

Notes of the MCCN Meeting in Preston

at the Central Methodist Church, Lune Street

10th October 2013

These notes are not intended as a full report on the meeting, but rather to indicate to those who were unable to be present the kind of thing that we do at such meetings – Ken Tait

Seventeen people attended and after coffee Sue Griffiths, the minister at Central, led our opening devotions using the seven principles from Gene Wilkes book *Jesus on Leadership* (ISBN: 978-0-8423-1863-1). Sue focused on the mission highlighting for us that ‘passion is the key variable’. She then read the beginning of the second chapter of the Second Letter to the the Philippians – which Wilkes uses to underpin his thinking. Sue then led the meeting in prayer

After introduction and brief statements about the situation in our churches, we divided into two groups. While one visited the Fox Street Community, the other was taken on a short tour of the premises during which Sue explained the tension between what was possible in the building and the vision the church has for its mission in the centre of Preston.

The Fox Street Community (www.foxstreet.org) is a 20-bed hostel in the basement of the Central Methodist Church. It is a development of what start many years ago as an informal night shelter, but now is a carefully managed project for helping men from homelessness to independent living in a home of their own. The hostel, which only takes men, has twenty small bedrooms, and a communal area with kitchen. There are staff based in the hostel and an outreach worker that works with those who are beginning to live independently outside the hostel. All admissions to the hostel are referred from the local authority and normally, the men spend less than two years in the hostel before the move to living in a flat with the aim of being independent in a further two years.

The final session before lunch was given over to MCCN business where the main item was Martin Turner’s presentation on stationing ministers in the centres of town and cities to Stationing Committee in a couple of weeks. Martin read what he had already prepared and invited comments and suggestions. (The full text of the presentation is available elsewhere on our web site).

After a lunch of Lancashire hotpot and various desserts, Tim Keightley, director of The Foxton Centre (www.thefoxtoncentre.co.uk), spoke to us about homelessness in Preston and setting out some thinking about homelessness and ways of responding to it. He distributed three papers:

- Degrees of homelessness (Annex A)
- A chart indicating the links between various agencies and resources that come under the *Preston Rough Sleeper Strategy* and the *(Single) Homeless Strategy* (Annex B)
- Extract from Keightley, T.D (2006) *Mission in Context*

The full text is at:

www.thefoxtoncentre.co.uk/content/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Mission-in-Context.pdf

Points made during the talk and discussion:

- We are all potentially homeless.
- It takes about two weeks for someone who leaves home (for whatever reason) and lives on the streets to be come 'entrenched'. Hence the need for the No Second Night Out (NSNO) initiative (www.nosecondnightout.org.uk).
- Eastern European workers will sleep rough as there is no social housing in their own countries. Some are here to avoid national service or prison in their home countries.
- In London, the working homeless are prepared to use night shelters to avoid paying for accommodation. This squeezes out the genuine homeless. Here may be conflict between such people and other groups such as Eastern European workers.
- If a project provides free food seven days a week, there is no incentive to change. Charging a nominal amount for food in a proper café-style environment is affirming.
- Some think that making a charge is wrong because what is being done is no longer ministry.
- Food banks have to be used and managed properly with collaboration and coordination among providers. Groups have been known (in Preston) to independently organise the distribution of food in the city centre, effectively duplicating what is already being done.
- Benefit difficulties are the main reason that people go to food banks.
- The Preston Homeless Forum meets four times a year and provided an opportunity for people working in different sectors to (e.g. 16-25 year-olds, ex-offenders, etc) to network, sharing information, offering consultation, avoiding duplication, and keeping people up-to-date with what's available and what's possible.
- The Foxton Centre acts as a first stop for people who need help in getting things sorted out. It also has an advocacy role supporting people who (for example) have lost their benefits.
- Loss of benefit payments can occur quickly and for a variety of seemingly trivial reasons – not turning up at the Job Centre, unkempt appearance, or for reasons that are difficult to determine and seem arbitrary.
- Universal Credit (soon to start operating in Preston) requires claimants to manage their money more effectively because they receive large amounts (including Housing Benefit) at greater intervals. This has led to some people being left with no money before the next payment arrives. It was suggested that the payment of Housing Benefit this way was being rethought.
- In supporting people out of homelessness they need to be helped to make small steps. Reduce alcohol intake; turn up on time; engage in meaningful activity, a place to live, learn how to use time, obtain work. Pressure from government to be in paid work can cause problems.
- Social contact is important in preventing their predicament making them feel isolated. Also a place to be warm and feel safe.
- Before starting something, see what is already going on and consider working in partnership with an existing project (even if secular) or (as an individual) volunteer for an existing project.
- Priorities:
 - Challenge the skiver/scrounger stereotype

- Advocacy requires knowledge of (for example) the benefit system
- A homeless person should be registered with a GP.
- Could accompany someone to a GP appointment – even this kind of befriending needs training.
- The charity Shelter is seen by some as antagonistic and confrontational and sometimes this style of approach is not helpful. However, they can be helpful with the legal aspects of issues.
- The Foxton Centre maintains links with the local authority. Such links should be explored before taking action.
- Everything we do is theological.

Annex A – Degrees of homelessness

Home - less

Rough sleeping (longer term, entrenched, no benefits)

Rough Sleeping (longer term, entrenched)

Rough Sleeping (shorter term/occasional)

Squatting (illegal, crack houses)

Sofa surfing

Emergency or 'first access' Hostel

Supported Accommodation

Social Housing Rented Accommodation but vulnerable - little furniture, struggling to pay bills, benefits sanctions or minimum wage/mental health

Own home but vulnerable

Private Rented Accommodation but vulnerable

Social Housing or Private Rented but not vulnerable

Own Home but mortgage arrears and/or family breakdown risk

Own home without a mortgage, no family breakdown issues, secure income, secure savings in bank, fully insured, bomb, flood and earthquake proof ...

Home

Annex B

