

Meeting held at Hull Central Hall

22 March 2011

This report is based on my notes and may in places be in error or have omitted what others deem important. Any additions or corrections are always welcome and can be sent through the web site.

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In the absence of the Coordinator, the meeting was introduced by the Revd Mark Pengelly. The Revd Luke Smith, Superintendent Minister of the Hull Mission Circuit welcomed the participants and his colleague Deacon Peter Ogle opened the meeting with prayer.

The Hull Story

Luke began by referring to the Mission Statement of Central Hall

- To demonstrate the love of God, as seen in Christ, for all who live, work and spend time in the city centre
- To provide opportunities for varieties of worship for a transient people
- To offer pastoral care and nurture for a scattered congregation, for members of other Churches whilst they are in the city centre and for those who belong to no church at all
- To fulfil a representative and prophetic role to civic, media, district and ecumenical authorities and structures on behalf of the wider Methodist Church
- To offer support and affirmation for Christians in the work place

He then mentioned some features of the week by week life at Central Hall:

- The Coffee Bar – some people are there every day of the week. It provides a sense of community for those who use it.
- The people who come to worship are transient or temporary or intermittent in their attendance.

Kingston upon Hull (usually called Hull)

It is said that Hull is ‘Top of all the tables it wants to be bottom of and bottom of all the tables it wants to be top of.’

In a 2009 report it is stated:

Hull is deprived compared to other places in the country, the 10th most deprived place in England. It has worse health, higher crime, poorer housing, higher unemployment, lower incomes and more people on government benefits compared to the national average. Demands on public services are high.

The full report can be found at: http://www.hullcc.gov.uk/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/HOME/COUNCIL%20GOVERNMENT%20AND%20DEMOCRACY/COUNCILS/COUNCIL%20PERFORMANCE/COMPREHENSIVE%20AREA%20ASSESSMENT/HULL_CITY_COUNCIL_COMPREHENSIVE_AREA_ASSESSMENT_REPORT_0.PDF

or through the shortened link <http://bit.ly/ieTMAT>

Hull is a city divided by into east and west by the River Hull. Each half supports a different football team and the boundaries of the three Methodist circuits recognise this division with the two larger circuits being East and West and Hull Mission Circuit somewhere in the middle. The Mission Circuit has two churches Central Hall and Selby Street.

Selby Street (www.hullmethcenthall.net/selbystreet)

Deacon Peter Ogle talked about Selby Street. Peter is part-time at Selby Street and part-time at Holderness Road in Hull East Circuit.

Attendance at Sunday worship is unpredictable, as is the form of worship, with numbers that can be very small and arrivals at various times. The service is often more like a conversation which may start in one place and end up in another. Music is provided through CDs.

During the week several things happen. On Monday a lunch is provided at £2 (with a contingency fund for those who do not have enough money). Peter is the cook. On Tuesday there is Little Angels Toddler Group and a Children/Youth group in the evening. On Wednesday the building is used by the NHS.

Money is short at Selby Road and it is a continual challenge to keep going. Up to now funds have become available...

Jacky is a community outreach worker for ten hours a week (paid from the District Advance Fund) but does more. Jacky lives in the area and knows the area and its people. Between a mile and mile and half away is a mixed residential area mainly social or rented housing with a transient population. Most people who live there move on if they can.

Central Hall

Central Hall has the usual Church Council, Circuit Meeting and Mission Committee with the last of these providing a means of ownership by the wider/district .

Attendance at Sunday Morning worship is about 25 with about 40m in the evening. Most would call themselves as 'white British'. Sometimes a band provides the music with the choir singing an anthem. There is weekday worship on a Wednesday which lasts half an hour. Some people come to all three services others only to one. For some Wednesday worship is their church.

Other churches meet on the premises. City Life Church meets in the Bank – a room that used to be a bank with a separate entrance – on a Sunday morning (www.citylifehull.co.uk) because it is cheaper than the hotel they used to use. Other groups meeting at Central Hall are Divine Life Ministries (www.divinelifeministries.com), a group from the Salvation Army and Hull and East Riding Christian Fellowship.

The Coffee Bar managed by Debbie (paid from the District Advance Fund) is open Monday to Friday selling food and drinks at prices that do not result in a profit. It serves 400 customers a week. Debbie deals with everyone who comes. Donated food is given to those who cannot buy, food that is ready to eat in the street or can be heated up. A Benevolence Fund is no longer operated. Those who come to coffee bar, come for the company and the sense of belonging. Some come to try to sell what they have stolen from shops. Recently an appeal was made to the district to raise £2000 to replace the dishwasher. The fact that the appeal raised £6000 is welcome evidence of the support from the district. The City Life group now open the coffee bar on a Saturday morning to provide breakfast for homeless people.

There is a Welcome Club that meets once a month, a Prayer Group, and a Bible Study Group, and the choir meets to prepare an anthem for Sunday worship. There is a Friendship Club which organises trips . Luke has good links with Radio Humberside for which he 'does things'.

Because of its location Central hall has a 'cross city appeal' as a place to meet. The premises are rented out for conferences and has contracted tenants as well as occasional lettings for a large variety of activities. These provide half of Central Hall's income.

Chaplaincies

Luke is chaplain to Hull College and Peter to the Princes Quay retail centre where he spends one

day a week with the intention of visiting all the units in a fortnight. Most issues raised in conversations relate to the economic situation – job insecurity, fall in number of customers. The intention is to show that the church stands alongside in solidarity. Luke spends half a day at the College talking to students and staff and he sits on the equality and diversity committee. The College would like a full time chaplain.

Stories

Investigation of a problem with the women's toilet near the Coffee Bar led to the discovery of between 30 and 40 syringes in the cistern. In the men's toilet around a 100 were found. Such things cannot be ignored and it can mean removing people from the premises if they arouse suspicions, but it's hard telling people they're not welcome.

Richard lived in the car park for three months during which he had his fortieth birthday. He came to church on a Sunday. One day all his belongings were stolen from the car park. The police took details and gave him a crime number. Later when Luke and Richard were shopping for replacements for what had been stolen they saw a man wearing Richard's clothes. The police were informed but nothing happened. Richard now has somewhere to live. He doesn't come to church despite saying he would.

Snuff, so called because he took snuff, came to the Coffee Bar to beg. He lived in a shed and liked 'a bit of cider'. A flat and some furniture were found for him. He was no longer seen around. He was found dead on his settee. Luke conducted Snuff's funeral service which was good because it was conducted by someone who knew him.

The Future?

The ministry of Hull Mission Circuit is expensive. Money is running out (income £80K, expenditure £100K) and there has been meeting after meeting to consider the future. Economies have been made – do longer have a caretaker, useless heating. After the recent review (2010) it has been decided to put the premises and site up for sale. (This has not been advertised with a board attached to the building to avoid upsetting people.) The reasoning is that the work does not need premises as large as the present ones. The work is person-based rather than building-based. Central Hall will close and relocate.

North Humberside Industrial Mission

Our afternoon session was led by the Revd Mike Hills, Senior Chaplain and Team Leader of the [North Humberside Industrial Mission \(NHIM\)](#) even though he is a team of one, being the only full-time chaplain. Mike is also priest-in-charge at St Mary, Lowgate, in the city centre. In addition to Mike and Luke and Peter, there are other part-time volunteer 'associate' chaplains.

The reduction in the number of chaplains is a consequence of economic forces affected NHIM like any other business, and increasingly a vicar will have responsibility for a number of parishes, and any vicars with stipends are expected to take some parish responsibility. There is scope for lay people to work alongside chaplains but those who are willing are already doing a lot. One avenue is training people who have retired to work in chaplaincy situations with which, because of their experience, they are already familiar with.

Whereas the parish system is based on geographical areas and looks after people in their homes, industrial mission is about looking after people in their places of work. People are often identified and valued by what they do to earn their living. The chaplain engaged in industrial mission is one of the few people who has access to all the layers of an organisation, and because of this experiences the different views from the different levels.

Through industrial mission it is possible to affirm participation in the local economy, saying good things about making money, and about people who work, to understand a situation from the point of view of those disadvantaged by it and recognise, for example, that senior management are often isolated without any one to talk to except the chaplain. An aim of industrial chaplaincy is to work with others to enable change to a more just, participatory and sustainable economy, and justice at work.

Where is Hull?

Hull is at the end of the line. It is thirty miles to/from anywhere with an insular, proud, independent people – proud of being bottom of the pile. Hull is the back door to England: waves of immigration have come from Europe through Hull.

Fishing

Mike came to Hull to serve in a fishing parish with a church which was in open fields when it was built in 1878, a church built to serve the community that would arise around the new fish dock. Three hundred deep sea fishing boats worked out of that dock and around six thousand lives were lost at sea during the time it was in use. Now it is just an empty space having closed in 1975, but every year around the end of January when it is cold an open air memorial service is held in the open space where the fish dock was that is attended by a thousand people.

Europe

These days Hull looks to Europe. It is no longer the end of the line. Sixteen percent of the country's sea-going trade goes in or out of the Humber estuary and there are links to all parts of the country. Hull is a major city and a major player in the region.

Success

The Deep is the most successful millennium project. The Casey stadium for soccer and rugby holds 25000 and will be expanded to 40000. The Hull Truck Theatre company has recently moved into a splendid new building. There are large businesses based in the Hull area including Reckitt Benckiser and BP. A large offshore wind farm is being developed with a maintenance base in the area which will bring a large number of jobs.

Image and Reality

The city produces a number of glossy brochures promoting Hull and declaring, for example, that Hull is a business friendly city. The image in such brochures is at odds with the reality that exists. The population is around 247,000 with an unemployment rate that is twice the national average and increasing, and increasing more rapidly among young people. The number of people classed as 'income deprived' – not having enough to sustain a 'decent' lifestyle – is about 100,000. Forty percent of the population have no qualifications, 37% consider themselves to be ill.

What is the church doing?

At the city level NHIM is moving away from heavier industries to focus on the city centre:

- retail
- courts
- Hull College
- charities

Mike mentioned:

- a school where a 'proper' religious service is held
- trying to engage with the renewables sector – emphasising the human
- that we all share responsibility for the economic crisis
- being a god-shaped church trying to inspire in a human-shaped organisation
- liaising with other city centre churches – the group of ministers that has been meeting for a while is now open to lay participation
- a group of churches called 'Inspire' that celebrate what they normally do and call it a festival

Out of idleness

Mike finished his session by reading a long quotation from *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville. The quotation is essentially the whole of Chapter 62 entitled *The Dart*

According to the invariable usage of the fishery, the whale-boat pushes off from the ship, with the headsman or whale-killer as temporary steersman, and the harpooneer or whale-fastener pulling the foremost oar, the one known as the harpooneer-oar. Now it needs a strong, nervous arm to strike the first iron into the fish; for often, in what is called a long dart, the heavy implement has to be flung to the distance of twenty or thirty feet. But however prolonged and exhausting the chase, the harpooneer is expected to pull his oar meanwhile to the uttermost; indeed, he is expected to set an example of superhuman activity to the rest, not only by incredible rowing, but by repeated loud and intrepid exclamations; and what it is to keep shouting at the top of one's compass, while all the other muscles are strained and half started- what that is none know but those who have tried it. For one, I cannot bawl very heartily and work very recklessly at one and the same time. In this straining, bawling state, then, with his back to the fish, all at once the exhausted harpooneer hears the exciting cry- "Stand up, and give it to him!" He now has to drop and secure his oar, turn round on his centre half way, seize his harpoon from the crotch, and with what little strength may remain, he essays to pitch it somehow into the whale. No wonder, taking the whole fleet of whalers in a body, that out of fifty fair chances for a dart, not five are successful; no wonder that so many hapless harpooneers are madly cursed and disgraced; no wonder that some of them actually burst their blood-vessels in the boat; no wonder that some sperm whalers are absent four years with four barrels; no wonder that to many ship owners, whaling is but a losing concern; for it is the harpooneer that makes the voyage, and if you take the breath out of his body how can you expect to find it there when most wanted!

Again, if the dart be successful, then at the second critical instant, that is, when the whale starts to run, the boatheader and harpooneer likewise start to running fore and aft, to the imminent jeopardy of themselves and every one else. It is then they change places; and the headsman, the chief officer of the little craft, takes his proper station in the bows of the boat.

Now, I care not who maintains the contrary, but all this is both foolish and unnecessary. The headsman should stay in the bows from first to last; he should both dart the harpoon and the lance, and no rowing whatever should be expected of him, except under circumstances obvious to any fisherman. I know that this would sometimes involve a slight loss of speed in the chase; but long experience in various whalers of more than one nation has convinced me that in the vast majority of failures in the fishery, it has not by any means been so much the speed of the whale as the before described exhaustion of the harpooneer that has caused them.

To insure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooneers of this world must start to their feet from out of idleness, and not from out of toil.