

CENTRAL

NEWS

GOOD NEWS STORIES from the CENTRAL BAPTIST ASSOCIATION



Spring 2019

In this edition we continue to explore the Mission Review “fruitfulness indicators” by focusing upon ‘PRESENCE’. We begin with a hot-off-the-press example.

CARE IN THE HIGH STREET



renew169

On his return from Fresh Streams conference this year, my minister Paul Knight excitedly gave me details of a wellbeing café network called Renew Wellbeing, and asked me to ring Ruth Rice, the organiser. Before that job had risen to the top of my to-do list I made a connection on Twitter with the person running a nearby Renew Wellbeing café and went to visit. So struck was I by the simplicity of the model and the clear needs it was meeting, we, as Churches Together in Towcester decided this was what the town needed – a quiet, shared space for anyone struggling with emotional or mental health, where ‘it’s ok to not be ok’. Don’t we all have days like that?

Fast forward through a visit from Ruth Rice to explain to church and community members what the cafés involve. She outlined a model based on a rhythm of optional prayer meditations and the Five Ways to Wellbeing. Volunteers agree to show up, are asked to forget the ‘us and them’ of normal volunteering and commit to being human(!) in

simply being welcoming to those who are struggling. It isn’t counselling and it isn’t professional

support but leaflets to signpost to those services are available in the café.

With a green light from Churches Together to forge ahead, we welcomed twenty people to a training evening in September, most

drab mess to a place of light, homeliness and welcome.

We opened our doors to guests on 12th November for two afternoons a week and have had a steady stream of people, from all walks of life and with a plethora of experiences in the three weeks of being open. All are looking for a place to be, to talk and to get a decent cup of coffee and cake (supplied by the local centre for people with learning disabilities).

We celebrated our official Launch Event one evening in November with visits by two mayors and a deputy, the local PCSO, members of the mental health team and a huge crowd of interested people and well-wishers. It was a remarkable occasion of community and church cohesion to celebrate all that a Renew Wellbeing café can offer and all overseen by Ruth Rice who celebrated this as her 20th open



of whom could commit to regular help. I felt God went before me as I contacted a landlord of a vacant High Street property and after a great deal of negotiation and paperwork, we received the keys to the property on 19th October. There was an amazing community response to pleas for painters, furniture, plumbing, DIY jobs and so much more which enabled the vacant shop to be transformed from a damp,

café. I’ve missed out a lot of the tough parts along the way, but it’s all been so worth it to see the right people use the space for the right reasons, and that’s what it’s all about.

Laura Patterson
Youth, Children and Families Team Leader with Tove Valley Baptist Fellowship



FACING THE FACTS



As one who sits on the Home Mission Grants Committee I was involved in the discussions on how we would usefully assess the effectiveness of grants. The committee arrived at seven indicators that would help us determine whether or not a grant would be or had been effective.

During the course of those discussions I couldn't help wondering how my own church would measure up against those indicators even though we are not in receipt of a Home Mission Grant? Others around the table were clearly having similar thoughts. Colin Pye produced a special edition of Central News encouraging all churches to engage in this process, and in that edition Geoff Colmer is quoted, "It would be wonderful if all our churches were in an ongoing conversation about their fruitfulness and effectiveness."

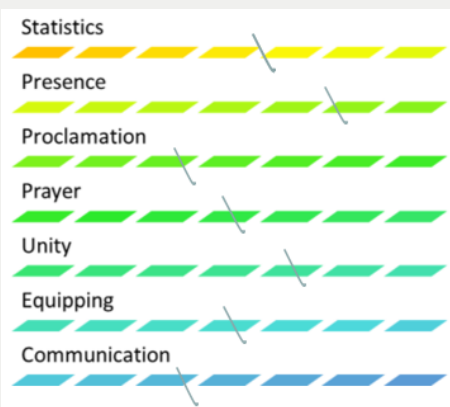
Meantime I had spoken to the deacons and elders at Central Baptist, Luton, about my involvement on the Home Mission Grants Committee, in the course of that conversation I spoke about our work on the indicators of fruitfulness. One of the deacons said that he thought that all churches, including us should evaluate our effectiveness against these indicators, everyone present agreed and we planned to make this the theme of our deacons and elders away day in

Encourage One Another

We asked a few friends from some of our churches to do a 30 second piece to camera (phone) on 'encouragements' ... The result is a video that we would encourage you to watch, and **perhaps download and share / show in your church**. See <http://tinyurl.com/y9rf3xzj> - we would appreciate your help in this, both to remind church communities that they are part of a larger Baptist 'family'

September. We asked Colin to facilitate our reflections.

The day started with a helpful look at the cultural context and statistical information of the UK church. This was very important in setting the scene for our reflections on our own church. I realised that most ministers are aware of these facts, we learn them in college, in articles and in discussion with each other, but it was clear to me that some of my leaders were hearing this for the first time, especially those from parts of the world where the Church is still growing. This was a great help when we reflected on our own church. The statistical information on our ministry was hard to hear. Forty four years ago, the three town centre Baptist churches in Luton merged to form one large church, Central. At that time all three of those churches



individually were larger than the combined congregation of Central is today. That is a hard message to receive. The statistics did give some cause for encouragement, although the largest age group is those over retirement age there was a good spread through the other age groups and the numbers reached through our youth and children's work are healthy.

Another interesting statistic was the number of people that passed through the church over the years, while the whole of our society is more mobile than in the past, Luton seemed to have a more transient population than other places.

and also to more subtly remind churches that 'every church is a Home Mission church' - i.e. every church benefits from a variety of resources, both from the specialist teams at Didcot and the Association via Council and Regional Ministers, which is only made possible by Home Mission giving. One suspects that it isn't always clear, but Home Mission not only supports ministry at a local church or sector ministry level, but is also vital to enable churches to have

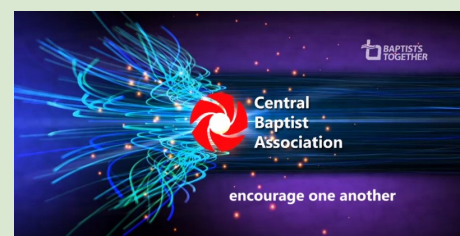
While I don't want to downplay the other indicators, the cold hard numbers helped focus our minds. We talked for a long time about our presence and proclamation. We spoke about the difference between being a church in a small community or on an estate compared to a town centre church. At the moment we are a town centre church drawing people from every part of the town, we considered that and what it meant for making sure that we are visible in the town centre. We asked what is different about us compared to the other twenty or so churches within a fifteen minute walk of our building?

The first part of the day looked, in relation to the seven indicators, at Where we are now? The latter part of the day was about dreaming, where could we be? The deacons and elders followed up the day by reflecting in their meetings, how can we get there? At our AGM we shared the day with the church members and heard their feedback and perceptions, we will hold further such discussions and prayer times as we seek to make the transition from where we are now to where God is calling us to be. It would be good, if like a church receiving a grant, we made a five year plan and reviewed our progress in three years from now. Whether our resource comes from the giving of the local church or from Home Mission Grants we have a responsibility to make sure that we use money, time and talents to best effect, after all these all belong to God and we are called to be good stewards. This programme of evaluation has the potential to be bruising but it is better to be real than pretend that all is well when perhaps the reality is that little progress is being made.

**Andrew Gale
Minister @
Luton Central**



necessary support in times of crisis, or when needing advice on a whole host of matters including safeguarding, mission, settlement etc.



PRESENCE

In the Mission Review edition, the second “fruitfulness indicator” is called PRESENCE. It references the experience of churches and individuals who struggle to make connections between what they do in church on a Sunday and the rest of life - the people they know, neighbours, work colleagues, even in their families and friends. For many the Christian faith has become their guilty secret, and not one to own in the public arena. This indicator is trying to tease that out and to reveal whether a church community is being effective ‘beyond its walls’. Too often we have a ‘come to us’ expectation which seems somewhat contrary to the model of Jesus who ‘went’.

One of the most helpful practical exercises that I have done with churches engaging with the Mission Review relates to this question of ‘Presence’. I ask them to do a ‘mapping exercise’ where they *draw* a rough map of their ‘parish’ (area where the church is located/ village/ town) and mark on it those significant events / people / places that they have involvement with either as a church or individuals - noting where church people live, work and play, where housing developments are taking place etc`. This gives a quick, helpful overview of a church’s presence, and provides a basis for considering how it can be more fruitful in this area.

Many of our churches will be honest enough to say they struggle at this point – that they lack ‘presence’ in the wider community. For example, in Little Kingshill, one of the churches where I ministered, it quickly became apparent that very few outside the church community knew that the church even existed, and if they did they regarded it with suspicion or indifference. It is amazing how ‘invisible’ many of our churches are, even in plain sight. Elsewhere in this edition is the story of Speen Church who faced this exact problem, their

church being the fairly typical small village church that because of the nature of its building and placing was all but ‘invisible’. You will see how it has shifted this perception by a remodelling of the physical facility and re-imagining what to do with it.

Earlier this year during my sabbatical I visited a number of situations that might be variously described as pioneering/ fresh expressions/ missional adventures. The thing they

With the Presence indicator we are asking questions like: In what ways are ‘church people’ involved outside of the church building and in the local community and beyond, being salt, light, and yeast? What are the opportunities being taken to serve or bless the community?

commonly a genuine desire to simply ‘bless’ and serve the community in question. It should come as no surprise to find that such a serving attitude often bore fruit. While appreciating these situations function in very different contexts to most of our ‘mature’ congregations, their passion for presence and blessing was one I think we can learn from.

A prime example of this is the Revd Ali Boulton (Pioneer Mission Enabler with Southern Counties Association). She and her family moved into the first house built on a new estate on the edge of Swindon called Wichelstowe, and together with a small team, have been pioneering there for some 8 years. With the stated aim of blessing the community, they have through a variety of means become key players in that community. They built strong relationships with the local Council and School, were involved in the building, shaping and running of the community centre, from the start ran a toddlers group, and continue to enhance the life of the whole community by a variety of activities. A thriving church that meets in the community centre has been the result.

This article only begins to scratch the surface of this issue, but if you want to explore further can I suggest you have a look at the LICC resource ‘fruitfulness on the frontline’ www.tinyurl.com/ydza8wax which is an 8 week video based course. This explores how we can be ‘fruitful’ where we are (work, home, community etc.), and rather than making ‘church’ the focus it sees the worshipping community as one that

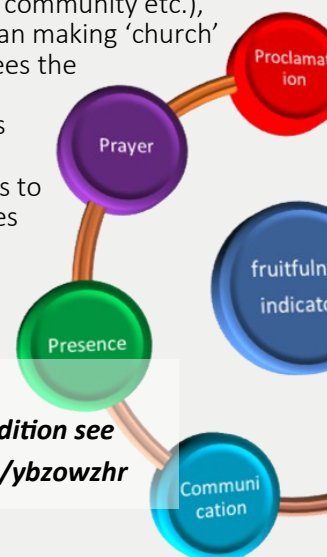
prepares individuals to be effective disciples wherever God has placed them.

Colin Pye

for a copy of the Mission Review edition see www.tinyurl.com/ybzwzhr



had in common was that they were all without exception *immersed* in the context they were seeking to touch with the love of Christ – they were PRESENT there, participants not simply visitors, co-workers with members of their communities rather than engaged in occasional forays into ‘enemy territory’. There was



Where Community Meets

“Where community meets” has been **Speen church**’s mission statement for at least the last 3 years and, as a church, we meet to worship, pray & socialise like many a small fellowship in a rural community. Nothing remarkable there. The rest of the village has joined with us for Christmas carols, weddings and



funerals, but we were essentially left to our own devices and regarded as mostly harmless. Rebuilding the church hall had been on the agenda for around 20 years; so in 2016 when we started, it gave the fellowship the opportunity to revisit how we were achieving our mission statement. The prospect of new toilets, hot & cold running water in a weather proof, light, airy building meant that there would be opportunities to share the Chapel with the wider community in a way that neither they, (or we) imagined.

Bringing the local toddler group into to the new hall proved an immediate success. Any parent who has had the courage to take their charges down to a toddler session knows how rewarding it is for the child, and how exhausting it is for them! The fellowship offered the parents assistance in setting up, supervision of the children and clearing up. This allowed time for chats over a cuppa and a break for frazzled parents. The result?

Young families started turning up to Sunday services occasionally, friendly exchanges between folk who had been strangers started happening around the village. It was all rather lovely.

Starting a community café in the new hall was the next step and the Chapel Hill Kitchen opened in September 2017. We have deliberately engaged volunteers from outside of the church family offering

a welcoming space, good homecooked locally sourced food, and a listening ear alongside the friendly service. We open Thursdays throughout the year and work on a not for profit basis. Spare monies are distributed amongst 4 charities; two local and 2 international and to date we have donated over £7500. We have regulars from all sections of the community from the working men’s WhatsApp group to the WI and some small businesses. We host a number of recently bereaved folk, those who are lonely and many who just need a quick lunch. Listening to the chat and general buzz whilst preparing breakfasts and lunches is a real privilege, raising monies for charities is great but getting the village back into the church in such an unexpected and gracious

way is the real blessing.

I’ll let one of our regulars have the last word;

“I never fail to enjoy the extraordinarily welcoming and friendly atmosphere, of course the home cooked food is simple but brilliant and the light and airy room in which Chapel Hill Kitchen operates is a delight. It is so nice to see the local community being so well served, the cafe attracts many regulars who may not otherwise have the opportunity or inclination to get out and enjoy the company of their neighbours. In a very short time this wonderful venture has become an important cornerstone of the



community.”

The Chapel Hill Kitchen can be found on Facebook, Instagram and www.speenchurch.org. It can be contacted at chapelhillkitchen@outlook.com and is open Thursdays from 9am – 3pm.

Kate Vale from Speen Church



The Association has a **new Safeguarding Officer** who has been appointed for eight hours per week.

Joy Cheang, is a member of Stopsley Baptist church in Luton. Joy has a background in safeguarding as a family support worker, at a Children’s Centre and in her local church. She also has experience working with the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service [CAFCASS].

Joy comments ‘I’m here to support and advise you if you have any safeguarding concerns and you’re not sure what to do next. I’m friendly and approachable and I have a broad range of safeguarding experience. I’m excited to be developing this new role and look forward to being there for you when you need me.’

If you have a query or need to report an incident, or anything to do with safeguarding, please get in touch with Joy, but for details about training sessions, please contact Stephen Copson. Remember too that the Baptist Union website carries a lot of helpful information about creating a safe environment and safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk.

Mobile 07403 722865
Email safeguarding@centralba.org.uk

This News Letter is produced / edited by Colin Pye. He can be contacted at colinmpye@gmail.com