

On Saturday 29th March around 35 folk from all three congregations (Olton, Christ Church and Hobs Moat) attended the Away Day at Trinity Hall Green. Springing from the commandment to 'Love God and love your neighbour as you love yourself' we reflected on how we discern God's way ahead for us by listening to God, others and myself (the three dimensions referred to in the April Newsletter).

We spent some time, with reference to things that came out of the 28th January meeting with Nick Stanyon, listening for what we are being told - who we are called to love. We recalled also the several 'voices around and within' that were presented during the United Worship and Church Meeting on 26th January. We have not, as yet, had time to pursue what came out of this 'listening exercise', but some things are explored in this Bulletin.

In the afternoon we turned our minds to the 'voice of experience' - how people felt about our monthly United Worship. It was clear that there is a mood to **move to a single centre for Sunday worship as soon as possible**. Circumstances that have taken Neil Eldridge off our worship plan for three congregations leave enormous gaps in the near future. This encouraged those attending the Away Day to unanimously recommend to the whole church that we do indeed move to a single centre for Sunday worship at the beginning of June. Initially, the venue would move around the churches on a monthly basis.

The formal decision to do this is to be made at a Church Meeting following the United Worship on Sunday 27th April @ Christ Church.

A number of related matters were also discussed at the Away Day and are to be pursued in the coming weeks. These included:

- visitation to all those for whom this would make attendance difficult to explore possibilities for transport etc.
- how to ensure that anyone arriving at an empty church received a welcome and the offer of transport to the worship venue, if desired.
- consideration for existing special occasions already in the calendar for a particular church.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES enabled by this change

- a combined pool of volunteers for 'Sunday duties' (welcome, reading, praying, refreshments etc.).
- work with a combined group of young people.
- a rich music resource (singers and instrumentalists) to contribute in various ways.

In these and other ways some significant pressures that have been experienced within each congregation may be relieved and enable fresh energy to be given to our life and mission.

NEXT STEPS

There are a number of things arising from the Away Day (some of which are mentioned overleaf) which can be explored and put into action in the immediate future.

A move to a single centre for Sunday worship (not rotating) is on the agenda, but a decision needs to be informed by a little 'homework' around life and mission (what do we need a building for?), finance (to what extent are we dependent on lettings income in addition to personal giving?), property (the possibilities and restrictions for redeveloping premises to meet our life and mission needs).

WAYS FORWARD

- * At the Away Day a series of possibilities arising from the 'Called to Love' exercise were presented, focussing attention towards **the elderly, housebound, lonely, along with those suffering dementia and their carers**. Such an emphasis ties in with the Generations Project (currently already involving folk from Christ Church, Olton and ecumenical partners) and could open up partnerships with the Baptist Church and others in Olton and the Bungalow Clubs in Hobs Moat.
- * **Listening for the needs and aspirations of those in the communities around us** in order to seriously engage with them raises the question of what Christ and Christian faith has to say to these? If we are to have an **increased confidence in enabling others to engage with Christ and Christian faith**, then we need to give ourselves opportunity within the church to seek answers to the question.
Our small groups (cell groups and other opportunities we may create around particular themes) and perhaps Sunday sermons will hopefully provide these opportunities.
- * Those who may feel that they cannot travel to a different church for Sunday worship will have a natural concern for their future in relation to Solihull URC. **We will be actively exploring worship opportunities at other times and in other places**. Some opportunities to share in worship and Holy Communion along with residents of care homes are created within the Generations Project and also in partnership with Olton Baptist Church, but we will be seeking to create others too. **If you are amongst these folk do please talk to Mark or someone else about your concerns**.
- * **Pastoral care** is an aspect of our church life that requires re-shaping. Our nine Elders need to focus their attentions on the whole of our future life. We will be quickly looking at ways in which all can know that they are loved within our fellowship. This is, naturally, a responsibility for us all in some way, so all are asked to ensure that particular needs or concerns about others do not go unnoticed.
- * **Bringing together the young people** from each of our three congregations opens possibilities for a wide range of activities. Plans are already in process for this, including 'all age' involvement. Look out for your opportunity to re-live your youth!
- * **Bringing together musicians and singers** from each congregation also opens many possibilities - for worship and for mission initiatives.

PLAY YOUR PART

This whole process of change has made several feel rather unsettled. This is likely aggravated by a sense of 'waiting' until decisions are made. **We do need everyone to contribute to the discussions** on which decisions will be based. It can be easy to sit on the sidelines, expecting decisions to be made by others and a new shape for our life together to create itself. But we are all a part of this. Some, because of age, will perhaps think that 'this is best left to those who are younger', but God calls us as disciples throughout our lives and within a new shape for our life and mission there needs to be a place for us all.

The Elders will meet for the first time on Monday 7th April.

We plan for another **Consultation opportunity on the evening of 29th May** and then through the summer months create other opportunities when you can participate in the ongoing re-shaping of Solihull United Reformed Church.

PLEASE PRAY

Throughout, this process needs to be founded in prayer. Yes, we are listening for God through our worship, Bible exploration, conversations, community engagement and within, through our own feelings. We need to also listen in those quiet moments, when we give God space and time, in prayer.

Lord God, we are but a small part of the universal and rich family which is your Church, but we recognise that you call each of us to faithful discipleship, responding to the call of our Lord Jesus Christ to "Follow me". Grant us the wisdom and inspiration of your Holy Spirit as together in Solihull United Reformed Church we seek to be faithful.