happen that way.

- Jane Edwards





¹ S. Wells, *A Future that's Bigger than the Past: Catalysing Kingdom Communities* (London: Canterbury Press, 2019).

² Black History Month events continued to be held via St Mary's Kilburn in 2020, where they could host live streamed events despite pandemic measures, but plans for future years include events at the Sherriff Centre.

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Derby

Derby

B R I N G I N G T H E
C O M M U N I T Y
T O G E T H E R

■

ST MARTIN'S METHODIST CHURCH

■

What

was the good of a lovely, refurbished building if we didn't have a vision as to how we were going to use it to build God's kingdom?



MAIRI RADCLIFFE

Minister

A VIBRANT COMMUNITY HUB

St Martin's Methodist Church and Community Centre, Allenton

In 2012, a Methodist congregation in a deprived suburb of Derby were praying to be a blessing to their community. It was difficult to see how, when their building was plagued with vandalism and rarely open during the week. With steel-reinforced windows and locked gates, the run-down building looked more oppressive than welcoming. And yet, as a church at the centre of the community, they could see that their situation was part of a broader issue of local deprivation.¹ Instead of a visible sign of the problem, could the church be part of the solution?

At the same time, a Big Local grant of a million pounds was presenting Allenton with a challenge. What sounded like a large sum of money would only be released at a rate of £100,000 per year. Without some out-of-the-box thinking, this would not go far in meeting the most pressing local need – a centre to bring the community together.

The church saw an opportunity. Their building, standing empty for most of the week, was one half of the answer. With growing support from Allenton, it could become a centre for community cohesion. Generosity bred generosity, and soon local contractors were offering their time to renovate the church through corporate volunteering. Along the way, other partners joined the project with the church – an opportunity for outreach in itself.

Eighteen months of renovation work later, the church has now become a vibrant community hub. A training café is at the heart of the centre, run in partnership with a CIC that supports people with learning disabilities. With other partnerships, the café has created new opportunities for sustainable church hire and outreach. Transformed by the community, for the community, the new space is allowing St Martin's to reach more of the people around them than ever before.

BIG LOCAL AND ST MARTIN'S CHURCH

A National Lottery programme, Big Local aimed to bring lasting change to 150 deprived areas. Funding empowered communities to work together, drawing on their own assets.

£200 million total funding

£1 MILLION per area

Released over **10 YEARS**

£116,000 of Allenton's funding has been given to the church – far more than the £70,000 promised – as the community has seen how much St Martin's has achieved in partnership.

Turning a church into a centre for the community

It was a St Martin's congregant who first suggested that the community could work together with the church to make Big Local funding go further. Funders had stipulated that the money was to be used by local people, for local people. Coming together to form the Allenton Big Local Partnership Group, leaders in the community consulted on how to spend the funding. Top of a list of identified concerns was that Allenton had no community meeting space. But with only £100,000 per year available, the question was how to build this space in a cost-effective way.

As a visible Allenton church, St Martin's was well placed to collaborate with local organisations to stretch the pot of money a little further. Here, the church encountered their first stumbling block – they had to persuade Allenton that their building was worth investing in. The church had a reputation for isolation, more than for being at the centre of the community. There was concern that the small congregation would not survive in the long term. And to complicate matters more, the Methodist Church would still own the church building after Big Local funding paid for renovation. Clergy and congregation would need to build local relationships of trust to turn the church's image around, showing the partnership group that they were committed to the community.

The Methodist Church took practical steps to show that the funding was safe with them. The Derby Methodist Circuit set aside funds to employ someone to take on responsibility for the development project, and Mairi Radcliffe joined the church. With the support of community development officer Carl Willis, an agreement was written that the partnership group could support. If the church folded in the next 10 years, the Methodist Church would pay a proportion of the money back to the community.

One early partnership made all the difference. The local social housing organisation offered pro bono labour to stretch the limited budget, supported by Carl Willis. They helped the church to tap into other contractors' corporate responsibility programmes and find more volunteers for the building work. Suddenly, the partnership group could see how Allenton could together make the redevelopment a reality. As Allenton began to see what St Martin's could do with a comparatively small amount of money, local confidence in the church grew. Architects, builders and tradespeople saw other contractors volunteering time or donating materials at cost, and asked how they could help. "*We saw how generosity breeds generosity,*" Mairi says. It took 18 months – longer than if the church had paid for the building work – but by the end, an estimated £1 million development was completed for just £232,000. Delighted with the results, Allenton Big Local Partnership Group eventually gave the church £116,000 from the funding. Other small community grants and funding from the Methodist Church made up the difference.

The space has now been transformed into a welcoming, busy hub for Allenton. Princess Anne opened the redeveloped building in February 2019. The media-friendly launch was catered by the centre's new training café – their first thriving partnership. As it opens up new prospects for church hire and local collaboration, the centre not only supports itself financially, but it also helps the church reach the people around them. It is even allowing the church to do more for people in crisis as a result of the pandemic.

Radical hospitality in sustainable partnerships

The church's faithful vision for the building has brought new life to both church and community. For Mairi, the church's work in the centre is incarnational mission. Her hope is that the church is a place where people are "*loved into the Kingdom*" whenever they use the redeveloped building. As a centre for the community, it should be a space where local people feel valued.

At St Martin's, partnership is outreach in itself. From the beginning, it was clear that the church would need partnerships to make the community centre work. Even with a redeveloped building, the church could not run the centre alone – their small congregation meant they had no volunteer capacity to run the centre. For Mairi, the solution came through the relationships she was building in the community. She made the most of 18 months of preparation time while building work was going on, attending community meetings and getting to know Allenton's people and groups. She found local organisations with a social ethos that the church could support. Together, they put together partnership agreements that worked for both sides. As Mairi and the church chose organisations to partner with, their mission came first – to use the centre to show God's Kingdom at work.

The missional partnership approach has been a success for church and partners alike. Before Covid measures hit, the church was working in partnerships with groups from across the community. At the heart of the centre is the Chatterbox Café, run as a training café by STEPS Derby, a small organisation working with service users with learning disabilities. The café has been vital to bringing in church hire, open to serve food and drinks during conferences and meetings. The Night Bus is a late-night weekend café run by mental health charity HeadHigh, offering a safe place for people with mental health problems at night. Community groups use the centre, too, with regular hires from a drama club, a group for the elderly, a bereavement support group, and activities for young families.

As the church's incarnational mission drives their offering to the community, their commercial sustainability becomes inseparable from

outreach – in everything from their choices of organisations to partner with, to their priorities for church hire. As a result, the community centre at St Martin's is more a social business than an instrumental one, in Sam Wells' terms.² While partnership agreements and community hire help to keep the church building sustainable, their incarnational mission is their priority. *"It's reflecting to people what God is like,"* Mairi says. *"We use the words 'extravagant generosity' and 'radical hospitality.'"*

The STEPS training café partnership

Rachel Hill and Jayne Brett were introduced to St Martin's by Carl Willis, at the beginning of the redevelopment project. They were interested in setting up a training organisation for people with learning disabilities in Derby, and Carl saw the potential for a partnership in the planned church development. If a training café could cover its basic costs, it could attract the community to the new centre. Incorporating as a CIC, STEPS moved into an office in the church during building work in 2018, while they trained service users at Allenton Big Local coffee mornings. Once the centre opened, STEPS took over the Chatterbox Café, eventually settling on core opening hours from 9.30 till 2 on weekdays.

It's fantastic for a church of this size... that we have a vibrant cafe in our building that anybody can use, but we don't have the hassle of running it.

- **Mairi Radcliffe**

Beginning with just two service users, they now train 11 in the café.

The Chatterbox Café's social ethos fits well with the aims of the church for the community centre. As a training café, they offer opportunities for service users to gain experience, preparing them for future work opportunities by developing a range of skills, from customer service to cooking. The church set out a licence agreement that worked for both the church and STEPS, helping them to keep the costs of a training café low. The kitchen and café space are licenced from the church for the morning operating hours, rather than leased, for a low rental price of about £350 a month. While the café makes no profit, a small café income and contributions from service users cover the rent. In turn, the café's

presence avoids the need for the church to take on employment issues. STEPS cover church cleaning costs and bills for their operating hours, too. Their presence in the building makes it much easier to keep the church open during the day. *“We need them and they need us,”* Mairi says.

The church has an informal open book agreement with STEPS. This means that the rent can be altered if circumstances change, on either the café or the church side. During the pandemic, the flexible agreement has helped the café to keep operating. For the church, it has given them much-needed income while room hire has paused. *“It’s partnership working at it’s best,”* Jayne says. *“We’re here as a community.”*

This centre is a real hub – for the adults with learning difficulties, for the elderly community, for the younger community. There’s lots of services going on, which all work together well. That’s a thriving community. That’s when you really can see things working.

- Rachel Hill, STEPS

Church and café are working together on projects for community benefit. The partnership has made the church’s recent Winter Food Programme possible. There are joint plans for an outdoor gym in the church garden for people with learning disabilities. And as the Chatterbox Cafe has begun to notice customers who need support with healthy eating, they are talking to Derby City Council about setting up community cooking lessons in the centre.

The locally well-regarded training café is a success for trainees, for the church, and for the community. STEPS and the church have learned together what the Allenton community needs from a café. Finding that young people prefer high street venues, they have refined operating hours around the needs of families and an older clientele. The trainees have been able to build positive relationships simply by being with the community. STEPS have seen attitudes change positively towards the service users – and towards learning disabilities. *“There’s still quite a stigma,”* Rachel says. *“I think it’s really good for them to be visible in the community.”*

But it is not just the café providers who benefit from the arrangement. The partnership makes a vibrant café possible in a church with a congregation of only about 30. As the café brings footfall to the

building, the centre has become a venue that groups from across the community want to use and hire. The café encourages people to cross the threshold of the church. "So many people say, 'Oh, this is not like a church café,'" Mairi says. "They're much more likely to come back. It reduces the stigma, the baggage that so many people have of churches."

A church pandemic response in community partnership

This challenging time has been a strain on financially insecure Allenton. The church's pandemic response has been more effective because of their partnerships, especially with the café. When they saw a need for support among the town's isolated elderly community, the church approached local organisations with plans for a Winter Food Programme. St Martin's planned to organise the project, using their own volunteers for delivery. While café operation was limited by lockdown regulations, it was an ideal opportunity to let STEPS take care of the cooking. All they needed was funding.

The response delighted the church. A local community group initially offered seven weeks' worth of funding for the Winter Food Project, providing a weekly hot meal to 40 local older people, along with much-needed social support. And

FUNDING STEPS AND THE CHATTERBOX CAFÉ

- Service users pay for training from their direct payments
- Minimal café income
- The café covers its own costs – three staff, bills and church cleaning costs

DIRECT AND INDIRECT INCOME FOR THE CHURCH

The church makes:

- About **£350** a month in café rent
- Up to **£2500** a month from room hire, made more attractive by café catering and building support

Funding for community meals has come from Allenton Big Local, Derby Rotary, the Council Neighbourhood Board and Asda.

when the community saw the success of the project, it created more opportunities for St Martin's and STEPS to apply for funding together – from the Council Neighbourhood Board, Derby Rotary Club and Asda. The project, which has been running since November 2020, is currently funded till the end of April 2021. Through projects like this, the community centre has given the church new insights into how to work with those around them, and new avenues for outreach in partnership.

Extravagant generosity between church and community

Among Allenton's struggling families and others living in poverty, there was some suspicion of the church's extravagant generosity, at first. But for St Martin's, radical hospitality means a longstanding commitment to the Derby suburb. "We are in it for the long run," says Mairi, who has seen the fruits of long-term partnerships after just a few years. The centre continues to give the church opportunities to bridge into the community – from requests to take funerals, to the local people who ask to discuss spiritual matters over coffee. And as the world around the church changes, the centre allows the church to reach out in new ways to meet new needs.

The church is now thinking about how to make the most of their growing local visibility. They have rebranded all the family activities at the church with the name Divine. A family Sunday afternoon service called Divine Worship is bringing in new people – one more result of the church's improving profile in the community. With the break from services forced by the pandemic, the church has an opportunity to consider how to respond missionally to their changing role in the community.

For some elderly folks it became (and continues to be) the highlight of their week. It gave St Martin's the chance to reflect in a tangible way the love and care of God and establish precious relationships with this group of people.

- **Mairi Radcliffe**

Income and opportunities from community hire

Room hire generates significant income from the church, thanks to the centre and the café. Mairi encourages the local council and community

groups to use the church and centre for meetings and events. The church can offer lower room hire rates than any other local venue, in a well-maintained community space. The church space and a meeting room can be hired at any time, and the café space is available for afternoon and evening hire.

The café is crucial to successful church hire. Indirectly, it enhances the building and helps keep it open. And STEPS can offer event catering as part of a complete hire package. This works well for the church, which is now popular as a local commercial venue. The STEPS service users benefit from the range of catering experience, too.

For the café providers, communication with partners is the key to making this arrangement work. As long as the café is the church's sole service for catering, visitors use it. "If the church puts on an event with free food, then the cafe will be empty," says Jayne. She advises churches to make the most of their partnerships in community hire. It can work for both sides.

Challenges

Building relationships in the community was the first challenge facing St Martin's. From the start, they understood that trust can take time to build. Mairi saw the 18 months of redevelopment not as a delay, but as a gift of time. She used that time to get to know the community. This meant recognising that Allenton's people were assets, not barriers, to what the church wanted to do. Their partnership success story is the result of that relational approach.

Pandemic measures have limited both the church and the community centre. Methodist Church rules required the whole building to close during the first lockdown. For small community groups wanting to return to the centre, risk assessment paperwork has sometimes been too difficult. For the café, which managed to open 3 days a week before the second Covid peak, regulations limited what the volunteers could do. But they are turning challenges into opportunities, making the most of funding to do more in the community.

PRINCIPLES OF RUNNING A CHURCH AND CENTRE FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY

At St Martin's, **they have taken opportunities to do something new in their community.**

The congregation prayed for a vision for their building to be a blessing locally, but they also grasped a concrete opportunity when Allenton was granted Big Local funding. They continue to find new ways to use their centre, facilities and partnerships in outreach, as they respond to new local needs.

They get to know their community, location and context. Corporate volunteering kept renovation costs low, but Mairi suspects that this could only work in an area of deprivation. Consultation showed that a community centre was a local need – there will be different needs in other areas. Churches need to get to know their own communities before launching commercial projects.

They are committed to their community for the long term. This made a difference at the early stages of the project, when they were introduced to the right partners to help make the project happen. It continues to make a difference now, as they build relationships in the community, and see the fruits of these relationships of trust.

They work with partners who share their ethos and vision. The amount of money they have for outreach is limited, but they partner effectively with community groups and businesses to meet more community needs. Through groups that use the centre, the church reaches out to Allenton. Mairi thinks that churches reluctant to partner with secular organisations may miss out on opportunities to do more in their communities. “It works in our context.”

They know the purpose of their café. The training café was never intended to make a direct profit for the church. Instead, the café keeps the building open, brings people into the centre, and adds value to church room hire. The partnership works through an agreement based on trust. The café has been an asset to St Martin's in times of crisis, helping them to do more for local people.

Last Word

The partnership model at St Martin's is one way that a church with limited resources can make a success of a café and community centre. Partnering with those who share their ethos, if not their faith, the church has become a welcoming, missional hub. Working with local groups, the church shares radical hospitality with Allenton – not just by doing things for the community, but by being with them.

"[Partnership] has worked amazingly well. It's not rocket science. But I don't think it happens very often."

- **Mairi Radcliffe**



¹ Allenton is in the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, *English Indices of Deprivation* (2019). Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

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Birmingham

Birmingham

U N L O C K I N G
P O T E N T I A L
T H R O U G H
E M P L O Y M E N T



JERICHO



Eventually

we decided that the way to help some of the folks overcome their barriers to employment and get some work history was to start businesses ourselves

RICHARD BEARD,
Chief Executive, Jericho



Jericho

Jericho's humble beginnings were in a small Baptist church in Balsall Heath, an area then notorious as Birmingham's red light district. Here, outreach to those on the margins would become a job club, helping local people overcome their barriers to finding and keeping a job – substance abuse, histories of offending, the cycle of long-term unemployment, and more.

Nearly 30 years later, Jericho is changing lives through social enterprise. Jericho's social enterprises are as diverse as their clients, with a wood reclamation yard, a construction company, a reuse and recycling project, and more. As these businesses create employment and training opportunities, Jericho's programmes support hundreds of people into work every year.

For clients, Jericho is the beginning of their success story, not the end. This is stepping-stone employment. Jericho aims to walk with people through their journeys into work, getting them ready to move on into mainstream employment. And as Jericho shares 30 years of learning with other church and community job clubs, more lives are being changed through social enterprise.

A church job club to help tackle local social issues

Jericho's roots go back to the 1980s, when Balsall Heath was notorious for street and window prostitution, with high levels of crime and other social problems. "It was the drug capital of Birmingham," says Richard Beard, Chief Executive of the Jericho Foundation. Into this challenging situation came Christine Parkinson, a Baptist Urban Missioner with a heart for those on the margins. She was based at small local church Edward Road Baptist Church. Christine worked with the pastor on practical outreach to help tackle the social issues in the area. They began with a drop-in centre, opening the church for a cup of tea and support for people in prostitution and the drug trade.

But being with people can change everything. Christine and the church began to ask people what would help. How could the church do more

to help people escape cycles of crime, poverty and deprivation?

An employment service could make a real difference to lives in the community, they realised. If people could be helped into work, they could escape the circumstances that had led them to crime. The drop-in centre gradually developed into a job club. In 1993 they registered as a charity, applying for local authority and grant funding to support the work.

Stepping-stone employment through social enterprise

The job club, now called Jericho, was bringing in more people seeking a way out of their circumstances through work. But those who came to the project were meeting with the same insurmountable problem. They were stuck in an unemployment trap. “It’s really hard to get a job if you’ve never had a job,” Richard explains. “This kept coming up again and again – we’d have really capable, gifted people coming to our job club, but we couldn’t get them into mainstream employment because they didn’t have the right track record.” It was a systemic problem that Jericho could not solve with simple advice. They began trying to make connections with local businesses, asking them to take their clients on job placements. But employers were often reluctant, given clients’ difficult backgrounds. “It was quite a hard sell,” Richard says.

For Jericho, the answer was to start a social enterprise themselves, so that they could provide short-term employment. The aim was to offer more than jobs alone. Many of their clients were struggling as much with keeping jobs as finding them. Jericho hoped to offer mentoring and guidance that their clients could not find in the mainstream job market. This model could give people both the experience and the support they would need to move on to other work. With the help of European grant money, Jericho launched as a community business in 1993 – “before anybody had invented the term ‘social enterprise,’” Richard remembers.

Today Jericho operates as a CIC social enterprise, based on the same road as the church where Christine Parkinson first imagined how employment could change lives. Balsall Heath is no longer Birmingham’s red light district. But poverty continues to create an unemployment

JERICHO:

THE VISION AND THE MODEL

- Established 1993
- Roots in a church job club
- Built on Christian values
- Jericho works with people with lived experience of:
 - addiction*
 - mental ill health*
 - learning disability*
 - modern slavery*
 - criminal records*
 - youth unemployment*
 - educational struggles*

7 social enterprises

Over **8,000** people supported to gain skills and employment

65% of their beneficiaries progressed to positive outcomes in 2019 –

92% of apprentices.

THE MODEL: Offering supported employment in businesses that produce excellent goods and services.

THE MISSION: Jericho supports individuals to overcome barriers and become fulfilled, skilled and employed.

THE VISION: Customers who buy from Jericho's social enterprises know they are making a difference. The more sustainable the businesses, the more Jericho can change lives.

trap for many in the area. “They can’t realise their potential because nobody will give them their first break,” Richard says. Jericho works to release that trap, helping people to change their own lives and escape their circumstances through employment.

Jericho’s social enterprises

Since then, 14 different social enterprises have run under Jericho’s banner. Some have been successful in the longer term – others have not. But, nearly 30 years on, Jericho has a clearer idea of what works and what doesn’t. With a mission statement to “support individuals to overcome barriers and become fulfilled, skilled and employed,” today they are changing lives through six social enterprises.

The Reusers and Wood Shack are two examples of Jericho’s supported employment model in action. The Reusers’ warehouse is located in Sutton Coldfield, a more affluent part of Birmingham. Jericho spotted an opportunity when they noticed people throwing away serviceable household items. Taking over a derelict building close to the recycling centre, they aimed to rescue items from the tip, upcycle them and sell them. The warehouse is now a valued local fixture, where the people of Sutton Coldfield bring potentially saleable items on the way to the recycling centre. Customers come to rummage for antiques, bric-a-brac, household goods and more. For more than 40 people working at the retail warehouse at any one time, the Reusers provides an opportunity for training and employment experience.

Next door, Wood Shack reclaims and reuses construction wood, providing a sustainable alternative to landfill. They collect wood from building sites for a lower charge than a skip – making Wood Shack’s recycling model more attractive than landfill. Back at the wood yard, they process the wood for sale as DIY material. A joinery workshop shapes the wood into bespoke woodwork products. The business creates a variety of jobs and training opportunities, from driving collection vans to retail at the wood yard.

JERICHO'S SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

THE REUSERS: Based near a major recycling centre, they rescue items from landfill, restore and recycle them. At a 15,000 ft. shop, customers are encouraged to rummage through antiques, furniture, bikes and more, turning others' waste into their treasure. Over 40 employees. Financial model: retail through a large charity shop.

THE WOOD SHACK: Reclaiming, rescuing and recycling wood from building sites, at a wood yard next door to The Reusers. Charging builders less than a skip would cost, they process the wood for resale and create bespoke items in an on-site joinery workshop. Financial model: service charge for removal, resale of processed wood, sale of woodwork items.

JERICHO CONSTRUCTION: Originally a training business, this construction firm is now a separate social enterprise. Taking on small to medium-sized new builds and refurbishments, they work with churches, the voluntary sector and commercial clients. Their ideal project size is about £1.5 million. Financial model: construction services.

JERICHO CLEANING: A growing commercial cleaners with 25 employees, cleaning building sites, churches and community organisations. Financial model: charging for services.

MIRACLE LAUNDRY: Community laundry with self-service washers and dryers, with service washes, ironing and dry cleaning. Financial model: laundry services.

CHANGEKITCHEN. This partnership CIC caters private and corporate events. In response to the pandemic, funding is allowing them to deliver hundreds of meals a week to people in food poverty. Financial model: event catering services.

The Jericho model – stepping-stone employment

All Jericho's social enterprises create training and employment opportunities – but not forever. The goal is to equip beneficiaries to move into mainstream employment. The model works for clients from diverse backgrounds, who can access support programmes to help them overcome the problems that have made work more difficult for them. This is “wrap-around support,” says Richard. For beneficiaries with lived experience of the criminal justice system, a criminal record can keep them from finding work when they most need it. By working with people as they are leaving prison, Jericho can help them into training and work quickly. Clients dealing with addictions can be offered specialist guidance and counselling. And Jericho's support team are experienced at supporting people with learning difficulties, who work across all the Jericho businesses. But some people need more targeted help to make the most of employment opportunities. A number of social projects are aimed at these groups.

*We're not a destination;
we're a stepping stone...
We work with people for
a season, and then they
move on.*

- **Richard Beard**

With youth unemployment levels in Birmingham among the worst in the country, Jericho's Supported Apprenticeships and Supported Traineeships can reach young people who need extra help to enter the workforce. Jericho Apprentices work for 30 hours a week on a 15 month contract, earning the National Apprenticeship Minimum Wage, and attend a local college to work towards a relevant qualification. A People Support Officer works with each apprentice individually to help them reach their employment goals. The social enterprises make this programme a success, allowing young people to take work opportunities across Jericho, from a customer service apprenticeship in The Reusers, to plumbing, carpentry and other construction placements in Jericho Construction.

Jericho also reaches out to survivors of modern slavery, where they have identified a gap in provision. Through Jericho's Equiano Plus project, they work intensively with a small number of people who have been trafficked from Europe or beyond. After rescue, survivors often

face very specific barriers to employment – mental health problems, poor English skills and difficulty navigating the asylum system. Jericho can offer them not only employment opportunities and access to support, but specialist advocacy too. About 90% progress to positive outcomes. Jericho's specialist advisors know their circumstances and can help them find the right next steps for them, whether that means work or more intensive support.

Other programmes are voluntary, helping people with mental health problems and learning difficulties to try out the world of work gradually. But whether people need specialist support or are just looking for their first break, the basic formula is always the same, Richard says. "You want to move on with your life, but you can't get a break? Come and work in one of Jericho's social enterprises. Get wrap-around support while you're with us, and then we'll help you move on into employment elsewhere."

Ignition – sharing experience \ with other churches

Jericho believes that Christian organisations running social enterprise can do more together than alone. Jericho's Ignition programme supports churches to set up and run job clubs. For

JERICO'S WRAP-AROUND SUPPORT

While in supported employment or training with Jericho, all beneficiaries have access to:

- *Guidance and mentoring*
- *Skills coaching*
- *Personal development programmes*
- *Counselling*
- *Benefits advice*
- *Specialist support for addictions, debt, housing and more*
- *Employability skills training*
- *Job search advice*
- *Vocational training*

But it is the social enterprises that give Jericho's clients the training, employment and motivation they need to make the most of support.

a small annual fee, Ignition offers support to 25 franchised church job clubs, packaging 30 years of Jericho experience into a training course. Together, in 2020, the Ignition job clubs reached 2000 people with work advice and support. Partnerships like these can share a wealth of experience in social enterprise and church commerce. This can help churches avoid pitfalls in ground that others have already trod. “There’s nothing new under the sun,” Richard says. “If you’re thinking about doing something, somebody else has probably already done it. And already developed a financial model, and policies and procedures, and guidance notes and training manuals. So don’t reinvent the wheel.”

A fundraising journey

Jericho made over £2.7 million in 2019, bringing in about 80% of income through enterprise and the other 20% from grants. The proportion of their income that comes from enterprise has increased dramatically

over the years. When Richard joined Jericho in 2004, only about 20% of their income was earned through the social enterprises. “We were very social, but not very enterprising,” Richard reflects. Today, the balance has tipped the other way. “We’ve become a lot more enterprising, but we still keep the social bit.”

The key thing is to try and make sure you’ve got a diversity of income streams, and you’re not dependent on one single funder, or one single route of funding.

- Richard Beard

It can be a challenge for social enterprises to fund themselves entirely through enterprise income, especially when they work with clients with high support needs. Costs and income look different in each of the businesses. The Reusers is one example of a social

enterprise that can keep costs low, staying financially sustainable without grants. At the same time, some of Jericho’s programmes need more funding than others. A beneficiary who has been released from modern slavery will cost more to support than a young carpenter. But more grant funding is usually available for programmes working with clients in more difficult situations, compensating for a lower commercial income. “We’ve learned the right balance in each of our different vocational areas,” Richard says, “the sweet spot between maximizing efficiency, but still supporting people and delivering social impact.”

Like many established organisations, Jericho has had to respond to changing patterns in the funding landscape. Where they used to be funded to run government contracts, there is now more funding available from the National Lottery and small trusts. With a portfolio of programmes, Jericho can respond to changes in funding trends, expanding areas where more funding is available – as with their modern slavery work. They apply to a network of funders, so that they are not dependent on any single funding source. And on the commercial side, their diverse social enterprises can support each other.

An ethical business with a Christian ethos

Although the organisation has diverged from its church roots, Jericho operates with a Christian ethos. They do not promote Christianity, and their services are available for people of all faiths, or none. But they are committed to a vision of social justice in the workplace. They believe everyone deserves a chance to achieve their God-given potential. As they help a small number of people each year to discover that potential through work, they are helping to level the playing field, one person at a time. And as they share their model through Ignition, their vision for social justice in work goes further, as they help churches create more change in more lives.

Our Christian faith is very much the driver and the motivation in what we do. We want to express the love of God in practical ways to folks in need in our community.

- **Richard Beard**

Jericho's commitment to environmental sustainability is a cross-cutting theme across all the businesses, from those specifically focused on recycling and landfill reduction – Wood Shack and The Reusers – to the ChangeKitchen partnership, with its focus on sustainable vegetarian food. For Richard, good stewardship of the environment goes hand-in-hand with Jericho's Christian values of social justice and caring for people.

The Jericho team think of their organisation in terms of three pillars: social enterprise, education and church. The church pillar is expressed through Ignition, as they equip local churches to serve their

communities. But the church is gathered in Jericho, too. About 30% of staff are Christians, alongside employees of other faiths and none. A chaplain works across the organisation, offering independent spiritual support for staff and beneficiaries alike. And prayer plays a central role in Jericho's work, as they seek God's guidance. For Richard, that makes just as much sense commercially as it does personally. "As a Christian organisation, if you believe that God guides us in our key decisions in life, why wouldn't he have something to say about how we run the organisation and the direction the organisation goes in?"

Challenges

Fundraising may be a challenge for a social enterprise that aims to do social good.

Jericho's social enterprises would find it difficult to compete commercially in an open marketplace. Where their competitors employ a fully trained workforce, Jericho's beneficiaries

are on a steep learning curve from their first day. This creates costs that other commercial businesses do not have. A client support team is there for beneficiaries from the beginning, offering targeted support to help each person succeed. "Clearly, you can't fund all of that through selling sandwiches," Richard reflects. "It just doesn't quite stack up."

Our experience has been that it's very hard to make social enterprise truly financially sustainable on the basis of its commercial income alone.

- **Richard Beard**

But the organisation does not set out to be fully self-funding. For many years, Jericho has been learning the balance between earning enterprise income and supporting people into the workplace. Today, their small, experienced fundraising team has the right expertise

to help them find that balance. "You get what you pay for, with fundraising," Richard advises. Skilled fundraisers know where to find funding and how to apply, making an articulate case about the impact of a social project. The cost is often worth it. "There isn't a shortage of money out there," Richard says. "It's knowing where it is and being able to craft the ask in the right way."

PRINCIPLES OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ENTERPRISE EXPANDING FROM CHURCH ROOTS

based on the experiences of Jericho Foundation

To support people, a social enterprise needs to succeed as a business. This is especially true when its charitable aim is to offer people work opportunities. Jericho produces quality products and services, popular with local people. And they do not shy away from telling people about the good that the business does. They remind people that, as they shop with Jericho, they change lives.

There is a balance to be found between the ‘social’ and ‘enterprise’ elements of a social enterprise. Not all Jericho’s businesses aim to be self-supporting, in a marketplace where their competitors have lower costs. Instead, they seek funding for the support that their clients need to make a success of work. With a portfolio of social enterprises, the higher-earning businesses can support those with higher costs. Professional fundraisers bring in funding for specialist programmes, communicating Jericho’s impact to the right funders.

Trying out new ideas can create more opportunities. At Jericho, they look for gaps in the market to fill, especially those that fit their Christian ethos and charitable aims. This can involve risk, and not all of their social enterprises have had long-term success. But they have created work opportunities for thousands of people in social enterprises that fit Jericho’s unique profile of ethical businesses.

Supported employment involves being with people and working with them. Through

relationship, as people work side-by-side, Jericho creates a positive social context where people change their own lives. But Jericho’s programmes also work with people, identifying barriers to work and empowering clients to overcome these. Through support, clients uncover their own God-given potential.

Knowing your context is important, especially in a business that aims to make a difference locally. At Jericho, research has made more sense of unemployment trends in Birmingham and the Midlands. They have created new programmes and provision to help, from apprenticeships targeting youth unemployment, to specialist support for survivors of modern slavery.

Churches can learn from successful models of social enterprises. Through the Ignition programme, Jericho trains new church job clubs in their model, sharing their learning. They encourage other churches to share their own learning and experiences even more widely. This is one more way Jericho works towards a vision of a transformed society, where everyone can work with dignity.

Last Word

Jericho's stepping-stone employment model has always been the heart of their work, as they support people towards employment. As they help people discover their potential to succeed, they are playing a small part in finding systemic solutions to employment barriers in society – just as Christine Parkinson and the original founders of Jericho imagined.

“What we see time and time again is really talented, capable human beings who are denied the opportunity to reach their full potential by the system, or by prejudice or by economic disadvantage. And we want to solve that. Everybody deserves a chance to unlock their God-given potential.”

- **Richard Beard**



References

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Bristol

Bristol

C R E A T I V E A R T S
T R A N S F O R M I N G
A C H U R C H A N D
R E A C H I N G A
C O M M U N I T Y



VICTORIA METHODIST CHURCH



Our

vision for our ministry to the community is to be a Methodist Church which seeks to share the Gospel through encouraging lifelong learning and engaging with and through media and the creative arts.



VICTORIA METHODIST CHURCH
VISION STATEMENT

AN INCARNATIONAL GOSPEL ENCOUNTER

Victoria Methodist Church, Bristol

For many years, the members of Victoria Methodist Church had no clear vision for local outreach. Victoria is a gathered church in Clifton, Bristol. Most congregants travel in from other parts of the city. How could the church reach out to their central Bristol location when so few members lived there?

For Victoria, the answer was to look at their locale with new eyes. The church is based at the centre of a vibrant culture, media and learning hub, where people come to engage with the arts and learning. Victoria was ideally placed to share Christ by sharing in the cultural expression around them.

Today, the church lives out this vision through a programme of art exhibitions, drama and music, attracting hundreds of visitors to every season of events. But these exhibitions and performances are not simply art for art's sake. As they encourage local people to share in an incarnational Gospel encounter through the creative arts, Victoria's hope is that the Gospel will transform the cultural life of the community. In turn, the arts and the community shape their life as a church.

The story of arts outreach at Victoria

The story begins about 15 years ago, when the church spent some time focusing on their mission action planning. Slowly recognising their context in an arts and media hub, they came to see that they were well placed to reach an artistic community in Clifton.

The church itself had assets that they could use to engage with the arts locally. Vic's congregation was full of creative people who were fired up about art, music, drama and lifelong learning. Once reordered, their spacious building would have the potential to bring the community into church to share in learning, culture and the arts. And, surrounded by University of Bristol buildings, art schools and museums, they had opportunities to form cultural partnerships.

THE CREATIVE ARTS OUTREACH GROUP AT VICTORIA

Through a multi-year process of mission action planning, the church began to think seriously about outreach to the community. They came to recognise not only the artistic opportunities in their area, but the creative talent in their own ranks. Drawing on this talent would help them realise an arts outreach vision.

In 2015, Jane Stacey took on the role of Outreach Coordinator for the creative arts. She put out an open call for church members with an interest in art, drama and music. By the time the reordered church building was open in 2017, a Creative Arts Outreach Group was ready to hit the ground running, organising musical events, art exhibitions, drama productions and more.

Since then, the group has organised four large art exhibitions. Other exhibitions run in partnerships with artists, including a refugee artists' collective. On the music front, they organise annual Come and Sing events, with regular concerts in partnership with the University of Bristol Music Department. They have even tried their hand at drama, producing a passion play in collaboration with an inner city church.

Today, a lay-led Creative Arts Outreach Group plans and programmes Victoria's arts outreach. Unusually for a Methodist church, the church funds the arts activity with a small budget. This makes all the difference to the range and quality of art they can bring in.

More than an art gallery

Outreach has always been the purpose of the arts at Victoria. The church set out not to be just another Bristol gallery, but to reach community with the Gospel through culture and the arts. In every artistic event that brings people to Victoria Methodist Church, the intention is for an incarnational Gospel encounter, where Christ is experienced in and transforms culture.

Regular art exhibitions and performances bring people into the church from the community to engage with art that inspires conversations and speaks to the soul. Shaped by Victoria's commitment to social justice, exhibitions have often expressed solidarity with the marginalised through the arts. From performances of Krása's *Brundibár* to partnerships with refugee groups sharing their own art, the church has collaborated to amplify the voices of those on the edges of society and church.

SUFFERING TO SANCTUARY: IDENTITY AS RESISTANCE, 2018

Marking Holocaust Memorial Day from January to February 2018, the church hosted a season of events remembering resistance against fascism and sanctuary from social injustice.

They launched the exhibition with two performances of Krása's *Brundibár*, a children's opera first performed in Nazi concentration camps, with an audience of 98 at the first performance. Speakers from the Refugee Voice Project spoke after the performances about life as refugees in Bristol, over a shared meal, linking past and present experiences of social injustice.

A multi-stream art exhibition ran for four weeks following launch day. Local primary school children's art was exhibited, created in response to *Brundibár* through workshops in schools. Four art works from the Methodist Modern Art Collection were on display, themed around Biblical stories of the injustices faced by refugees, including Nicholas Mynheer's *Flight from Egypt* and Jyoti Sahi's *Dalit Madonna*. In a collaboration with the Bristol Refugee Network, Iraqi refugee artist Dr Abdullah Bash exhibited his art on themes of conflict and sanctuary, and read his poems at the shared meal on launch day. A collection of photographs from the Egyptian Coptic Church tied the theme of resistance to

injustice into a modern Christian context. Stalls allowed the public to meet members of Bristol refugee organisations. 200 people attended the launch, with 160 more visitors over the next four weeks.

In a partnership with the Bristol School of Art, curatorial students helped the church to hang and curate the paintings, creating an exhibition that led visitors on a journey, from works on the theme of suffering, to paintings sharing hope.

"At this exhibition, it isn't the voices of the Victoria congregation that you should be able to hear but the voices of those who don't yet enjoy our freedoms. Please join with us in opening our hearts and minds to the experiences of others, and subsequently to the possibility of fulfilling what God commands us through the prophet Amos; to 'let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.'"

— **Gallery notes by Jessica Dalton-Cheetham, Brundibar producer**

Inspiring a spiritual response to art

The creative arts outreach has transformed Victoria into an outward-facing, missional church. Encouraged across the threshold of the church by the arts, visitors are often surprised when they come into Victoria. The bright, welcoming space, ideal for art and music, is not what people expect from a church. The quality of art and performance is often more professional than they expect. But more than that – many visitors are surprised that church would be interested in culture and the arts at all. “It’s a Gospel moment, when people are slightly wrong footed,” says minister Richard Sharples.

Feedback shows that visitors to the exhibitions agree. As they see how Victoria engages with the arts, their impression of the church shifts. “Good to see such an open-minded church,” wrote a guest at the *Grains of Truth* exhibition in 2018.

The arts provoke spiritual conversations in unexpected ways at Victoria. “We’re interested in meeting people and having those conversations around art. It’s a real space of grace, openness and encounter,” Richard says. The conversation begins at the open church door and ends with a comment book. To support visitors’ engagement, members of the congregation offer hospitality wherever possible. For church Learning Coordinator Christine Stones, who has stewarded exhibitions, the comments have helped her to recognise the “*spiritual impact of the paintings*,” as people engage with a Gospel story reimaged through the arts.

There is no direct agenda here to bring people to worship on a Sunday. The arts outreach has a more subtle impact in the community. For Jane Stacey, who coordinates the Creative Arts Outreach Group, the exhibitions offer a spiritual challenge to visitors, helping them to explore a different kind of life in the midst of the everyday. “*We’re a very consumerist society. If you can just help people to step out of that, in the busy city centre, for 20 minutes, there’s a different sort of engagement.*”

Amazing church bringing Jesus into contemporary settings with modern day issues around social injustice.

Thank you for this most moving exhibition. Modern art opens up the Christian faith.

- **Comments on ‘Encounters: Walking the Fractured City’, 2019**

Supporting prayerful engagement with the exhibits

To build on these conversations, a programme of events encourages prayerful engagement with the art. 2019 saw Mark Cazalet bring his *West London Stations of the Cross* to the church, as part of the *Encounters: Walking the Fractured City* exhibition. Minister Richard led meditations around the full-sized stations. At 2020's *Searching for Hope* exhibition, four spaces of reflection were set out around the church. Programming often includes artists' talks, for a deeper look at the themes and context of the art. The church was pleased to host some of the artists featured in the partnership exhibition by Bristol Refugee Artists Collective, who came to speak about their art and how it reflects their lives.

Victoria's prayerful engagement with art does not end with the community. Vic's minister Richard has used pieces from the Christian-themed exhibitions to inspire worship in the congregation. Four services were themed around *Suffering to Sanctuary*, engaging with works from the Methodist Modern Art Collection. A partnership exhibition with Christian art collective Inside Out offered the perfect opportunity to invite the artists into the church, with Phil Summers leading a service through his art. At the *Grains of Truth* exhibition, with sculpture by political dissident Santiago Bell and minister David Moore, a large triptych depicting the story of Jonah was one of several works rich in Biblical references. For the congregation, this offered a way into the art through worship.

Wonderful, deeply spiritual and inspiring images despite the human pain.

Powerful images reflecting the lives of many people we may choose to ignore.

- Comments on 'Grains of Truth', 2018

Thank you so much for the production, which was incredibly moving and important to be seen and heard once again. Especially with the plight of the world's refugees being as it is. On a personal note, as a Jew and a mother, I thank you deeply.

A very good step on a spiritual journey which will lead to more.

- Comments on 'Suffering to Sanctuary', 2018



Exhibitions and events in partnership

Victoria takes the arts seriously. This helps them to make a success of partnerships. The church has been reordered into a light, spacious building that lends itself to art and music, with simple gallery facilities. Partners are excited to exhibit in the aesthetically pleasing, professional space. Through these partnerships, the church brings in a wide variety of art and performance. Local university departments and art schools have lent expertise, from curation to professional-standard concerts. Collaborations with other churches, artists and members of the community have brought in a diverse range of people to share their talent. The quality of Victoria's arts outreach is enhanced as a result. *"If you are engaging with aspiring musicians, or with artists who are trying to make their living doing this, you need to take that seriously,"* Richard says. *"You need to make sure that what you do is good and respectful."*

Partnership exhibitions have seen artists' collectives exhibiting in the church, bringing in a professional standard of art. *Searching for Hope*, an exhibition by Christian art collective Inside Out, is the latest of Victoria's collaborations, bringing the theme of hope to the community amidst

the pressures of 2020. Personal and geographical connections led to this partnership with the Gloucestershire-based Christian art collective. The Lent exhibition was interrupted by pandemic measures, but they were able to open for two weeks in September.

The refugees' art always raises all sorts of issues... We had amazing cushions for the recent exhibit that a young woman had done about her uncle's mental health problems [and] homelessness, and they just spoke to people who came and saw them, in a very powerful way.

- **Jane Stacey**

Through local partnerships, the creative arts outreach builds bridges into the community. When Victoria hosted an exhibition by the Bristol Refugee Artists Collective, the group could take ownership of the church as their shared space. Collaborations like these give the church a chance to stand with the oppressed. *"Those sorts of encounters enable us to engage with a very different section of the Bristol population,"* Richard says.

Partnerships have opened up the church to wider community in new ways. Victoria's long-term collaboration with the University of Bristol Music Department has inspired Calm Create Community, a creative open church afternoon. In the midst of prayer stations around the church, a core group from the congregation shares a creative activity with the community, often accompanied by live music from the Music Department. This collaboration builds on an existing Music Department concert programme at the church, which regularly brings audiences of up to 100 into the church.

Beyond the impact of the arts themselves, cultural partnerships can have commercial benefits for a church. Victoria has been building a relationship with their next door neighbours, the Royal West of England Academy, over many years. The RWA closes for redevelopment in 2021 – the church will host an exhibition of their permanent works for two months. Richard sees commercial partnerships like this as vital to the church's future. They are working to ensure this does not cause disruption to the congregation. A recent review aims to listen to congregants' views on future plans, seeking a sustainable way forward.

PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL ARTS OUTREACH

based on the experiences of Victoria Methodist Church

At Victoria, **they have tuned into a mission that resonates with their locality.** Inspired by their location, they have shaped outreach that draws in their creative community.

They know the purpose of the arts at the church. Through arts outreach, they open up the church to the community. They start conversations through art inspired by the Gospel, letting it prompt worship and prayer. They express solidarity with the oppressed.

They keep the arts on the agenda with a Creative Arts Outreach Group.

They take the arts seriously. By funding the arts outreach, the church makes it clear that the arts are valued. Collaborating with artists' networks and touring exhibitions, they have exhibited high-quality, professional art that fits with the mission of the church.

They work in local and relevant partnerships. Working with local university departments and art colleges, they have brought in the expertise they need, from curation to musicianship. Through local partnerships, they share the church with community groups.

They have used their building as an asset. They had a purpose in mind as they reordered the

building. Today, the light, uncluttered space lends itself to arts and performance.

They work to bring the congregation with them. Victoria responds to criticism that the arts sometimes drown out the rest of the church's creative and learning outreach. Regular lifelong learning events create a balance. They make the arts more accessible with participatory events like Come and Sing, and by encouraging the congregation's creativity.

They balance creative vision and planning. The creative outreach at Vic was born from a strategic process that identified arts and culture as priorities. Today, a balance of creative ideas and practical planning keeps every event on track.

They learn from what they do. From visitor feedback to photographs, learning is captured from all the exhibitions and events. The Creative Arts Outreach Group holds follow-up learning meetings, writing reports on every season of events.

A congregation celebrating home-grown talent

When so much of the arts outreach revolves around the work of professional artists, it is vital that Victoria also values its home-grown talent and encourages creativity in the congregation. In the autumn of 2018, the week-long event *Celebrating Creativity at Vic* was shaped around two weekend-long displays of creativity from the wider church family. The previously hidden artistic talent of many in the congregation was a focus, with displays of tapestry, lace-making, photography, poetry and textile arts, while members of the church mental health support group shared their art. A church network of knitters grew out of this event, bringing spiritual formation into their knitting. During Lent 2020, the group read a Scripture text each day while knitting together. Music draws in others from the congregation. The annual *Come and Sing* events include up to 100 congregants and friends as performers each year. The events grow out of the church's strong musical tradition, supported by providing an honorarium to the musical coordinator, who directs the *Come and Sing* events and encourages congregational participation in music.

Challenges: Sharing an arts outreach vision with the whole congregation

When one enthusiastic group is at the centre of an arts strategy, **engaging the whole church** can be a challenge. At Victoria, a few congregants feel that the arts impinge on Sunday worship. Responding to concerns, a policy limits the numbers of exhibitions which take over the church space. Christine's advice is for churches to think about how to bring the whole congregation on board with an arts outreach

Some people have said things like, "We don't want to worship in an art gallery."

- **Christine Stones**

mission. "I think that applies to any church thinking about how they develop their vision and how you try to carry everyone along."

The arts do not always feel accessible to everyone.

High on Victoria's agenda is encouraging the congregation to develop their own artistic talent. They work to make the exhibitions more accessible, bringing

the art into worship, and inviting artists to speak. Music and drama can give the arts outreach a more participatory dimension. With less of a constraining impact on Sunday worship, concerts and performances are received very positively by the congregation.

Staffing and capacity can be challenges, too. The church is only able to open exhibitions for a limited number of hours a week. But every visitor matters, within the broader vision of outreach to the community. The Creative Arts Outreach group plan carefully around the church's limits.

Maintaining a balance between the arts and the sciences helps to avoid alienating those in the congregation – which includes university lecturers and scientists – whose interests lie elsewhere. This is where the lifelong learning part of the vision statement comes into its own. Ecumenical Lent Conversations have brought in speakers on climate change and technology. At Learning and Sharing lunches, discussion topics have ranged from inclusivity to taxes. To support the church's many congregational formation groups, there are regular church away weekends; 2019's weekend focused on promoting diversity and celebrating those of African heritage in the church. Victoria hopes to redress this imbalance in the future, with more events focused on learning.

Despite these challenges, the overwhelming response to the arts in the church is positive, especially when the art is used in worship – made possible by the Christian themes of many of the exhibitions.



Last word

As Victoria's arts outreach brings church and culture together, they are asking new questions about what people see when they step into a church. *"What story are we telling?" asks Richard. "If you've never got people coming in from outside, you never bother to come to those questions."* At Victoria, their simple invitation to the community to come into the church leaves both changed, as together they experience the Gospel story reimaged through arts, culture and lifelong learning.





Northampton

Northampton

C H A N G I N G Y O U N G
C H O R I S T E R S ' L I V E S

■

ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

■

The

absolute key is people. If the music has been a success in recent years, it's ultimately because we recruit young, talented, enthusiastic children, and we give them really high quality training.



JEM LOWTHER

Musical Director

A NEW KIND OF CHURCH FOR A MODERN CITY

All Saints' Church, Northampton

All Saints' Church, Northampton has a choral tradition dating back to the fourteenth century. But by the 1980s, music at the church was in decline. As a new vision transformed the choral music from the mid-1990s, All Saints' developed a commitment to supporting the musical education of a diverse group of local young people, regardless of financial background or prior musical training.

Today, the outstanding choirs of All Saints' show how well this strategy has worked. They are changing young lives as they recruit talented choristers who have not had the advantage of past training. Offering training and exceptional choral experience, the Music Department develops inexperienced singers into professional-standard musicians. The choirs sing a full programme of services at the church. They record music together. They tour internationally, giving young people the opportunity to sing in churches and cathedrals around Europe. And many choristers go on to musical careers. The church's music programme has been influential for other churches in the area, too, with local choral churches collaborating and supporting each other.

As the church seeks ongoing funding for the choral programme, rector Fr. Oliver Coss frames the All Saints' educational choirs as "a youth project that changes young lives, in an era where schools don't teach music anymore." At All Saints', as they uphold their first-rate choral tradition, they cultivate an aspiration for excellence in young people who might never have had musical opportunity otherwise.

A choral revival at All Saints', Northampton

The choral tradition at All Saints' stretches back into the church's mediaeval roots. But the story of the recent choral revival begins in the mid-1990s, when the church was keen to reinvest in its declining music. Rector Fr. Simon Godfrey wondered how he could attract Directors of Music, especially given the challenges of their location. The civic church was well-regarded in Northampton, but did not have the resources of a London congregation or a cathedral. Inspired by the nearby M1, Fr. Simon had a vision for All Saints' as a church where new

musical directors might “*stop off at on the way*” to a more substantial position at a cathedral. The plan was to attract new graduates of organ scholarships or musical directors nearing the end of their first terms. Through significant “music curacy” roles, those musical directors would shape the music at the church.

But All Saints’ does not have the advantages of a cathedral in an affluent city. The musical directors would be unlikely to find many young choristers with existing musical training. They would need to identify potential in local young people, nurturing their talent. They were supported in this by the Northamptonshire Choral Foundation, which encourages churches with aspirations of musical excellence. The church set out to offer musical training and choral experience to talented young people from Northamptonshire, regardless of financial, musical or religious background.

Thanks to this vision, the church has enjoyed a choral revival since the mid-1990s. Directors of Music have included Richard Tanner and Simon Johnson, each bringing a different character to choral music at the church. Current Director of Music, Jem Lowther has been in the post since 2015, with a background as an Organ Scholar at Oxford. He is committed to the church’s work with local young people, valuing the musical education that the choirs can offer to inexperienced but able choristers.

Recruiting and developing the choirs

Today, All Saints’ has a reputation for excellent choral music. For Jem, this is all about the way they identify young people without much musical experience but with plenty of potential. Recruitment is key to the choirs’ success. They aim to bring a new crop of enthusiastic, talented young people into the church’s educational choirs each year. Several strategies help to make recruitment a success. The first step is to build enthusiasm and find the right young people. Visiting around 25 local schools each year to talk about the choirs, Jem gives each child a golden ticket to an annual *Be A Chorister Day*. There, children experience life as an All Saints’ chorister. By the end of the day, the

children will have taken part in a concert with the choirs, giving them a taste of what they could achieve at the church. Following up, Jem auditions children who show aptitude and interest.

To help find gifted young people from across the community, the church aims to remove barriers to participation. The choristers are paid – the only payment ever asked of them is a contribution towards their own costs for choir tours. With no past musical training required either, a diverse range of young people come forward to join the choirs.

But as the church removes barriers to entry, Jem and his team must start without expectations. For many of the new choristers, their only exposure to music is through the church. A programme of training is offered to all recruits. They are taken through Grade 1 music theory and individual singing lessons, all free of charge. *“You absolutely cannot take for granted that they know that you read left to right on a musical staff,”* Jem explains. *“Even very, very basic things like that. Music is a very technical thing, especially choral music. So we do have to guide them through that in the early days, and on an ongoing basis as well.”*

The choral experience offered to the young people is second to none, helping them to make the most of their training at

THE CHOIRS AT ALL SAINTS', NORTHAMPTON*

3 educational choirs:

- Girls' Choir (age range 9-18)
- Boys' Choir (8-13)
- Choral Scholars and Lay Clerks (graduates of the other choirs)

Made up of **45** choristers

Sing at **5** choral services a week.

**In 2019, prior to reduction in numbers and services due to Covid restrictions.*

the church. Choristers spend an average of 11 hours a week in lessons, rehearsals and services, coming into the church up to 4 times a week. *"It's a big commitment,"* Jem acknowledges. But commitment leads to excellence. As they sing alongside more experienced choristers, the young people see what they can achieve and aspire to higher standards. For Jem, knowing that the choirs are the young people's only musical experience *"makes it all the more pressing that we're providing music of quality."*

Impact of the music for church and choristers

The music at All Saints' is aspirational, to use Sam Wells' terms. The high quality of music at the church is crucial to everything the Music Department achieves. The outstanding music makes a difference not just the church, but to the young people. The choristers themselves cannot speak highly enough of the impact of their experiences in the choirs.

Without being a member of All Saints' choir, I would not be the person I am today.

- **Libby Marsland, 22, former Girls' Choir Head Chorister, current Choral Scholar**

It's going to be an experience that I'll take with me wherever I go.

- **Christopher Trotter, 17, former Boys' Choir Head Boy, current Choral Scholar**

The music at All Saints' gives the choristers the opportunity to participate in excellence. Jem sees the difference this can make in their lives. *"I think there's often a stigma around words like ambition or competitiveness or pride,"* he says. *"We tend to think these are things that are actually foisted onto children by sort of nagging parents."* But, coming from a range of backgrounds, some of All Saints' young choristers lack this confidence at first. The quality of music at the church motivates them to reach high standards. *"It gives them something to aspire to."* Their confidence grows as they take opportunities they never imagined – singing at services, travelling to perform in cathedrals, recording music and touring internationally.

The tours are a particularly special moment in the career of a chorister. Travelling across Europe to sing has broadened choristers' outlook and built their aspirations.

L I B B Y ' S
S T O R Y

Libby Marsland's ten-year involvement with the All Saints' choirs began when she was 12. She loved to sing, and her teacher suggested she audition. But Libby had no musical training. She had never even been to church before. *"I received so much of my music education training from being a member of the choir,"* she remembers, *"from singing techniques to music theory."* The experience gave her a lifelong love of music and performance, as she joined other choirs and sang with the Girls' Choir until she was 18, taking on the role of Head Chorister in her final year. Now aged 22, Libby has returned to All Saints' as a Choral Scholar.

Libby's experiences in the choir have given her confidence as a person and as a performer. *"It has given me so many opportunities, from tours abroad, CD recordings, to performing a solo to 1000 people, which is something I never thought I would be able to do."* The sense of community has stayed with her, too, and she has made enduring friendships through the choir.

Today, Libby's choral experience is shaping her ambitions for the future. She now studies music education, wanting to offer musical opportunities with other young people. She credits leaders and role models in the choir for inspiring her career aspirations. *"I'm a huge advocate of making music accessible to all children regardless of background. All Saints' did this for me, and I will always be grateful for that."*

As part of their tour to Malta in 2017, the choirs sang in St Paul's Cathedral, Mdina and St George's Basilica in Gozo. For children who begin with no training, going on to sing for captivated audiences can be a magnificent experience. The tours are the first time many choristers have travelled abroad. Even fundraising for tours can be enriching.

When Christopher Trotter created his debut CD *Treble* to raise money for the Malta tour, he used the recordings to audition for the BBC's Young Chorister of the Year competition, and was selected as a finalist. *"It was an amazing experience,"* says Christopher, now a Choral Scholar with aspirations for a musical career.

The absolute key is people. If the music has been a success in recent years, it's ultimately because we recruit young, talented, enthusiastic children, and we give them really high quality training

- Jem Lowther, Musical Director

The sense of community fostered through the choir is significant for many of the choristers. It is especially important for those with difficulties in their home or school lives. *"All Saints' is their place,"* Jem says of these choristers. Some are in the choirs for ten years, longer than they attend any one school. A sense of belonging in groups can positively impact young people's health and wellbeing,¹ making this close community all the more important for choir members who are missing it

at home or school. Chorister Libby Marsland has seen the impact of community in the lives of all the young people in the choir. *"Being able to sing with people from all different walks of life and a variety of ages makes it feel like one big family,"* she says.

The music at All Saints' is valued by the congregation. They appreciate the standards of choral music that enhance the services. The music has given the church opportunities to collaborate with other churches, coordinating with St Matthew's, Northampton to offer choral opportunities to more local children. And as the music brings young people and their families into the church, the congregation can see first-hand the impact that the Music Department has on the lives of All Saints' choristers.

Local choral churches work together, coordinating services and outreach to potential choristers, to avoid competition with each other. *"The church*

really had to find its niche," Fr. Oliver says. But this has only enhanced choral music in Northampton. All Saints' professional, aspirational choirs fit the needs of a prominent civic church, while other churches have been able to create opportunities for choral participation for all.

Funding the music

When music brings value to a church, a church is more likely to fund it. Jem's salary is funded through an annual grant from the family of deceased congregation member. *"That came directly through the meaning that the choir brought to a member of our worshipping congregation,"* Jem says.

As well as appreciating the music itself, funding shows how much the church values the impact of the choirs for the young people. *"The knowledge that the church is bringing meaning to these people's lives is also a reason why the PCC has taken, over a number of years, the often courageous decision to continue investing very heavily in the music,"* Jem says. The raw cost of the music is about £30,000 a year, funded mainly by the PCC.

Tours can add an extra £20,000 to a year's spending on music at the church. To help fund the tours, choristers pay a direct contribution of about half their own cost. This is the only charge that the church ever asks of choristers, and they try to be sensitive to the young people's financial situations. The rest comes from fundraising. Concerts bring in funds, and the choirs have some sponsorship from local businesses. The Friends of All Saints' Music, a membership programme, helps with fundraising for tours and other costs outside of core music spending. Fr. Oliver is aware that funding streams for choirs can be vulnerable. Increasingly, as he seeks new funding with the Music Department, he emphasises how the choirs change young lives, giving a musical education to children who would never have had access to music without All Saints'.

Challenges

Recruiting for the Boys' Choir has been a challenge for Jem and his predecessors. While the Girls' Choir is full with a waiting list, boys are more difficult to recruit and retain. Jem attributes this to gendered perceptions of singing. *"I don't think choral singing in a church is broadly thought of as being a boyish activity. And I think that trend has increased. We are the only Boys' Choir in Northamptonshire."*

Former boy chorister Christopher agrees. An advocate for choral music for boys, he thinks there is a *"stigma"* when boys sing. *"Especially with boys' choral singing, I think it's definitely gone off the radar on the turn of the new century,"* he says. He has no time for the idea that *"girls sing, boys play football,"* but he notices this social perception.

To address the problem of boys' recruitment, the church has focused its recruiting on boys, for the past few years. In 2019 they applied successfully to the Friends of Cathedral Music for a grant to develop the Boys' Choir. They aim to show the boys that they are valued. When a former boy chorister, now Director of Music at Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge, invited the Boys' Choir to sing there with the chapel choir, it was a chance to show the boys where their musical aspirations might take them. *"It all started when he when he joined the Boys Choir,"* Jem says of the director, who was delighted to show the boys what they might be able to achieve in the future.

Coronavirus is currently limiting what the choirs can do. It is a threat to recruitment – Jem has had to skip the usual recruitment cycle this year. This will mean no new crop of younger choristers when they return to services in the building, which will have an impact on the choirs in future years. It is impacting the training they can offer, too. While the choristers can continue to sing at online services, they no longer have the full choral experience of singing together. The Music Department helps recreate some of that experience by mixing choral videos. *"We can use our existing expertise very effectively on Zoom,"* Jem says, *"but it's much harder to offer a quality experience to someone joining for the first time, who doesn't have anything to fall back on."*

PRINCIPLES OF CHORAL MUSIC IN A PROVINCIAL CHURCH

*based on the experiences
of All Saints', Northampton*

At All Saints', Northampton, **they nurture potential, not previous experience.** Their inclusive choirs give opportunities to talented young people. They invest time and training in the children. The young people's experiences in the choir help develop their aspirations of excellence, together with a lifelong love of singing. For the church, the reward is an excellent quality of choral music.

To find this potential, they spend time on recruitment. "People are the absolute key," Jem says. Recruiting campaigns identify talent and build enthusiasm among children like Libby, who may never have considered joining a choir. They have been strategic about Boys' Choir recruitment, to counter perceptions that singing is not for boys.

They know that excellent choirs will attract funding, especially when they emphasise how the choirs change young lives. The PCC is willing to support the outstanding music, and are proud of the training the church gives to many young people without the privilege of past musical experience. A Friends scheme offers a way for those who enjoy the



¹K. Miller, J. Wakefield and F. Sani, 'On the reciprocal effects between multiple group identifications and mental health: A longitudinal study of Scottish adolescents,' *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56 (2017), 357-371.

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Miller, K., Wakefield K. and Sani, F., 'On the reciprocal effects between multiple group identifications and mental health: A longitudinal study of Scottish adolescents,' *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56 (2017), 357-371.





Salford

Salford

C H U R C H G I G V E N U E
A T T H E H E A R T O F A
V I B R A N T A R T S S C E N E

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SACRED TRINITY

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Our

vision is to be a community that welcomes people and welcomes conversations, and the arts are a really important part of all of that.



ANDY SALMON

Rector

VIBRANT LOCAL ARTS SCENE

Sacred Trinity, Salford

When Andy Salmon was appointed rector of Sacred Trinity in 2004, he was already engaged in the regeneration strategy for the Chapel Street area, an aspiring arts and cultural quarter for nearby Manchester. He saw the potential for Sacred Trinity to make the most of its location on artistic Chapel Street itself. The challenge would be to build relationships in the local arts scene, finding out how the church could be part of the flourishing creative vision for the area.

Sixteen years on, Sacred Trinity Church is a successful gig venue. Their journey has seen the church contributing to local arts in other ways, too, not least through eight years in the Chapel Street Community Arts partnership. Today, the church's commitment to the arts inspires the congregation to embrace creative forms of worship. No longer just at the geographical centre of Chapel Street, the church is now at the heart of a vibrant local arts scene.

Building on Sacred Trinity's cultural history

The church has been at the heart of local culture for centuries, famously through the nineteenth-century Flat Iron flea market based in the churchyard. Andy wanted to build on this heritage.

I love coming to gigs at Sacred Trinity. It's a welcoming friendly space. It feels comfortable but it has that something special that's a little awe inducing. It elevates a performance. Maybe it's acoustics, maybe it's in the architecture. Maybe it's Andy and the lovely team.

- **Matt, gig customer**

When Andy arrived, Sacred Trinity was already hosting a monthly goth night in the church. Using this as a launching point, he began cultivating relationships across the local arts scene. In 2005, a Salford arts hub organised *Sounds from the Other City*, a multi-venue music festival. Andy jumped on an opportunity when the event was sold out – he offered the church as a venue for the 2006 festival. Thanks to his existing relationship with the arts venue, they took him up on the offer, and in 2006 Sacred Trinity hosted its first gigs as part of the festival line-up. With this experience under their belt, Andy and his team launched the church as a music venue.

Sacred space, cultural engagement

Today at Sacred Trinity, headliners like Laura Marling and Larkins are hosted in the same intimate venue as local Manchester band Everything Everything and Acoustic Amnesty poetry and music nights. There is very little that does not work in the church – the flexible interior space lends itself best to seated concerts, but allows for standing gigs too.

While some church venues run using corporate venues or work solely with outside promoters, Andy and his team prefer to create a more local feel, running their own bar and sometimes even organising gigs themselves. For most gigs they partner with promoters, who take over the church from setup to close-down. The volunteer-run bar means customers might find themselves buying drinks from members of the congregation. Thanks to this personal touch in a sacred setting, simple conversations with punters can become outreach. Andy often finds himself discussing questions of faith while serving a beer behind the bar. Audiences may have travelled from around the country to these Manchester city centre gigs, and the church team will never see most of them again. But the concerts still offer an exciting chance for missional encounter with these people. *“The audience might be from Newcastle, Nottingham, Liverpool,”* Andy says. *“We’re not going to see them in church on Sunday. Does it produce any fruit? Often we don’t know. But the conversations are precious.”*

The presence of church members is one way to make the most of this kind of cultural engagement in their church building. Another is in the use of the building itself. Andy and his team make it clear that Sacred Trinity is a living church, asking performers not to use the sanctuary, with its in-built barrier of the altar rail. This becomes a physical reminder of the sacred space, for performers and punters alike. *“It’s still church,”* Andy says.

Gig nights in the Sacred Trinity never fail to be special - offering great acoustics and the uniquely beautiful surroundings that only a church can provide, but with something extra besides. It’s that additional feeling of warmth and welcome shown by Andy Salmon and his staff that make you feel a special part of his flock for these moments of musical worship!

- Shay, promoter and gig customer

Through the gigs, the church's heritage of community engagement is still going strong, helping Sacred Trinity stay relevant to Salford and Chapel Street's young, creative population.

Advice on venue management for an active church

To run as a gig venue, churches need to think about venue management, bar and staffing. Andy shares advice from experience on all of these.

But once churches have planned for these issues and made initial outlays, there is good potential for income from gigs, especially from running a bar. Again, Sacred Trinity does well here, thanks to location, in particular. At a busy gig, they can take up to £1000 gross in bar takings.

Eight years of Chapel Street Community Arts

Looking for other ways to be at the heart of artistic Chapel Street, the church has gone beyond gigs, to contribute to the arts scene more broadly. For eight years Sacred Trinity ran Chapel Street Community Arts, in partnership with two other churches. This charity promoted collaborative art for wellbeing and community identity in Salford. Under its auspices, the community created

MANAGING A VENUE

- Your church *might not* need to register as a venue. Under the Live Music Act 2012, venues need not register if they hold fewer than 200 people, for unamplified gigs.
- You *will* need to plan for health and safety, including carrying out fire risk assessments.
- You *may* need to think about installing stage lighting and PA systems. Sacred Trinity bought their own lights, but they leave the amplification to promoters or hold acoustic gigs.
- You *will* need to plan setup. Andy's team move church furniture, lay carpets to protect the floor, and set up the bar.

BAR SETUP

- You *will* need a bar. People coming to a gig expect to be able to buy a drink, Andy advises.
- You *will* need an alcohol licence for a bar, with a trained licensee – a temporary licence will get you started. Andy advises putting aside £300-400 from your first gig's takings for licence costs.
- You *can* run the bar yourself, buying in bottles or a cask of ale. Have a simple pricing policy – charge the same for each alcoholic drink.
- You *may* have to refuse to serve people who have had too much to drink – but Sacred Trinity rarely have problems when serving alcohol.

gardens, and school children made wall mosaics featuring Salford's places and faces. Working with a local artist to celebrate the area's connection with the Beano, they brought community art and photography groups together to create comic-style pages, sharing the story of Chapel Street for a local history exhibition.

But community projects like this survive or fall based on fundraising. Chapel Street Community Arts has wound down in recent years, after funding its community arts worker became a challenge.

One group is still active from that chapter of the church's history – the Chapel Street Camera Club. The wellbeing and community arts aims of the project live on in this photography group. Attracting a mix of retired and unemployed people and those with mental health problems, the camera club gives them a chance to take part in creative projects that promote social connection and an active lifestyle. The group still collaborates with local professional photographers, telling community stories at church exhibitions. Like the original Chapel Street Community Arts project, the group is a bridge into community, linking the church with the arts and social action. While the Camera Club may not bring many people to church services, it brings people into relationship with Sacred Trinity.

SACRED TRINITY'S MONTHLY SUNDAY SERVICE PATTERN

First Sunday: Taize service

Second Sunday: Topic

Third Sunday: Bible

Fourth Sunday: Open Table

A creative congregation

Engaging with Chapel Street's cultural scene has done more than bring gigs to the church – it has also shaped the congregation. Over 50% of the parish is in the 20-29 age group. The Sunday morning service is traditional Liberal-Catholic in style, and it has sometimes been a challenge to bring in a young population. But the evening services have given the church a chance to draw in younger creative and professional people.

The church once hosted Sanctus One, an alternative gathering. Today, the main congregation has built on their creative worship tradition, making the most of church links with the arts community.

A café church vibe sets the tone for services that value creativity, conversation and outreach into the young local community. The monthly Taizé service draws in some people from the local European population. A regular Open Table communion gives the church an opportunity to reach and engage local LGBTQIA+ people. Topic discussions have seen the church broaden its community outlook into social concern, with an eclectic range of guest speakers from L'Arche Manchester to the Boaz Trust.

Different people drop in to one or more services each month, depending on their life patterns. *"We see it all as church,"* Andy says. This is one more way that Sacred Trinity embraces all the ways that artistic people might want to be part of the church at the heart of their creative quarter.

STAFFING GIGS AND EVENTS

- You *might* consider paying a venue manager to take care of the setup and event. Andy pays £100 per event to a friend of the church to manage the venue.
- You *may* be able to run the venue and bar with volunteers. At Sacred Trinity, church members and their friends often volunteer – they get to see the gigs in return.

LEARNING FROM CHAPEL STREET COMMUNITY ARTS

- A small arts project can have a lasting impact in the community
- Not every arts project will succeed
- Some projects will only last for a season
- An ongoing project needs funding



Challenges

Sacred Trinity works as a gig venue primarily because of its location, and the relationships Andy has built with the cultural community. Their challenges have come as they have learned how to run successfully as a venue, and as they have tried to engage the community in the arts more broadly.

Andy advises **preparing for potential pitfalls that come with running a venue**. Location is key – not all churches will be based in an area where gigs can attract promoters and customers. A church's building will need to be flexible enough to work as a gig venue. And congregations will need to support the venture, especially if a bar is involved. Sacred Trinity's PCC was nervous about storing alcohol in the church, at first, but the church has rarely had to deal with problems as a result of the bar. An alcohol licence will mean a small initial outlay of money. Fire risk assessments are important too, where the pitfall is less about money and more about time for training and paperwork.

Fundraising was a particular challenge to the church's efforts to become a centre for community arts, beyond the gigs. Chapel Street Community Centre wound down after many years when it became too difficult to fund projects and the community worker. "Funding is always hard work," Andy points out. Good fundraising expertise is not always easily available to churches, and ministers may not have time to write funding bids. While some church leaders can draw on their assets in congregations for help, this is dependent on people's availability and fundraising expertise.

PRINCIPLES FOR CHURCHES HOSTING GIGS AND CULTURAL EVENTS

based on the experiences of Sacred Trinity

Tap in to what's happening where you are. Based in the centre of one of the most vibrant music cities in Europe, Sacred Trinity was in an ideal location to succeed as a gig venue. Churches outside city centres can still tap into their own local arts scene. Whether a community enjoys classical concerts or knitting groups, there will be ways for churches to get involved.

It's about relationship. Networking was vital when Andy and his team were getting started. A relationship with a local venue owner or community centre manager might lead to a church's first gig. Get to know the cultural community in your area, Andy advises, and find out what artistic activities are already going on where you are. Marketing matters. Sacred Trinity's team advertises events locally and online. Promoters and performers find venues through websites that show the potential of a venue. Take pictures to show how the space works as a venue, even if only hosting a small gig for a friend of the church.

Make the most of a church building as an asset. Sacred Trinity lends itself to all kinds of gigs, thanks to flexible interior space. In other churches, there might be ways to make a feature of pews for seated gigs. Consider whether there is space to set up a bar, and who will run it. From the building to volunteers, a church's assets are key to the unique contribution they can make to the arts locally.

Last Word

Gigs have helped to put Sacred Trinity back at the centre of Chapel Street's artistic community. Through commercial arts, Sacred Trinity offers hospitality to a creative community. As audiences encounter the church in new ways through gigs and the arts, Andy and the congregation make space for the Holy Spirit to move in surprising contexts.

"We as a church are committed to creativity. We see the arts as a way of relating to God's very nature, as a creative being."

- **Andy Salmon**





Hampshire

Hampshire

T H E Y A R N - B O M B I N G
C H U R C H A N D
C O M M U N I T Y

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ST MARK'S, PENNINGTON

■

This

is the church
connecting with
others that are
here and seeing
what emerges.



RACHEL NOEL

Vicar

A NEW KIND OF CHURCH FOR A MODERN CITY

St Mark's, Pennington, Hampshire

At the heart of Pennington, St Mark's Church is surrounded by an imposing hedge. For years, it was a barrier between the church and a deprived Hampshire village. Then a simple idea for community yarn bombing took shape.

The Pennington hedge-bombing project began in 2018 with thousands of poppies commemorating Remembrance Sunday, crocheted and collected by the community. Since then, the hedge has become one of many ways that the church brings the village together – through a project that belongs to the community, not just to the church. As people work together to make, collect and display the yarn, the hedge bombing has been reducing isolation and giving the village a shared focus.

And community cohesion was never needed more in Pennington than in 2020, when a hedge display featuring messages of hope kept the village connected even while they were apart.

The hedge is now a visible sign of the Holy Spirit at work in this community, covered with knitted and crocheted art made by the people of Pennington. Transformed from a barrier into a blessing, the St Mark's hedge is the place where Pennington stands together.

A church being with the community

The yarn bombing at St Mark's is part of a broader story, as the church has stepped out into the life of the community around them. Pennington is socially divided from its richer neighbour Lymington. As vicar Rachel Noel describes it, the area has "*some real challenges of poverty.*" When Rachel came to St Mark's in 2018, the small congregation of about 25 regular attenders were asking how the church

could be "a place where the light shines through and beyond into community."

You can be part of this church and contribute as you are, with your gifts.

- Rachel Noel

As Rachel connected with the community, she could see how a steep curve between rich and poor was affecting the parish. The village needed a focus for social cohesion. Pennington was lacking community

facilities, and local people were asking the church to help organise events. But life was already happening beyond the church. To build a real connection with the community, the church needed to be with Pennington, rather than doing things for them.

Community events by Pennington, for Pennington

Previously, the church had organised events *for* the village. Now, the church had a vision to be a catalyst for community empowerment. In a partnership between church and neighbourhood, a sub-committee of the PCC was formed to organise events that the people of Pennington could be proud of. Local committee members knew the community's assets and how to make the most of them. And they understood local

barriers to participation, in a village where poverty is often the most significant local challenge. They applied for community grants and sought local business sponsorship, so that they could keep events open for all.

The church isn't very visible. The hedge was feeling like a real burden.

Whenever something feels like an obstacle for me, I say, is there a way to see this as a blessing?

- **Rachel Noel**

In their first event, Christmas in Pennington 2018, they set out to showcase local talent. It was planned through informal local networks, from the community pub to the school gates. Pennington has no local village centre, so a subsidised funfair was brought right into the heart of the community's streets. Local people offered equipment to set up a stage to host local bands and school children's

choirs. Pennington's businesses sponsored street performances and a Santa's grotto, complete with real reindeer – a chance for church and village to share Christmas presents with children who might have gone without. The following year, the events team brought Pennington Common Fun Day to the village, bringing community groups together, with free stalls for local organisations, and a fair and dog show run by the people of Pennington. A beer tent, set up by the local pub, allowed the church to host Pimms and Hymns, enjoyed by people who had never crossed the threshold of the church. And, like all the events, it was free. That made all the difference to families who would not have taken part otherwise.

Relationships and networks grew as the church worked with community leaders. The church's image was changing as they reached out, too. The village was starting to see St Mark's as a place for the whole community, not just the congregation. But there was still an obstacle between the church and the village – the hedge that surrounded the church building.

From obstacle to blessing

The church hedge was a literal and symbolic barrier between the church and the rest of Pennington. If the church could not be seen, how could it be a place of connection where they could reach the village with God's love?

As Rachel prayed about how the church could see the hedge more positively, 2018's Centenary of Remembrance sparked an idea. St Mark's was already a community focal point for Remembrance Day services. Could the church use the hedge to make the most of that local civic spirit, sharing it beyond the church building? Rachel's interest in crochet for mental health inspired a project to cover the hedge with crocheted and crafted poppies. Facing outwards into the village, the hedge could share Pennington's community pride beyond the church, celebrating local creativity as they marked Remembrance Sunday.

LEARNING FROM COLLABORATIVE CHURCH-COMMUNITY EVENTS

at St Mark's, Pennington

- By partnering with community connectors, churches can empower communities to empower themselves
- People will engage in events run *by and for them*, not by and for the church
- Local people are the experts in their own needs – they know the barriers people face and how to help overcome them
- Partnership with a church can lend credibility to community networks looking for funding or local council support
- In relationship, churches can build bridges into the community, helping people to see the church as a place for everyone.

St Mark's set out to get the whole community crafting. The church already had relationships with community connectors who could help spread the word, thanks to the collaborative events. The church's active social media networks shared publicity. Friends in local businesses were happy to act as local collection points for the poppies, where the church left bags for anonymous drop-offs. The local pharmacy delivery driver brought the bags back to the church, full of crafted poppies. Pennington's shops, care homes and community knitting groups all got involved.

Locally, people were proud of it. "I was part of this. I think this might be one I made." It became a focal point in the community.

- **Rachel Noel**

In the inclusive spirit of all St Mark's community engagement, people were encouraged to take part in any way they could. This was participatory art, in Sam Wells' terms.¹ They set a low barrier to entry – crafters could donate one poppy or a hundred. Poppies were crocheted and knitted, while local school children brought painted stones and plastic bottle poppies. As Rachel put it, the inclusive message of the church was, *"We've got this space. It's Remembrance. If you want to be involved, be involved."*

For the final display, the crocheted words 'We will remember them' were surrounded by a wall of thousands of poppies crafted by local people. The second Remembrance yarn bombing in 2019 saw 4000 poppies adorning the hedge. A local art exhibition in the church grew out of the project, where about a dozen people from the community displayed poppy paintings. It was small but significant. *"We invited anyone who wanted to, to contribute pieces,"* Rachel says. *"It wasn't a huge number, but it was anyone who anyone who'd wanted to, which for me is what's important."*

Just as the church had hoped, the poppy display became a focus of local pride. Press coverage helped, but so did the sense of ownership across the community, as people visited to enjoy the hedge they had helped to create. This was not the church's display – it belonged to Pennington.

Building community in lockdown through the hedge

Community cohesion became all the more urgent for Pennington in 2020. The pandemic was in danger of hitting hard, in this less affluent village. Lockdowns limited what the church could do face-to-face in the community, even though increasing numbers were engaging with the church's new streamed services and social media accounts. But Rachel and the church wanted to help bring people together beyond the online space. The hedge could be a way for the community to connect visibly, if not physically, in a shared project to help reduce isolation.

As the first lockdown began, the church was preparing for Easter yarn bombing. They were halfway to a complete display, with 1500 knitted and crocheted items already collected. They made the most of their existing community infrastructure to get the village crafting in lockdown – fast. Just one week later, crocheted flowers spelled out the message 'Pennington stands together' on one side of the double hedge, and '... even when we're apart' on the other. The display was finished off with 2-metre social distancing guidance measured out in yarn.

In a gift of timing, the early success of the church's live streaming brought local media to the church early in lockdown, showcasing the yarn bombing on BBC South Today. Rachel had the opportunity to talk to reporters about local challenges of hidden poverty and the pandemic. But Rachel and the church know that they can only tell one part of the community's story. For a broader perspective, the church lined up interviews with representatives from the village's schools, food bank and CAB. The BBC ran two pieces on Pennington that week. It was just one more way that the church used their visibility to point back to the community through the yarn project.

As Rachel took advantage of the church's move to Zoom to keep on crocheting during meetings, the church expanded the display into the original Easter theme. Promoted on social media as #CrochetThroughCorona, the Easter project brought in more yarn creations for the hedge, completed with Rachel's figures of Jesus and a donkey. When a local photographer noticed that the crocheted

donkey was missing a tail, she suggested a 'pin the tail on the donkey' social media event, where people could edit in their own tail. Other locals noticed a space next to the figure of Jesus on the hedge. A #SelfieWithJesus hashtag encouraged people to take photos of

themselves with the yarn figure. It was another socially distanced shared focus for the community, as they came in person to take pictures of themselves with the hedge.

How do we engage more widely? How do invite people to share who they are and what they want to offer into this community?

- **Rachel Noel**

Inclusion has always been at the heart of the yarn project. Pennington's children were not left out of the hedge bombing fun. Spring daffodils appeared on the hedge next, painted by the children of local key workers.

And, in all the social media excitement, the church did not forget the less mobile people in the community.

They turned the yarn figure of Jesus into a Zoom background, showing people how to use it, giving a remote connection to the hedge to those who could not walk there. Rachel and other members of the church have been shielding from the virus, and this has sharpened their concern for more isolated members in the community. But they have always been aware of the need to include all sections of the community in events. *"You can't make everything possible for everybody,"* Rachel reflects. *"But I think quite high on my radar is, what can we make possible for more people?"*

A Christmas Knitvity for all of Pennington

Local children were a concern as Christmas approached and Rachel realised she would be unable to visit local schools for Christmas assemblies. The idea of a giant Advent calendar on the 2020 Christmas hedge display was born. Local school children from 22 class 'bubbles' painted Advent date panels, revealed on the hedge day by day, and sponsored by a local estate agent. But the church did not stop there. They made the most of their community social media engagement to bring the hedge display together with church life and worship. A daily five-minute video gave children the chance to introduce their Advent panel to the community. Rachel and congregants shared Bible readings



from a Christmas grotto in the church, using Godly Play ‘wonderings’ to help families reflect on the Christmas story.

Christmas brought the community together in knitting and crocheting once more. A Zoom knitting group met weekly to create 235 squares for a knitted Christmas tree. Other Pennington neighbours met to knit outside, chatting over their fences despite the cold. Under a yarn tree rising above the church hedge, the Advent boards were joined by a Christmas Knitvity pageant of figures. A crocheted baby Jesus in a stable was the centrepiece, made up of 87 community-knitted squares. Angel wings were added to the hedge as Christmas approached, bringing people back to the hedge to take a selfie as an angel. Media attention, including BBC Breakfast, helped make this a fitting last celebration of a year when Pennington connected through community arts, even while they were apart.

A different kind of community engagement with church

The hedge that was once a barrier is now a bridge into the community. It brings the church out into Pennington – not just as a symbol of their presence, but through relationships. The yarn bombing has become a context for the people to start safe spiritual conversations with Rachel and members of St Mark's. As the hedge raises the profile of the church in the community, more people are beginning to feel like St Mark's is their church, whether they attend regularly or not.

But more and more people are engaging with worship. Through lockdowns, a shared YouTube channel with Lymington Parish Church has been bringing together a divided area. The streamed services have worked to include the people of Pennington, from a joint church passion play to interviews with local people. It has made a difference. The services have *“picked up people in the community who wouldn't ever normally come to church,”* Rachel says. *“There is a much lower barrier to coming to church online.”*

The high-profile yarn bombing may have captured media attention, but other participatory art events have brought St Mark's together with Pennington. Local schoolchildren worked with the church to create art for the 75 Memorial Flames Exhibition for the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. Community was a theme of the design – a flame surrounded by representations of the village's most familiar faces. The design went on to influence the 'Pennington Stands Together' theme during lockdown yarn bombing. At St Mark's, Pennington, community art is a window onto the world, helping the church to shine God's light out into the village.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ARTS

based on experiences at St Mark's, Pennington

At St Mark's, **their outward-facing ethos is prompted by the church, as much as the vicar.**

Rachel's incumbency has been shaped from the beginning by her job profile to "*step out of the church into the community.*" Inspired by this outward-facing ethos, Rachel got to know the community as soon as she arrived.

They find out their community's real needs.

Through a growing local network, Rachel began to understand how the disempowered community had been impacted by poverty and divided from its richer neighbours. The church's response was to prioritise being with the community, empowering them rather than doing things for them.

They connect with what the community is already doing. Guided by principles of asset-based community development, the church reached out to community connectors with a heart for Pennington. These local leaders are behind the infrastructure that made the yarn bombing a truly local effort, from the shops that act as poppy collection points, to knitting groups that take part.

They use a multimodal approach to connect with community. The church had been building their social media outreach before the idea for the hedge took shape. It became even more important in lockdown. But in-person connections are just as important. Community art can be a catalyst for safe spiritual conversations.

They work in partnership with the community,

while making the most of the resources available to a parish church. As a subcommittee of the PCC, a Community Events Team had the credibility to apply for local funding, while community membership kept ownership in the hands of the village. That sense of ownership continues into the yarn bombing. Pennington comes together to create, collect, and display the yarn art. On the church side of the partnership, St Mark's uses its position of influence to point back to the community wherever possible.

They know that participatory art should

involve everyone. Inclusion is central to all their community projects. They were unafraid of starting small, as they welcomed people to bring one poppy or hundreds for the first Remembrance yarn bombing. They have found opportunities for children to create art for the hedge, and set up Zoom crafting groups that welcome new knitters.

They want to be a place where God's light shines through the church and into the village.

The ethos of the church's community work is not about forcing people into a church mould. Instead, they want to empower local people to share their talents and assets to build a Pennington they can all be proud to live in. This ethos is changing the local image of the church – and leading people to connect with church life in surprising ways.

Last Word

Participatory art has transformed the hedge at St Mark's, Pennington. Through the yarn displays, the church nurtures the abundant life already flourishing in the neighbourhood. As the people of Pennington knit, crochet and create together, the church becomes a place where God blesses a community, right where they are.

“How can the church be a place that the light shines through? Not where you have to come in and be part of how we always do it. But [where] the light shines through and beyond, into the community. How can we create spaces or situations or things that make it more possible for the community to be proud of itself?”

- Rachel Noel

¹S. Wells, *A Future that's Bigger than the Past: Catalysing Kingdom Communities* (London: Canterbury Press, 2019).

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London

London

B R I N G I N G G O S P E L
M U S I C T O C H U R C H E S ,
S H A R I N G T H E G O S P E L
B E Y O N D T H E C H U R C H



**SOUL SANCTUARY
GOSPEL CHOIR
& ST JAMES'S
CHURCH,
PICCADILLY**



To

spread a message of faith, hope and love through contemporary gospel music; to create performances full of life-affirming joy and soulful celebration, collaborating with other artists and art forms; and to support and work with a diverse range of like-minded churches, charities, and communities.



MISSION STATEMENT

Soul Sanctuary Gospel Choir

A NEW KIND OF CHURCH FOR A MODERN CITY

Soul Sanctuary Gospel Choir and St James's Church, Piccadilly

The Soul Sanctuary Gospel Choir aims to share contemporary gospel music with those who rarely encounter it – in the church, and out in the wider world. This pioneering gospel choir has a mission “to help spread contemporary gospel music into Catholic, Anglican, and other non-Pentecostal churches.”¹ As the choir takes gospel music into liturgical churches through Mass settings and performances, they bring new worship styles that enrich churches and attract new worshippers. At private and community events, they share the power of gospel music to inspire joy, healing and reconciliation. And now, via the Soul at St James project, they are taking the Christian message out through gospel music and spoken word, reaching passers-by with themed performances in the courtyard of the church.

St James's, Piccadilly is an inclusive, diverse church with a commitment to solidarity with the marginalised. Their history as a church that looks out into the community is symbolised by an outdoor pulpit, overlooking a courtyard that faces out into central London. As the choir sings in this in-between space, the music becomes a bridge between the church and the world beyond its walls. Soul Sanctuary's music captures imagination, inspires reflection, and calls for social change – through an inclusive gospel message.

Taking gospel music into liturgical churches

In the early 2000s, Soul Sanctuary Gospel Choir co-founder Miko Giedroyc was a keen amateur jazz musician. While he enjoyed playing with talented musicians, he sometimes wondered what the purpose

of the music was. “I always had a kind of feeling of pointlessness with jazz. It's amazing music, but I would think, why am I doing this?” Then, in the early 2000s, Miko was inspired by music with a mission. He was invited by a Pentecostal church in Tooting to play keyboards at a Sunday service. The music at the small Pentecostal church had a profound impact on Miko, a Roman Catholic. “It completely blew me away,” he says. “Everybody thinks they know what gospel music is. But until you hear it in church, you do not know what it is.”

I just thought, this is the best Christian music there is. There's nothing like it. We've got to have this everywhere.

- **Miko Giedroyc,**
General Manager and
keyboard player, Soul
Sanctuary

Miko was excited to share the power of gospel and soul music more widely, and organised a regular gospel gig at the 606 Club. There he met gospel singer and Baptist minister Tracey Campbell. Like Miko, Tracey was keen to bring gospel music to churches where it was not being heard. *“We both agreed that what we had to do was somehow bring this music into Christian denominations which barely knew it,”* Miko remembers.

Tracey and Miko brought gospel music to perhaps the least likely church setting they could have imagined – a Roman Catholic Mass at St Patrick’s, Soho Square. They set up what was then the St Patrick’s Gospel Choir, singing at a poorly-attended Sunday evening service. They were supported by imaginative clergy who could see the potential for gospel music at the church.

Their first challenge was writing Mass settings and appropriate musical pieces. They had assumed that someone would have written liturgical gospel music before, but there was none to be found. Suddenly aware that this was a pioneering project, Miko and Tracey found themselves assembling a full gospel Mass setting, along with arrangements of four gospel songs to sing as hymns. They went on to commission and write Mass settings and pieces to fit the full liturgical calendar. They brought singers together to shape the music and perform it – in

what began as something of a scratch choir.

At first, the experiment was far from a success. The already small 5pm Mass congregation halved overnight. The choir was bringing gospel music to a church with its own choral tradition, where people were not expecting it. But gradually, attendance at the service began to grow again. By the time St Patrick’s closed for refurbishment in 2010, the gospel Mass was regularly bringing in 100 to 150 people. It was revitalising the liturgy at the service. For Peter Yarde Martin, Band Leader at Soul Sanctuary, gospel music can bring freedom to a congregation’s worship. *“It brings a totally different energy to into the service,”* he reflects, *“a sense of enthusiastic joining in. I think you can see in the congregation a sense of permission to move and act.”* The

It’s beautiful, what can come out of collaborating with people that bring an entirely different style of worship... People that may not necessarily choose to enter a Catholic liberal church would maybe do so more because of a gospel choir.

**- Elijah Kinney,
Pastoral Assistant, St
James’s, Piccadilly**

music can bring liturgy to life in new ways.

By this point, the choir was sharing the music elsewhere, too – from a memorial Mass for Mother Teresa in Westminster Cathedral in 2007, to a number of BBC radio appearances. So it was in the context of a busy schedule, both within and outside church, that the choir had to look for another church home in 2010. A friendship with a priest at Farm Street RC Church brought the choir there. It has been an enduring partnership, and they still sing an evening Mass at the church every third Sunday of the month.

At St. James's, we realised that we really ought to be outside, and that our ministry should be to London – the shoppers of Piccadilly... There's an invisible force field at the door of every church, and people just don't go through it.

- Miko Giedroyc

Taking gospel music outside the walls of the church – Soul at St James

In another collaboration, the Soul Sanctuary choir has been bringing a different sound to St James's, Piccadilly since 2014. St James's is an inclusive, liberal Anglican church, with many LGBTQ+ members and a diversity of ethnic backgrounds among parishioners. Different approaches to worship encourage that diversity, giving voice to new Christian perspectives. Elijah Kinney, Pastoral Assistant at St James's, reflects on the collaboration with Soul Sanctuary. *"It felt like a natural fit, because there's openness there. We're not closed off to one idea, or one particular style of worship."* A long-term partnership with the church has seen the choir bring sung Eucharists and performances into the church, opening the doors to new worshippers as they reimagine liturgy together.

But it was important to St James's that Soul Sanctuary's music did not just bring people into the church. They wanted to take the music out onto the streets of London. St James's Church faces onto one of London's busiest shopping streets, with an outdoor pulpit – a symbol that reminds the church that the gospel is for everyone, and cannot be contained by the walls of the church. *"When the church was being built,"* Elijah says, *"the idea was that the message of Christ is there for everyone, to be proclaimed outwards."* That outward focus of the

COURAGE

SOUL AT ST JAMES

By November 2020, after a summer international protests, Black Lives Matter headlines were fading. As a choir with many black members, it was important to Soul Sanctuary to help keep the conversation open. The choir had been keen not to jump on a bandwagon but to go deeper. This could be an appropriate time to explore the issue through storytelling and reflection. As Peter Yarde Martin reflects, *“There was a real sense that this is not an acute thing – this is a chronic problem in our society, in the system. It’s not just going to go away after that flashpoint has passed.”* *Courage* was the result – a call to dismantle racism and inequality, through song and story. In collaboration, the diverse choir and church could bring more people into the conversation. The choir’s extensive gospel repertoire is music rooted in the fight for racial justice – and the hope of change. *“There’s a huge element of struggle and protest in these musical traditions,”* Peter says.

Storytelling shaped the performance. *“As a choir, our main purpose is to sing, but we all have a voice,”* says Clarence Hunte. *“We wanted to explain our feelings through the narrative of song.”* Through carefully-chosen songs, spoken word and conversation, the choir wove together

stories of injustice, action and hope. *Strange Fruit* opens the performance, a piece that lingers on the image of a lynched black body, forcing the listener to confront the horror. A unique arrangement with spoken word encouraged reflection. Later songs focused on the challenge of change, supported by conversation around racial justice and white privilege. The choir ended on a note of hope through incremental change, with Whitney Houston’s *Step by Step*.

For the choir, the performance – which continues to impact audiences through the video on the church website – is about keeping the BLM conversation open, while encouraging people to think more deeply about challenging privilege and taking action. *“There has been action, but not enough action,”* Clarence reflects. *“And by getting people to talk about it, making people come out of their comfort zone, it helps people to evaluate their opinions and what they believe.”*

church chimed with the mission of Soul Sanctuary to bring gospel music – and the gospel – to new audiences in the church and beyond.

As the choir sang at outdoor services with the church, the joyful, inviting gospel music caught the attention of passers-by. Unlikely audiences of shoppers and tourists would come and share in the music. But when it came to the sermon, listeners would disperse. *“They weren’t necessarily there for a church service,”* remembers Clarence Hunte, Choir Director. *“They wanted to hear the music.”* This was an opportunity to share the choir’s music and its Christian message with the world – but formal liturgy was not making sense to their audiences. It was the music that invited people in. So why not centre the music? Around a themed programme of music, the choir could reimagine sermons in recognisable ways. *“This was the perfect opportunity to include spoken word,”* Clarence says, *“and to have a kind of a TED talk, or someone to explain the story of their experience on that theme.”* From this moment of inspiration, the Soul at St James project was born.

It was a way for [St James’s] to continue the dialogue around white privilege, around what’s been happening with racial justice. It’s something that’s got to remain constant in our vocabulary and what we’re trying to push forward for.

- **Elijah Kinne**

Soul at St James aims to create inclusive arts events to bring faith out into the world through gospel music and performance art. The original plan was for monthly outdoor live events in St James’s courtyard, geared towards those with no experience of church or Christian faith. Each afternoon session would explore a big topic of modern life through a single-word theme – Love, Hope, Refuge and more – in an inviting space where music and spoken word would help people to reflect on the theme. *“With hindsight,”* Miko reflects, *“we really think this is what we’ve spent 15 years building up to.”*

Plans to launch Soul at St James were initially interrupted by the pandemic. But towards the end of 2020, at the tail end of a wave of Black Lives Matter protests across the country and the world, Soul at St James launched their first event – *Courage*. The online performance engaged people in a conversation on racial injustice, through song,

Gospel music is rooted in culture. It's so rooted in joyful experience that people gravitate towards it. When you hear gospel music, it's a spiritual experience, that people chime into.

- **Elijah Kinne**

storytelling and shared experience. Soul at St James was the ideal venue for this performance, with its public-facing approach that bridges faith and society. Given pandemic restrictions, Courage was recorded in the church and shared as a video. But as much as the pandemic has temporarily limited Soul at St James, it has also allowed the choir to share the message of resistance and hope far beyond the walls of the church. By March 2021, the Courage video had been viewed over 1800 times.

Through the Soul at St James partnership, church and choir hope to create space to help people explore more of the big questions of the day through gospel music. There are plans for other online video projects, but they are looking forward to the time when they can launch Soul at St James in the church courtyard. The Courage video has shown how together they can open dialogue on the topics that matter in people's lives, shining the light of Christ beyond the church walls through gospel music and performance art.

Taking gospel music into the world

Gospel music is an artistic bridge between the churches and the world.

Soul Sanctuary's celebratory performances are in demand – at weddings, music festivals, theatres, and many more venues. This can be an opportunity to share Christian music more widely. At a 2019 fundraising event, the choir performed with Mica Paris in St Edmundsbury Cathedral. Clarence remembers the way the music resonated with the audience at this secular event. *"The cathedral just lit up with gospel music. I haven't seen a gig like that in years."* The music reaches people who are not religious, Clarence thinks. *"There's something about this music that unites everyone."* Songs in the choir's repertoire are often recognisable as pop music, a universal language that many can connect with, regardless of faith background or familiarity with

When we sang at the prison, it was a sense of church, but not in a church. The room was just filled with the Holy Spirit... One man said that he needed to hear this music at that point, knowing that he was going to be released two days later.

- **Clarence Hunte**

musical styles.

But the choir's focus is their mission to bring this music – and the gospel – to a wider audience, in service of churches and communities. At the heart of the choir there has always been a desire to support good causes, as well as sing in churches. Soul Sanctuary's community outreach has included commemoration events for the Grenfell tragedy and a performance at Wandsworth Prison. In settings like these, gospel music can console while calling for action. The Grenfell memorials were among the most significant and emotionally charged events the choir has performed at, and they felt privileged to share music with survivors. *"That that music was able to offer something to those families was just such a powerful experience,"* Peter remembers. The choir chose songs of protest and change to give expression to the community's experience, regardless of listeners' faith backgrounds, including *Something Inside So Strong*. *"It really felt like we were serving a purpose to that community."* For Peter, this healing power of gospel music has been shaped by its history – rooted in Biblical narratives of exile and Exodus, and shaped through emancipation and the civil rights struggle. *"There's a recognition of pain and the need to be healed,"* he reflects.

It doesn't matter what your religious background is. When you hear this music, you're uplifted. You're just filled with joy.

- **Clarence Hunte**

Resourcing the church with gospel music

Today, Soul Sanctuary brings an eclectic mix of gospel, soul and jazz to churches and the community. As well as singing monthly with both St James's Piccadilly and Farm Street Church, drawing from a repertoire of five gospel Mass settings, they have reimagined the Christian story in new musical forms. Their Night Watchmen's Nativity premiered at St Martin-in-the-Fields in 2019, using gospel music, sung Scripture and spoken word to share a message of social justice through the Christmas story. The performance, which told the story of the Nativity through the eyes of Bethlehem's homeless who were called shepherds, was later aired on Sky Arts. And when the choir realised that there were many musical settings of the Passion but far fewer of the Resurrection,

they worked with John 20 and 21 and the stories of Emmaus and the Ascension to create a gospel Resurrection setting.

More and more churches are seeing the impact of the choir's music. In response to growing interest, Soul Sanctuary has a ministry encouraging other churches to set up gospel choirs. A Toolkit programme supports churches in raising up people from the congregation or community who would like to sing. The idea is proving popular. Free workshops run before each Soul at St James event – the first was attended by 45 people, and subsequent workshops have brought in over 100. The choir's online resources are used by churches globally. As they develop the Toolkit, Soul Sanctuary are aiming to do more to support churches and those who want to sing.

Challenges

Churches bringing gospel music to liturgical settings may find that it involves more work and commitment than traditional choral music. There is poor crossover of gospel music into liturgical churches, Miko says. In the early days, that meant a volume of composing and arranging work that made weekly Masses challenging for the choir to sustain. But thanks to their years of experience, more recently the choir has been able to work with churches to share their music with those starting from the ground up. For churches wanting to start a gospel choir, Miko's advice is that a choir director is essential. Beyond that, he says, a gospel choir can be almost resource-free for churches, if they can encourage members who want to sing or draw in musicians from the community.

The pandemic has been challenging as it has moved the choir's work online, just as it has for many collaborative musical projects. When the choir is singing in person, intense three-hour rehearsals are immediately followed by performances. They shape a sound together, responding to each other's voices. This process is much more difficult remotely. But choir members are used to sharing scores and recordings online, so that they can prepare their parts in advance of rehearsal. Their experience of recording and sharing music has made remote rehearsals and performances easier. But they are keen to return to face-to-face

rehearsals. The outdoor courtyard at St James's may offer them a safe way to begin sing together in the future, when they are able to launch Soul at St James.



PRINCIPLES OF A CHOIR SHARING GOSPEL MUSIC WITH CHURCHES AND THE COMMUNITY

*based on the experiences of Soul Sanctuary
and St James's, Piccadilly*

Soul Sanctuary have found that gospel music can reach the world beyond the church walls with the Christian message. At community and private events, the choir selects songs carefully for each occasion, often sharing a message of hope and joy, if not an explicitly religious one. Through this music, the gospel message can reach people from all backgrounds, whether churched or not.

In partnership with churches, they are taking gospel music further, together with its Christian message. In the in-between setting of the St James's courtyard, the joyful, engaging music invites passers-by to the edge of the church – bridging the church and the world around it.

They make the most of the socially engaged, healing power of gospel music. The potential of gospel music to express hope and pain has seen the choir invited to perform in situations where the music can speak to both. The choir has seen the power of gospel music to bring healing and change in the church and community, from Grenfell memorials to the *Courage* video.

They resource the church as they share their music. They began with a mission to share gospel music in liturgical churches, and they still bring a new sound to liturgy through gospel Mass settings. Their performances reimagine the Christian story in new, inclusive forms. Through the music, the gospel can speak into situations of injustice, inspiring change and hope. And through the choir's Toolkit, online resources and workshops encourage churches to set up their own choirs, so that gospel music – and the gospel message – can go further.

Last Word

As Soul Sanctuary brings gospel music to new churches, they share a richness of worship styles, imbue liturgy with a different kind of energy, and draw in new worshippers. And as they take gospel music out beyond the church, with all its potential to bring comfort and social change, they share a Christian message with the whole community.

“Our main purpose is to share this type of music with everyone, regardless of background,” Clarence says. “We want to continue to share music and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, even through music that doesn’t necessarily speak Scripture or is religious.”



¹Soul Sanctuary Gospel Choir, *What we do* (2020). Available online: <https://www.soulsanctuarygospel.com/about-us/what-we-do> [Accessed 2/3/21].

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AIMS & RESEARCH

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Aims

- 1. To identify churches (or church-linked organisations) working on innovative projects in the 4Cs, selected from among network members and beyond, and:**
 - a. Carry out scoping research for their potential as a case study
 - i. Via desk research
 - ii. Via initial conversations with church/project leaders
 - b. Select a smaller number of case study candidates to research in more depth.

- 2. To carry out in-depth case**

study research with these churches and organisations to explore:

- a. How they have implemented a project or ministry in one of the 4Cs
- b. The challenges and successes they faced while establishing projects
- c. The factors relevant to success in each of the 4Cs
- d. How they understand the role of Culture, Commerce, Congregation or Compassion in their ministries in church and community.

3. To create four products around each of the 4Cs by:

- a. Identifying factors key to the success of projects in each of the 4Cs
- b. Sharing case study stories.

Research questions

1. What are the practical applications of the 4Cs in church and community contexts?

2. How do members relate to the 4Cs in thinking and practice?
Including:
 - a. The theological frameworks for their understanding of the 4Cs
 - b. The practical factors impacting their work with the 4Cs.

3. What factors lead to success in projects working with the 4Cs?

- a. What is their story of the project?
- b. How has the project been impacted by
 - i. The socioeconomic context of the church and project
 - ii. The location of the church and project
 - iii. The resources available for the project – funding and other assets
 - iv. The demographics of beneficiaries or participants
 - v. Other context?
- c. What challenges have churches and organisations faced, in projects and ministries?
- d. How have projects developed through experience – in relationship, in partnership, and in response to what their church and the community really needs?
- e. What is the ongoing impact of their church context – e.g. theology, outlook and the congregation's response to the project?

Methods

HeartEdge began the research project in February 2020, with an expectation that it would take 7 months. Our original plan was to visit projects to see work in the 4Cs in action and meet those involved in ministries. By the end of March 2020, it had become clear that research at the beginning of a pandemic was all but impossible. Churches were closing; clergy were too busy with outreach to take part in research. But many said they would be willing to take part in a few months. With this in mind, HeartEdge suspended the research for six months.

In October 2020, the landscape was very different. The pandemic was still limiting many of the projects we were hoping to research. But churches had had several months to find new ways to reach people, and to fulfil their aims despite new challenges. Art and music was being created and shared online, bringing isolated people together through culture. Congregations were meeting via Zoom. Compassionate projects were reaching out to those at risk in their community. Commercial operations were adapting to meet new needs in their communities. And more churches had been drawn into HeartEdge, through our online festival of theology and practice, 'Living God's Future Now'. We had more opportunities than ever to find out what was happening in churches around the country, where many were reaching out to their communities through the 4Cs.

We reshaped the research plan around digital and remote research methods. The values of

HeartEdge remained central to the research, especially our vision statement, At the heart. On the edge. As much as possible, we aimed to interview more than one person involved in the project, going beyond the 'heart' of clergy's stories to hear from the 'edge' – volunteers, congregants, and other laypeople involved in the projects we researched. For some projects, we could only carry out one interview with a clergyperson or representative, because of the limitations of doing research during a pandemic. In those cases, we reached out to others via email. But for most projects, we were able to interview up to 4 people. This helped to give us a more complete picture of each of the ministries.

Stage 1: Scoping

- We contacted over 100 churches with innovative projects or ministries in the 4Cs. About 50 were already known to HeartEdge. We expanded the search through snowball sampling – where churches suggested others that might be relevant to the research.
- 45 initial scoping interviews were carried out with church representatives, to identify churches that would work as case studies.
- 30 of the scoping interviews were written up as church profiles, and now form a HeartEdge library of additional church data.

Stage 2: In-depth research

- We carried out follow-up interviews with a further 31 contacts from churches and projects.
- In total, 76 people were interviewed for the research (either through in-person or email interviews).

Stage 3: Case studies in each of the 4C areas

5 projects in each of the 4Cs were identified as suitable case studies. Sampling criteria included:

- A range of types of project, e.g.
 - participatory and aspirational art
 - social and exemplary commerce
 - a range of ways of reimagining congregation
 - lay-led and clergy-led projects
 - church-based projects and those which have a history in a congregation but are now independent
 - projects based inside churches, those based in the community, and those that bridge the two through innovative partnerships, outreach and community ownership
 - projects working with a range of groups – homeless or food-insecure people, disabled people, older people, dechurched and unchurched people, and more
 - projects reaching out in innovative ways – churches that meet in gyms and restaurants; creative church projects sharing bitesized reflections online; community partnerships being with those around them through relationship; a pastor using models from entertainment to communicate a Christian message; a choir bringing gospel music to liturgical churches and the marginalised, and many more.

¹ The limit of 20 case studies did not allow us to include projects in all 4 nations of the UK, after other criteria were taken into account, but the church profile library based on scoping interviews includes Welsh and cross-UK projects.

- A range of locations: suburban, urban, rural, and based in England, Scotland, the Netherlands, the USA, and one Scottish-based partnership with Malawi.¹
- Diversity of membership, of projects and churches, in terms of:
 - Ethnic diversity of churches and projects (see discussion in Introduction)
 - Projects that work with people from across socio-economic groups
 - Projects and churches led by women and men
 - Projects led by those who are often beneficiaries of charity, welcomed and empowered as partners and assets, in a shared vision for change.
- Projects where research access was possible despite the limitations of the pandemic.

Stage 4: Data Analysis

Church and project representatives were consulted at every stage of the research, to ensure their stories were accurate and represented them in ways that they recognised. Interview data was turned first into notes for research participants to comment on, and then analysed using thematic analysis. All participants were given the opportunity to comment on the final case studies, no matter how small their contribution to the research.

Stage 5: Drafting and Creating Products

The HeartEdge researcher drafted 20 written case studies (5 in each of the 4Cs). Most were between 2500 and 3500 words. These went deeper than most similar case studies, aiming to capture as much experience of projects as possible, and to turn it into principles that churches can learn from when setting up their own ministries in the 4Cs.

Future products based on the research will include a podcast series. Interview data – notes and transcripts – have been made available for future work at HeartEdge (where participants have agreed).

Case studies at a glance

CityKirk, Amsterdam

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

An innovative renewal of church in the city of Amsterdam, the concept for CityKerk was born from Tim Vreugdenhil's Stand-Up Theology, performances opening up theology to those without church connections. The team are pastors across the city to a new kind of congregation. Tim envisages three levels of connection among a scattered congregation, with the deepest 'heart level' following a rule inspired by the Nazareth Community.

Tim has been establishing Church-To-Go, a ministry for those in Amsterdam interested in exploring spirituality, sharing inspiration through videos and a WhatsApp group. Transforming an

empty church into a House of Connection church, a virtual celebration of 75 years of freedom in Holland received media interest; messages written outside the church and shared on their website inspired hope in the pandemic.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Mirjam Sloots' neighbourhood ministry, based at the House of Connection, aims to empower people in the deprived local area to use the church, led by their needs as a community, in a "*first, listen*" approach. A Syrian kitchen connects the community by sharing meals weekly from the back of the church, and an art project linked community groups to respond to Christmas with art.

Chapel in the Fields, Greater Manchester

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

A project based at Sinderland Green Methodist Chapel, near Manchester, refurbished by minister Kevin Johnson, a guest in the chapel. Aiming to be “a place of creativity, spirituality, hospitality, worship and a resource to the wider church.” They have refurbished a chapel with a grant from Methodist church.

‘Postcard from the Chapel’ – online bitesize video reflections aimed at those with or without faith,

including an Advent-themed series. Small Zoom congregation ‘The Gathering’, aiming to return to refurbished Chapel building.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Resourcing church & community – quiet days (currently online); supporting the community at the local crematorium (including a death café); Woodwork for Wellness workshops (a mental health project).

Cotham Parish Church & St Paul’s Clifton

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

Both churches have a strong focus on contemplative prayer and spiritual formation through creativity.

At Cotham, lay congregational initiatives include a Peace Prayer Group, an annual Month of Guided Prayer and a creative writing and spirituality group.

At St Paul’s: lay-led creative services, themed discussion groups, a weekly meditation group

in response to pandemic anxieties, and creative Zoom services for children. “*Church is, is in the best sense, homemade and participative.*” – David Stephenson, vicar

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Other collaborative activities: a book group themed around current issues including Black Lives Matter, an art group aimed at older people, and creative Lent and Advent groups using lectio divina with poetry.

St Isidore Episcopal Church, Spring, Texas

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

Eight linked intentional communities of those who are excluded from church, with groups shaped around their needs. Liturgy and structure emerges from congregation. “*A church of many walls*” – Sean Steele, Priest

OTHER MINISTRIES:

A new warehouse building hosts the church’s large food pantry and now allows the church communities to meet in a Common Collective service once a month.

Research will look at a 2-3 communities, e.g. Laundry Church, a free laundry ministry with a bilingual mass, aimed at working poor who do not have Sundays free to go to church.

St Martin-in-the-Fields – Disability Advisory Group & Nazareth Community

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

Two case studies in one, as examples of congregational renewal at St Martin-in-the-Fields. Nazareth Community – an intentional community with a rule of life based around seven spiritual disciplines, as a framework for prayer and service in the centre of London.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Disability Advisory Group – collaborative ministry with, rather than for, disabled people, with an outward-looking approach to resourcing the wider church on disability inclusion.

St Stephen's Norwich

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

Café-based community worker and team advising local homeless and people in need who use the café (linking to services, housing, addiction advice etc). Being with model – volunteers include past and current users of café/advice service.

New employment project based in the café – computer training project and partnerships with employment mentors.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Also to capture insights from the café as commercial enterprise in Commerce products.

Ness Bank, Inverness (Church of Scotland)

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

The church established Inverness Foodstuff in 2014 to develop partnership-based solutions to problems of food poverty in the city. The café hosts NHS services, a hairdresser, benefits advice, clothes swaps and more, offering meals with surplus food from local supermarkets.

Foodstuff aims to be part of the solution to real (not just perceived) local issues. 'Conversation

Café' initiative gathering local council, police and other services to discuss local solutions to challenges of homelessness/poverty.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Café currently closed but they continue to offer meals via a gazebo and through home delivery, and have set up a telephone helpline. By Oct 2020 they had served 12,000 meals during the pandemic.

Westray & Papay Kirks, Orkney (Church of Scotland)

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

In their small island communities, these churches have an ecological ministry that has inspired their wider communities. The presbytery has a covenant of Partnership with a Malawi presbytery, and both congregations are actively involved in the partnership.

Covenant of Partnership has seen the presbyteries working together on grassroots projects with

joint fundraising and relationship building, with a focus on being global church together. Currently arranging email interviews with Malawi leaders.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

As Eco Congregations, they have pioneered wind turbines and ground source heat pumps at the kirks and manse, raising income and encouraging community wind turbines on the islands.

Copelston Centre at Copelston Church (LEP), Peckham

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

Organised by a Church Related Community Work minister, the Centre is a church-based charity working with local community partners. They aim to develop ownership among those who use the centre, with a vision for mutual transformation between church and community.

New pandemic-response projects include food delivery service in partnership with local caterers. The Centre hosts Southwark Day Centre advice service and food bank; Silver Linings project

for older people delivered in local partnerships; subsidised counselling and art therapy.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Funding for Centre work comes from London City Bridge and London Community Foundation. Other activities include community music groups and a café church.

Carluke St Andrew's (Church of Scotland) Dementia Support Project

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

This small church has a heart for people with memory difficulties and their carers. Their drop-in is run in partnership with the community mental health team, a Heart for Art group, a walking group for bereaved spouses, and other partnership projects. Shaped around a being-with ethos, they develop those who use the drop-in into volunteers.

Their partnerships and links have made this project particularly special, allowing specialist

sessions from Scottish Ballet, Screen Memories Scotland, Health:Pitch wellbeing opera and Playlists for Life. Recently successfully applied for Go For It funding.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

While closed during the pandemic, they are offering online, phone and email-based support, a Zoom-based carers' support group and Zoom Playlist Parties, and delivering activities to homes of those known to them.

Grassmarket Community Project at Greyfriars Kirk (Church of Scotland)

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

Seven social enterprises offering training and opportunities for those excluded from mainstream employment. These include the Grassmarket Café, which has grown into three catering enterprises through partnerships. Social enterprise makes up 58% of Grassmarket Project income (2019).

With a vision for community empowerment and ownership, the Project now has over 500 members (volunteers and service users) and aims to fill gaps in employment and wellbeing support.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Wellbeing activities grow out of the member community, including a walking group and herb garden, from which new enterprises may develop.

Open Door Centre, Christ Church Barnet

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

Church community centre owned by an independent trust, with a café its central focus, with a vision to serve a large elderly community in the area. Initially built through grants and church fundraising, it is now largely self-supporting with café and rental income, run by volunteers and two paid staff.

Moving into a second phase with a first floor extension, costing £700,000, to work with the church's compassion ministries, providing

facilities for night shelter (showers, laundry) and space for an advice worker in partnership with statutory organisations.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

The Open Door Centre is the church's vehicle for mission and community outreach, bridging into the community, with 40,000 visitors since opening in 2017. It has become "*where the church meets in the week.*" Significant support of their elderly community during the pandemic.

The Sheriff Centre at St James West Hampstead

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

The Sherriff Centre – a commercial coffee shop, soft play centre and post office, together with a charity with the aim of providing debt advice. In the past eighteen months the business has been restructured and turned around – loss-making in its first five years, it made £10,000 profits within first year of restructure.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Expanding into evening gigs with a bar, in partnership with Sofar Sounds.

St Martin's Allenton (Methodist)

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

A church transformed into a community centre with a lottery grant, built with the help of volunteer labour from local businesses. The church has led on a collaborative approach to redevelopment for the whole community, making the most of limited funding.

Their café operates as a training café in partnership with an organisation for people with learning disabilities. Although the church makes no profits under the partnership agreement, the arrangement supports the costs of keeping church and centre open.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

The centre has become a community focus, drawing people into the church in new ways, leading to plans for new services and congregations.

Jericho

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

Six social enterprises developing the employment potential of marginalised and disadvantaged people, with roots in a 1980s Baptist church job club in a deprived part of Birmingham. Now an independent charity with a Christian ethos, they support churches to set up employment-focused social enterprises.

Reusers, a household waste reuse enterprise; Wood Shack, a wood recycling and workshop; Jericho Cleaners; a laundrette; Jericho Construction; Change Food vegetarian/vegan catering business; Jericho Construction.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Their Ignite programme shares their model with other churches aiming to begin social enterprises, operated through the Cinnamon Network.

Victoria Methodist, Bristol

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

A congregational arts and cultural outreach group is the impetus for this church's focus on art and lifelong learning, as a bridge between church and community. They host exhibitions, participate in art trails, and work in partnerships with artists and touring exhibition providers.

Partnerships with local art galleries and the Bristol University Music Department.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Calm Create Community, in collaboration with the Bristol University Music department, is an open church drop-in, creating a place for the community where they share in prayer, hospitality, live or recorded music and participatory art.

All Saints Northampton

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

Educational choirs in a regional church. Without access to significant resources, the church has worked imaginatively with directors of music to develop choirs that record music, tour internationally and offer music training opportunities to many local schoolchildren.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

With fewer choral funding opportunities available, the church is focusing on the opportunities the choral programme can offer young people, seeking new streams of funding for the choirs as activities that change young people's lives.

Sacred Trinity Salford

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

A successful gig venue in a church at the heart of a vibrant arts and cultural quarter, with gigs run by a small team of volunteers or in partnership with promoters, and a history of working in collaboration with the local arts scene.

Participation in the local arts scene has revitalised a creative congregation, now seen in a Sunday evening programme with a café church feel. The rotating monthly programme includes creative services and conversation that engages congregation with social issues.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

Also to profile the Chapel Street Community Arts partnership, based in part at Sacred Trinity, which inspired community art for 8 years. A camera club with a focus on wellbeing is still active from this project.

St Mark's Pennington

A church with a focus on participatory arts and culture, where yarn bombing along the large church hedge has brought church and community together. Displays have been themed around Remembrance Sunday and community responses to the pandemic.

Soul Sanctuary Gospel Choir

MINISTRIES FOR FOCUS:

A choir with a heart to bring gospel and soul music into churches that do not often encounter gospel music, with a social justice focus.

Long-term collaborations with Farm Street Roman Catholic Church, where they lead a monthly sung gospel mass, and St James Piccadilly.

OTHER MINISTRIES:

As part of their Soul at St James project, they filmed 'Courage' as an artistic contribution to the Black Lives Matter movement, now streamed by over 1500 viewers.

Credits

STORIES

Thanks to everyone creating new stories –
and to all those who took part in the
research and featured here

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HeartEdge Case Studies

HeartEdge carried out research into projects in the 4Cs among member and external organisations, either based in churches or rooted in earlier church work.

The first research outputs are written case studies: 5 in each of the 4Cs; 20 case studies in total. The final case studies are in-depth explorations of each project – their contexts, processes and achievements.

Each case study has drawn out some key principles that other churches can use to set up their own similar projects.

These case studies show how churches and organisations have initiated projects or ministries, how they have addressed challenges, and the factors relevant to their success. They share models and inspiration for HeartEdge member churches to initiate and advance their mission in each of the 4Cs.

‘This collection of case studies is a mini theology of the Holy Spirit. It traces the way the Holy Spirit works – blessing open-hearted, open-minded enquiry, exploration, discovery, partnership and initiative. Rather than settle on a model of church and strive to reproduce it far and wide, this approach perceives how the Holy Spirit is working in the world, and sets up a tent there, harnessing the Spirit’s energy and yoking itself to the world’s imagination.’