

Methodist City Centre Ministers Meet in Preston

About twenty members of the Methodist City Centre Network from around the Connexion met at Preston Central Methodist Church for their autumn meeting. Revd Sue Griffiths welcomed members and after prayers gave a potted history of the church followed by a guided tour.

Built in 1817, Lune Street's Chapel was one of the first public buildings in the country to be lit by gas and cost £6,000 to build. How this much money was collected is unknown, although this being a weaving area, it is possible some more comparatively prosperous weavers gave generously.

In 1851 the evidence suggests that Lune Street Chapel had started to attract a sizeable number of newly wealthy adherents. It was apparently known then as the Cathedral of North West Methodism!

Preston, having more than doubled its population in the first few years of the 19th century, was ill prepared to manage the emerging conditions in the cotton mills. Innovations and changes in the trade and the over production of cotton led to the closure of mills leaving many without jobs or on part-time work. This was the period known as the Lancashire Cotton Famine and lasted up to around 1865.

1861 brought a new glass roof to the Chapel and a considerable portion rebuilt. It reopened for Worship on Oct 25th that year having been cleaned and re-ornamented and had much more comfortable seats in the gallery!

The interior was once again updated in the early 1990's. The hall downstairs was converted firstly into an 8 bed, then 40 bed night shelter, this following from the Churches determined and committed involvement in caring for the homeless and poor, and out of its 4 times a week Soup Kitchen.

The entrance area was enlarged, allowing a new "Olive Grove Coffee Shop" to be opened along with a new kitchen, a crèche and toilets.

The hall downstairs was converted firstly into an 8 bed, then 40 bed night shelter, this following from the Churches determined and committed involvement in caring for the homeless and poor, and out of its 4 times a week Soup Kitchen. This has become the Fox Street Community. In partnership with Preston City Council

The community aims to provide safe, quality accommodation; be a home with rights and responsibilities; help residents to strive for independence through support and action and Challenge residents to change and achieve.

The afternoon session was led by Revd Tim Keightley of the Foxton Centre. The Foxton Centre is Preston's main provider of daytime services to rough sleepers and other homeless and vulnerable adults. The Café offers people a comfortable, safe space in which they can get a nutritious & affordable meal, socialise and take advantage of a variety of organised activities, such as accredited life skills training, arts and crafts projects and social activities. Clients are also able to access support within the Café from a team of community social workers, project workers and students, who work with small case loads, offering intensive daily support to people with complex needs.

Beginning with conversation about what home meant to the group, discussion moved on to the degrees of homelessness; the visible and invisible homeless and how various statistics can and should be interpreted and used. Many of those present are working among the homeless and discussion ranged through theory and theology to practical examples of good practise.

The meeting concluded as the Co-Ordinator of MCCN, the Revd Martin Turner, shared the responses from members who had written to him of their concerns regarding stationing policy in the city/large town centres. A helpful discussion followed and Martin was asked to take the paper to the national Stationing Committee, who had kindly asked for the input from MCCN. This paper can now be accessed on the MCCN website.

Stuart Wild (Secretary MCCN)