

Modelling Excellence

During the conference there were two sessions that provided opportunities for participants to hear stories of excellence from churches and projects across the Network.

In introducing the first session Martin Turner spoke of the current negative state of mind in Methodism, a state of mind that made the sharing of positive stories difficult.

A Multi-faith Marque of Excellence – Bev Ramsden (Blackpool, now in Llandudno)



Central Methodist Church in Blackpool is not a typical 'heritage' church – it is situated in a row of shops – received this award because of the welcome it offered. Other factors taken into account are:

- How often the church is open
- Facilities, e.g. refreshments, disabled access, baby changing
- Links to the wider community
- Heritage and history

In making the award the North West Multi-Faith Tourism Association (part of the Churches Tourism Association

www.churchestourismassociation.info) said the church was 'an outstanding example of a sacred site that exists to serve not only its own congregation but to reach out and welcome the whole community'. The only suggestion for improvement was that there should be more 'faith content'.

As a consequence of the award the church now has two plaques (see illustrations) and is now on the tourist map – on the Visit Blackpool and Visit Lancashire web sites.



In applying for the award it was expected that money would have to be spent. That turned out not to be the case. The church was asked to provide any information it had, and a leaflet about Methodism and information

about the particular church proved sufficient, and the only maintenance cost is keeping the information up to date.

Bev mentioned a book: *Sacred Land* by Martin Palmer (ISBN 978-0749952921) which she used as the basis for a recent sermon. [### Link? ###]

Del Boys for Jesus – Mark Pengelly (Worksop)

Five or six years ago the idea the Methodist/URC LEP in Worksop had the idea of building new centre with the intention of making the church relevant by trying to serve the community. Other people, not directly connected to the church, also saw this as a good idea. Working with these partners brought in extra funding but the heritage of both URC and Methodism was not helpful and so the project was set up as a Social Enterprise Company (SEC) – a tool which the partners felt they could use to help serve the community. The cost of building the new centre was £2 million.

Over a hundred volunteers from the church and beyond caught the vision and both the church and the work has grown. More than a dozen small groups have been enabled to become established providing support for people with mental health problems, those with learning disabilities, those endeavouring to return to work, and so on.

The use of a Social Enterprise Company with a board of partners chaired by the superintendent minister has allowed the project greater freedom than might be possible for church projects. For example, a different employment model and the use of borrowed money (the loans will all have been repaid by the end of 2013).

The Gathering – Andrew Letby, Edinburgh

Louise, a Venturer Fresh Expressions Pioneer, who has been in Edinburgh for something over a year, recognising that younger people wanted something new initiated the 'Gathering', best described as a small worshipping community which meets in different places, that speaks to young people, and provides mutual support. There is lots of social time and chatting during the meetings and worship is creativity to help the world involving story-telling connected to real life – from the Bible, from life, or fiction – artists and musicians. As someone said the Gathering is a place where he can be more himself and discover himself.

Is the Gathering sustainable, financially? Except for salaries, outgoings are small. Those who are part of the community could give, but the experience from the United States is that people need to develop before they can give.

One-one mentoring takes place asking 'What do you want?' and then leading on a journey providing opportunities to come to faith. Do you offer them Christ? That's the heart of it. If this is not happening then what is the point?

The Stockport Refugee Group – Joss Bennett, Stockport

It takes a long time to 'process' asylum seekers. The Home Office lists what will happen but it is very different on the ground.

A lone parent will get £43.94 in cash from the Refugee Council to be collected from a nominated post office on a nominated day. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work, cannot have a bank account. In July 2012 there were 16412 pending cases.

A case: a couple fled Pakistan in 2006 after she was threatened with death by her brother because she had become a Christian like her partner. Such people feel that they should just do what they are asked and not 'prod the sleeping lion'. The Friday before the conference they were given 'out of the blue' three years right-to-remain and are moving into a flat of their own. (Those claiming to be Christian are often asked questions – by the UK Border Agency – to test their knowledge of Christianity such as 'How many days are there between Easter and Pentecost?')

The Stockport Refugee Group has no presence on the Internet because of the need for secrecy. It provides a meeting place where asylum seekers can meet other asylum seekers, where they can take the letters they have received and have them translated and explained. They can get help in completing long forms and consult with a housing officer, a nurse, a doctor or a solicitor. The great need is for someone to talk to, to ask for help, for transport, to telephone, to interpret. Asylum seekers need to be encouraged to keep going and not to inflame the situation. They are told that we – the Stockport Refugee Group – are here for you.

The Stockport Refugee Group was started by the church, but is no longer run by the church. It is funded by voluntary contributions and grants. Grant applications require a lot of effort.

Evening Café – Stephen Day, Huddersfield

(Stephen made the presentation instead of Jacqui Goff, the café manager, who was unable to take up her place at the conference because of medical treatment.)

The café at Huddersfield Mission normally opens from 9am until 2pm. A group looking at how the church might meet the needs of the homeless suggested that it opened in the evening. A grant of £5000 was obtained from the Seedbed Christian Community Trust enabled the project to get off the ground and in 2012 the café opened, with the help of volunteers, from 6pm till 10pm Monday-Friday during January to March.

A free hot meal was offered to anyone who came in whether homeless or just needing somewhere to be. No money changed hands. Volunteers worked in the kitchen or among those who came in. The budget was for 20 people each evening. During the three months the minimum was nine but usually thirty or more with a maximum of 78 and average of 49. During the four hours each evening people came and went as they pleased.

Initially it was scary for the volunteers (who come in the main from local churches) but as people got to know each other a community emerged and there was a sense of mutual value. The café no longer belonged to the volunteers, it belonged to the community.

When it closed at the end of March people were asked what was good about it. Safe. Warm. Food and drink. A sharing community. Not one-way – engaged together.

The Evening Café will open again in January 2013, but only from 6pm till 9pm and only for two months. The Seedbed Christian Community Trust have contributed £2500 and an appeal to churches in the area has brought a generous response including a donation from a couple who at their wedding asked for contributions to the project instead of gifts.

Four into one – Andrew Letby, Edinburgh

Methodism in Scotland was not born within the communities where it is found, and at the time the social needs of the people were not as great as in England. Today there are 2500 members, of which half are worshippers, and they are scattered across 40 congregations. Some members live 50 miles from any Methodist church.

In Edinburgh Circuit there were four Methodist churches, about 450 members of which about 300 attend worship. From the centre of Edinburgh it is about 10 miles to the next Methodist church, and that was considered 'alien'.

The question was asked: Why are there four congregations? Criss-crossing across the city was not the best use of resources and something should change, but over what time scale. Some said now, some said never, some said we can't wait for everyone to be ready. Whatever time was suggested there were those who said too soon and other who said too late. Put we set out on the journey and some did not stay with us until its end.

The coming together of the three presbyters, the three deacons and the six lay workers was a significant step. We undertook a mission review of the new church, worked at getting to know each other, established clear lines of communication in order to create a new gathered community with a lay steward for each area.

The main church is at Nicolson Square with work with young people based at Leith in what was YMCA Leith, but is now YMCA Edinburgh. There are projects both inside and outside, linked to school assemblies for example and a drop-in for women and one for men with activities, quizzes and games.

There is much potential. The Café in the Well (underneath the worship area) provides the possibility of doing things on the ground floor and we are open to having the path we are following changed to allow for new things to happen. The diaconal ministry has grown with the deacons being the lead ministers in the different areas.

The Methodist diaspora has been drawn together and there is the hope that this will help the people of Edinburgh know what it is like to be a Methodist.

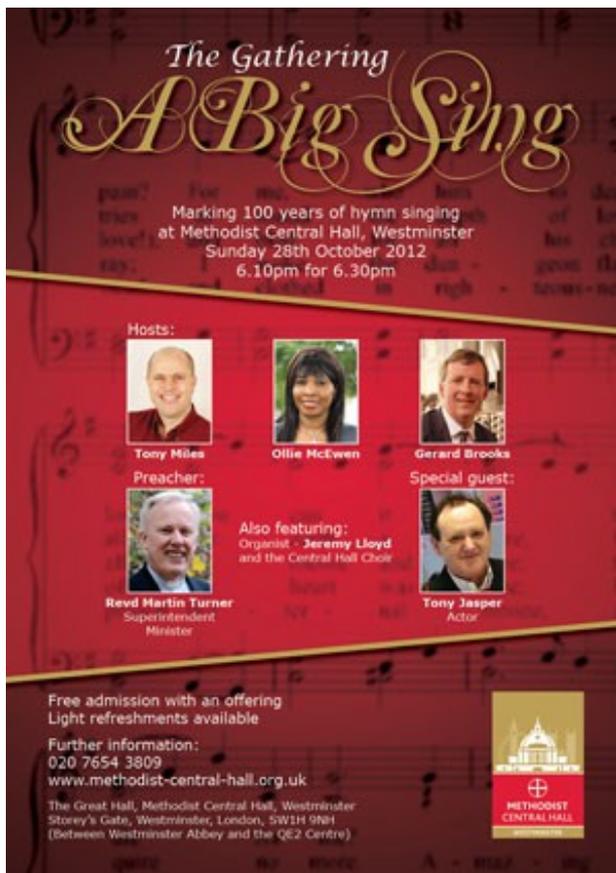
Before Andrew's presentation Geoff Baines showed a video about meetings around the city under the title Voxelopolis about 'finding our voices so that other people might find theirs. My notes are not sufficient to give any further details – KT.

The Gathering : Sunday evening events – Tony Miles, Westminster

After the refurbishment of the Great Hall at Central Hall Westminster the idea was mooted as to whether Sunday evening worship might be in the Great Hall (usually empty at that time) rather than in the chapel.

A Healing Service attracted a good number, some locals, some had travelled in and some were visitors to the city.

The idea evolved into mounting occasional events which would be free (with an offering), not evangelistic, but rather something that Christians would feel they could bring along their non-Christian friends.



The key issue was how to get people to come along. It was decided that there should be some well-known name to attract people, but thing that really worked was doing a deal with premier Christian Radio for advertisements – most of their listeners do not go to church. In addition email flyers (as PDFs) are emailed out emphasising that there is something for everyone, it's free so no one cannot afford to come, and bring a friend. And, importantly, it will last no more than 90 minutes.

Inevitably such events make a loss. The annual cost (an event a month?) is about £5000 offset by an income of £2500. The cost is largely a result of outsourcing technical assistance, stewards and catering.

The numbers attending rose from 300 initially to 700 and averages between 500 and 600 with the best attracting 1200.

Tony's presentation included images of the flyers sent out for various events. The one for the Big Sing last October is shown here.