

A PERSONAL VIEW - Mark Fisher

Looking back - I came to Christ Church following the break in shared ministry with Knowle to offer some stability for a limited period. After 12 months I also gave 'interim-plus' ministry to Knowle and Digbeth in the Field. Along with Olton and Hobs Moat all were facing a time of change with the Synod scoping the five churches to receive ministry from two stipendiary ministers. Between Neil Eldridge and myself the notion of a ministry team that could include lay-preachers and others seemed a logical way forward if the churches were to benefit from ministry as fully as possible. Unfortunately, this view was not shared by Knowle and Digbeth and so after another 12 months we faced the future situation of three churches with one minister. So, Olton, Christ Church and Hobs Moat came to the conclusion that, for this ministry to be as effective as it might, the amalgamation of the churches was the way forward and seemed a relatively easy decision to make.

This was the view from the 'angle' of ministry while a viewpoint from the three communities and a desire to serve them into the future is rather different. Our amalgamation has given us the enormous challenge of serving three communities as a single congregation with one minister. As I am now that one minister, I have to say that it seems wise that we face this challenge together. The alternative would be three congregations with a minister trying to be three, which is not a recipe for growth or sanity!

Up to the present the mission of each church has been centred on Sunday worship. Any other activities (apart from fundraising) have had as their aim the attraction of people to Sunday worship where faith and customs might be experienced and learned. Experience tells us that this has never been particularly effective in enabling people to come to faith (a fact that is difficult to acknowledge after more than 32 years of preparing sermons!) and that alternative approaches that are both more personal and also relate more to everyday living need to be explored. This need is reinforced by the cultural changes that have overtaken us where people are looking more for those things that support and strengthen their personal viewpoint or belief rather than for an institution that will form and structure their faith.

For us this means that we do not need to focus all things around Sunday worship and, while we will of course maintain our regular services, can also be freed to relate to people in three communities (and more) in aiding their exploration of life and faith in a wide variety of ways.

Looking ahead - I hope that we can recognise that right decisions have been made in order to make the best of our resources of ministry (not just ordained) and that there are exciting possibilities ahead for us to play our part in building the Body of Christ. It will not, of course, look like the church we are so familiar with, but we might trust and pray that it will look familiar to our Lord - communities of people who recognise his love and forgiveness, know his life and seek a deeper relationship with him.

I do not imagine for one minute that our ongoing journey will be an easy one. Indeed, it will require of us a deeper trust in where God leads. But then, is that not we are all about anyhow - deepening faith?

The core Mission Statement, written for Christ Church in November 2012 is offered, having been compared with those written for Olton and Hobs Moat during the LMMR process, ensuring all points are included. The sections that 'unpack' what this means in practice have been revised in January 2015 in the light of discussions in Solihull URC over the preceding twelve months. The text in *italics* outlines what this means for ministry to Solihull URC for the foreseeable future.

WHAT WE ARE ABOUT

- 1. Recognising the God who is known in Jesus Christ, in the Church, the community and the world around us.**
- 2. Responding in worship and through sharing in His activity.**
- 3. Helping others to recognise Him and to respond too.**

UNPACKING WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

- 1. Recognising the God who is known in Jesus Christ in the Church, the community and the world around us.**

What is the language/action that God uses? - The person Jesus - healing, love, justice, sacrifice, restoration, forgiveness etc.

Where do we 'hear this voice'/see His actions in the present? - Employment, civic life, charities, community organisations, creativity, education, health care, Church life and Christian action etc. - also in personal life and relationships.

The focus of 'life-themes' (central to everyday life and our faith) is suggested as a key way in which we can do this. Bible exploration is key to understanding how God has been present for his people through time.

'Me, you and God' are the key strands - What is my experience and where do I see God? What is the experience of others (in different situations, places, cultures and times)? What is God saying to us through our experience, through Biblical testimony and as we pray?

- 2. Responding in worship and through sharing in His activity.**

We 'celebrate God', both as a church and individually, using every means that God has given - hymns, songs, music, poetry, prayer and action etc.

We also use our times of worship for Biblical exploration and reflection on human experience, responding in thankfulness.

We are 'called to love' and there are many ways through which we share in what God is doing, both as a church and as individuals. We would seek to give expression to God's love in our personal life and relationships, within our church life and in our engagement with the community and wider world.

- 3. Helping others to recognise Him and to respond too.**

Enabling others to share in our exploration and to encounter Christ. Also, to facilitate alternative ways of worship and the celebration of God that are meaningful and appropriate for all.

Being open to 'community celebrations' as opportunities to acknowledge God's presence in the life of the wider community. Examples are: Remembrance (Centenary of the 1st World War), Harvest (the fruits of human gifts and labour), significant anniversaries etc.

THE ROLE OF MINISTRY

The following outlines how ministry may enable the fellowship fulfil its mission purpose. This clearly applies to any ordained ministry called to serve the church, but is a shared responsibility with the Elders, other members and any others who are called to particular roles/tasks within church life.

1. Recognising the God who is known in Jesus Christ in the Church, the community and the world around us.

What is the language/action that God uses? - Jesus - healing, love, justice, sacrifice, restoration, forgiveness etc.

Ministry will enable the congregation in this 'recognition' - familiarising people with the Biblical testimony, enabling and encouraging an active engagement and relationship with Jesus and sharing the reflection and experience of the Christian community through history to the present day.

Encouraging reflection and prayer is a key part of this role.

Where do we 'hear this voice'/see His actions in the present? - Employment, civic life, charities, community organisations, creativity, education, health care, Church life and Christian action etc. - also in personal life and relationships.

Ministry will be engaged with the life of the community - able to help the congregation identify where God is at work.

The focus of 'life-themes' is suggested as a key way in which we can do this. Bible exploration is key to understanding how God has been present for his people through time.

'Me, you and God' are the key strands - What is my experience and where do I see God? What is the experience of others (in different situations, places, cultures and times)? What is God saying to us through our experience, through Biblical testimony and as we pray?

2. Responding in worship and through sharing in His activity.

We 'celebrate God', both as a church and individually, using every means that God has given - hymns, songs, music, poetry, prayer and action etc.

We also use our times of worship for Biblical exploration and reflection on human experience, responding in thankfulness.

Ministry will have a focus in worship - both in leading and in encouraging and enabling others in leading worship. In encouraging 'personal worship and prayer' ministry will help people explore less traditional worship suitable to each.

We are 'called to love' and there are many ways through which we share in what God is doing, both as a church and as individuals. We would seek to give expression to God's love in our personal life and relationships, within our church life and in our engagement with the community and wider world.

Ministry will encourage both congregation and individuals to participate where God is perceived to be at work. Mission projects for the congregation, support for other Christian projects or charitable activities are obvious aims, but ministry should also help understanding of where in 'secular settings' Christians can share in God's initiatives.

3. Helping others to recognise Him and to respond too.

Enabling others to share in our exploration and to encounter Christ. Also, to facilitate alternative ways of worship and the celebration of God that are meaningful and appropriate for all.

Being open to 'community celebrations' as opportunities to acknowledge God's presence in the life of the wider community. Examples are: Remembrance (Centenary of the 1st World War), Harvest (the fruits of human gifts and labour), significant anniversaries etc.

Ministry will assist the congregation to explore means whereby an engagement with Jesus Christ can be made by people outside the Christian fellowship. A key role is to enable people to 'speak of their faith' in the language that is natural to them (speech, actions, written word, drama, visual arts etc.) in situations outside the church.

Ministry will support the congregation in exploring wider community issues from a Christian perspective in order that this might be shared in the wider setting.

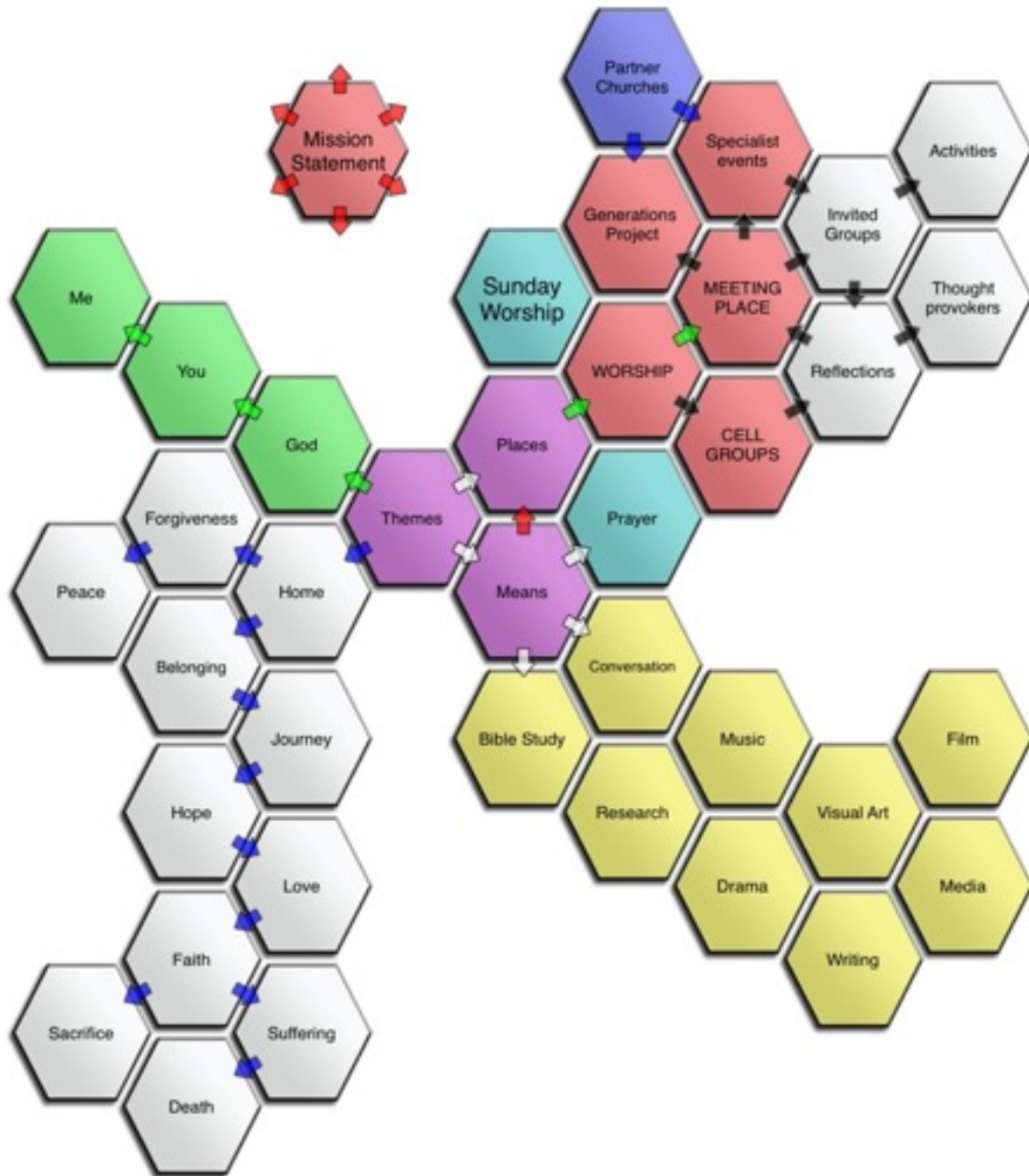
All this outlines a role that is

- teacher, leader, enabler, pastor*
- relating to the individual, the church community, the wider community*

It is above all a 'pastoral role' - being based on close relationships and respect that facilitate the enabling and the encouragement, supporting individuals in their Christian discipleship.

ENABLING OTHERS TO ENCOUNTER CHRIST AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

MISSION STRATEGY



SETTINGS for WORSHIP

The starting point for our life and mission is our own exploration of faith in everyday life. This will take place in Cell Groups and specially arranged occasions, but all together in times of worship.

On a Sunday morning this will regularly be at Christ Church, although a 'Sunday Out' would take us to other settings.

We look to worship opportunities at other times in Hobs Moat and Olton, in Care Homes in conjunction with the Generations Project and in exploring such as 'Forest Church', Cafe Church, Messy Church as we pursue particular 'Life Themes'.

Prayer

Fellowship Prayers and Praying with the Papers are established. We might also look to opportunities for Prayers for the Community in each neighbourhood, along with Churches Together partners.

SETTINGS for MISSION ACTIVITIES

THE MEETING PLACE @ CC

A space that is more neutral than 'church' enabling both aspects of mission to be fulfilled

- expressing a caring love for the community in which we are set.
- sharing Christ

The John Palmer Hall to be re-configured to offer a 'coffee lounge' type space, along with space for young children and for practical activities. The plan below gives some idea how the space could be developed.



It is envisaged that perhaps the Meeting Place would be open to the general public in a morning and over lunch time, while in the afternoon and evening particular groups (existing or to be created) might be invited to use the space.

One clear objective is to host a 'Dementia Cafe' with support for carers and activities for sufferers.

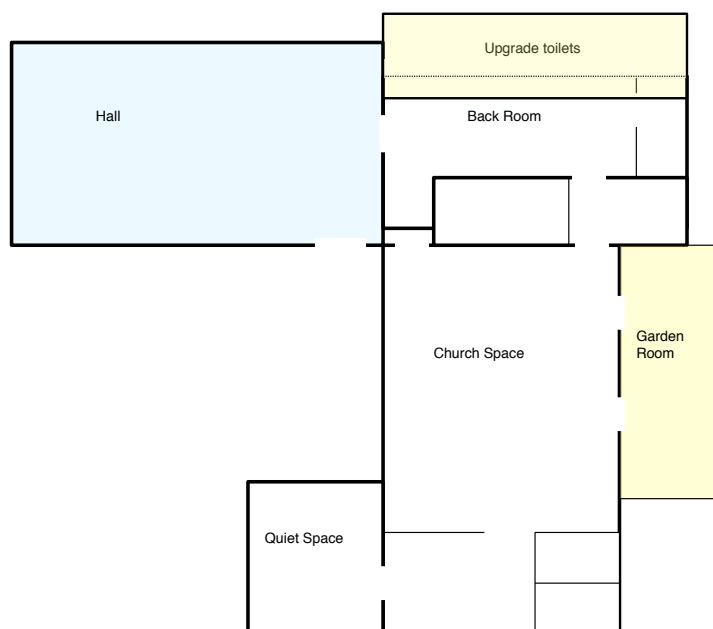
THE CHURCH-SPACE @ CC

To be used as meeting and exhibition space for some 'specialist events' around the themes being explored, but also marketed as a space for conferences and presentations.

HOBS MOAT

To continue the Friendship Lunch Club and fortnightly Neighbourhood Coffee Morning. Along with partners involved in the Meeting Place @ CC we can explore the possible expansion of such activities at HM.

Some redevelopment at the rear of the property to create male and disabled toilet facilities that are accessible from both church and hall. In time there could be other opportunities to extend the church-space for activities that support the lonely and isolated in the community.



OLTON

Existing halls may be used for a variety of activities – theme activities with the uniformed organisations.

Depending on the outcome of the Quinquennial Property Survey, and cost quotations there may be opportunity to create a more multi-purpose space in the church to be used for our activities and by Kineton Green School and the Orchids Childcare wrap-around work. These could offer opportunities to build relationships and develop support for parents and lead to involvement in church activities.

Conversations continue with Churches Together in Olton regarding shared activities and worship.

GENERATIONS PROJECT

This has been co-funded by the Synod Mission Fund and the Harrison Bequest allowing a half-time post to establish the Project. Full-time ministry to SURC will mean the Project needs to be recognised as a key part of our mission as well as engaging ecumenical partners.

While this is established in central Solihull our relationship within Churches Together in Olton offers possibilities to extend into Olton. The project includes pastoral support for families and staff as well as residents which could relate to supportive meetings/activities at the church.

STEPS OF CHANGE

Property Management

Administrator to handle lettings

Identify and action immediate tasks at each site

Attend to access and cleaning arrangements

Assess property costs and rental income, church use and financial input

Review rental charges

Christ Church

Noticeboard changes

Cost a possible 'merge' of Mayflower and Livingstone Rooms

Conversations with existing tenants about space and moving.

'Think Tank' on the nature and design of Meeting Place

Obtain tenders for stage removal and other works

Explore with Alzheimers UK a possible Dementia Cafe

Hobs Moat

Obtain plans and costings for new toilets

Explore possible support for Bungalow clubs

Olton

Noticeboard changes

Obtain full survey of premises to gauge viability and possible expenditure

Conversations with tenants and community groups