

MISSION NOT IMPOSSIBLE

our role as a Christian Church in a new situation

a vision for Solihull United Reformed Church September 2014

This document seeks to outline a vision for our mission as a Christian Church.

It outlines some of the background issues:

- Changes in society mean that we must find a new way of engaging with people.
- We are not just about 'social care'.
- To enable encounter with Jesus Christ is central to our 'call to love'.
- We also need to discover how the person of Jesus Christ is relevant to key themes in everyday life.

Three practical ways forward are then offered:

- To use 'life themes' as a means to engage with non-Christians and enable them to see the relevance of Christian belief to the everyday.
- To develop 'Meeting Place' as a way to both a) express practical care for the lonely and isolated and b) offer a welcoming space to explore 'life themes' and Christian faith.
- The possibility of employing a 'Mission Enabler' or Church Related Community Worker to support us in these initiatives.

A time-table for discussion and decision is suggested.

Beginning a Journey

Earlier this year we, as a church, began an exploration of what it is that we believe God is calling us to. We returned to the Commandments that were highlighted as 'the greatest' by Jesus himself - "You shall love the Lord your God and love your neighbour as yourself." - and were led into a consideration of who it is we are 'called to love' along with 'how?' and 'where?'

We were also mindful of current activities we are already engaged in, along with the communities around us.

Threads of discussion were brought together in March at our Away Day (in Trinity Hall Green) when a series of possibilities were presented. These focussed attention towards the elderly, the housebound, the lonely and isolated, including those suffering from dementia and their carers.

Clear links were seen with the Generations Project, church and community activities in Hobs Moat (lunch club, coffee morning, Bungalow Clubs etc.) and in Olton (Baptist Church initiatives in care homes, community chaplaincy and allotment project).

Don't forget Jesus!

It is very easy for community and caring activity to be 'what we do', as witness to the love we are called to share. However, if the lives of others are to be transformed in more than practical ways, we need also to help people recognise for themselves the God who is the source of that love.

Traditionally, we have relied on people's awareness of Christian faith within the culture of our society. School assemblies, at one time, offered a general introduction to Christian values, but no more. Weddings and funerals, which were once services offered almost exclusively by the church, no longer necessarily bring people into contact with Christian beliefs. An invitation to come to worship in church on a Sunday to discover more is not enough to bridge the gap and other means need to be identified through which we can enable people to engage with Christ and Christian faith.

Follow the Revolution!

In the church we have not helped our current situation. In a very fast-changing society we have been too slow to 'up our game'. Deep rooted traditions and practices, historic and precious buildings and the challenges of offering the community 'something new' when we ourselves prefer 'something old' often mean there is truth in the paraphrased hymn 'Life a mighty tortoise moves the Church of God'.

So, there is need for us to re-engage with Jesus the revolutionary who came to bring life-giving change to society and the world, including us. Not much analysis is required for us to know that the Jesus revolution is needed desperately in our world. It begins with us and the church.

Engaging with Christ

Traditionally, we have expected people to share in our celebrations of Christian themes. Christmas, Easter, Harvest are occasions when we have said 'Come and celebrate the incarnation, the Passion, death and resurrection' where we see God in action. Then somehow folk are to make their own connections with their life and experience. It is not an easy path.

What then if we were to explore 'themes of life' and there discover the relevance of the Christian message in the everyday experiences of all?

Home, belonging, journey, hope, love, faith, suffering, death, wisdom - these are just a few 'themes of life' which also feature significantly within the Biblical and Christian story.

They will provide rich pathways of exploration for both those of us within the church and for our engagement with those from outside the church.

Meeting Place

Sunday Worship is where many of us come to meet with friends, but a more neutral space is required for engagement with others. The world is ahead of us in the creation of the meeting places with comfortable seating, attractive surroundings, tasty food and drink, reading material and no obligation to move-on quickly. In recent years Churches Together in Solihull has made use of Starbucks for 'Live Lounge' a midweek evening opportunity to engage with a wider audience around issues of life and faith.

The creation of our own 'Meeting Place' would enable us to:

- welcome the general public and share, through displays, something of our exploration of themes, inviting their participation.
- fulfil a caring mission to the lonely and isolated
- welcome particular groups for activities

Can we do this?

A major factor behind all our considerations has always been 'the people factor' - our membership and a consideration of personal commitments and age. This clearly has implications on our ability to sustain a project such as a Meeting Place.

Part of the answer to the question is other people who might get involved: perhaps an employed 'Mission Enabler', volunteer helpers, invited groups, partners from other churches etc. There is an 'act of faith' involved in seeing such a project generate interest and participation as it develops. However, there remains the need for our own serious involvement and we need to know of personal commitments that folk are willing to make to this. Elderly or infirm members might make use of a Meeting Place for themselves, but also to be a significant part of our welcome to others, so all may be involved in some way.

Commitments

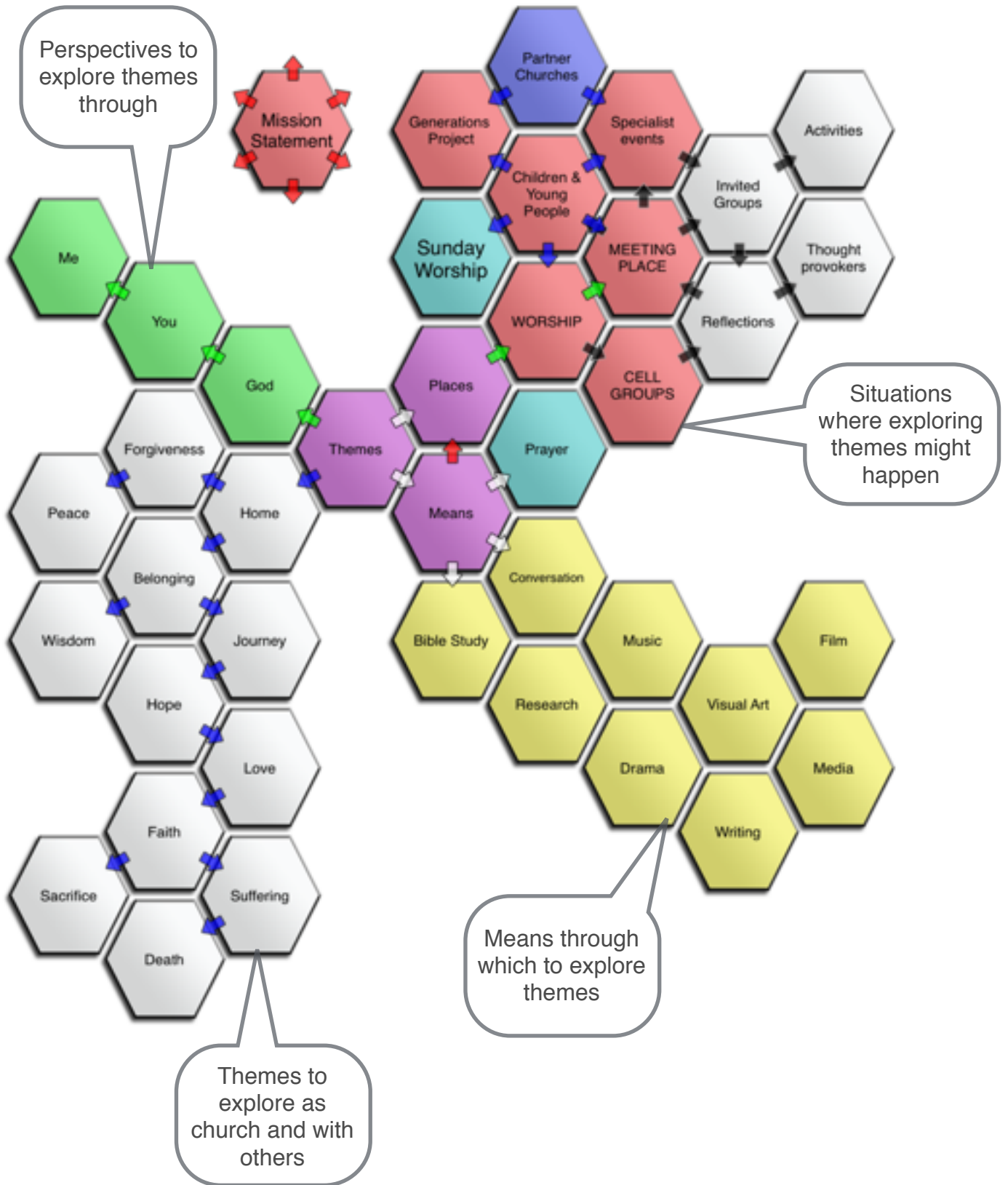
A personal commitment to Jesus Christ in our own life is paramount. This may be deepened through exploring the relevance of Jesus in different aspects of our everyday living, through themes.

A commitment to those we are 'called to love' and engaging with them, in caring and in sharing something of our faith, is also asked of us.

Then there are the practical and financial commitments that spring from the 'how?' of caring and sharing.

It is these that will lead us to clarity regarding our premises, which are a basic resource for all that we seek to do. More flexible 'church-space' to enable a wider range of activities is envisaged.

MISSION STRATEGY



Meeting Place

What's in mind?

- A coffee lounge surroundings
- Quality drinks and light refreshments
- Comfortable seating, including sofas and some appropriate for the elderly
- Activity space - screened from the main space - for arts/crafts etc.
- Displays - around themes or relating Christian faith to world news
- Reading material - daily newspapers, magazines, Christian publications

Who is it for?

- Perhaps open to the general public 10am - 12.30pm
- Possibility to invite particular groups 2pm - 4pm - such as: dementia cafe, some current user-groups (Mums & Tots, Retirement Fellowship etc.)
- Young people at arranged times
- Planned events around a theme

How might it be run?

- Possible 'mission enabler' or paid manager
- Serving - volunteers (church, work-experience, long-term unemployed, learning disabled etc.)
- Catering - church, college students,
- Financially - on a non-profit basis, but seeking to cover all expenses (incl. heat/light)

A Sample Theme Exploration

The following outlines some possible ways in which the theme '**Sacrifice**' might be pursued. We will be undertaking some of this in preparation for Remembrance Sunday this year.

Bible Study

Abraham and Isaac, Disciples leave their nets, Gethsemane - 'Not my will but yours', Crucifixion - 'I give up my spirit',

In our Community

Parents, Carers, Armed Forces, those with a 'Calling' - biographical stories, statistics, response of others.

Music

When I survey the wondrous cross (and others related to Good Friday)

Drama

Visual Art

Reflection on known artists' work. Own art from experience or reflection. Portraits (photo)

Film

The Passion of the Christ, Inn of the Sixth Happiness, Battle of Britain, Young Carers (New Forest),

Media

Writing/Literature

'Where the memories go' Sally Magnusson,

Explorations using different means might be done in a number of different settings:

Cell Groups - Bible study, biography

Worship - reflection, recorded or sung music, prayer, teaching

Children & Young People - stories, pictures, 'giving up' - own feelings,

Special Events - film screening with discussion, an 'art day',

KEY STEPS THROUGH THE AUTUMN

Sunday 28th September - Church Meeting

Incorporated in our worship - a presentation and discussion regarding avenues for mission. Commitments may be made to detailed exploration.

Themes

- to adopt the use of 'life themes' for our exploration of Christian faith and witness.
- to actively create opportunities to explore these 'life themes' with the wider community.
- to explore creative ways to present a Christian perspective in this setting.

Meeting Place

- to explore the development of such a space in every aspect.
- to shape our outreach to the lonely, isolated, those suffering dementia and carers.
- to identify means of supporting organisations who share our mission.

Support Worker

- to explore the possible employment of a 'Mission Enabler' or Church Related Community Worker to help us steer this strategy into action

October & November - Church Chats

In addition to pursuing commitments made regarding mission at the September Church Meeting, opportunities will be created at different times and places to enable further presentation and discussion regarding our mission commitments.

Sunday 7th December - Church Meeting

Following a service of Holy Communion (led by Ann Tempest) - a decision regarding our premises.

The proposal, which will come from the Elders, will be framed around our buildings as a resource for our agreed mission.