

Café Alive

Ecumenical Community Café in Church sanctuary.

Story.

Being in an ideal situation, close to primary school, Pre-School, doctors surgery and secondary school and having a very good working relationship with the other 2 churches on our estate, we decided to open an ecumenical community café in our sanctuary. We were unable to use the halls as the Pre-School is in residence every week day in term time.

Notes.

1. PRACTICAL

- **Where did the idea come from? How did it start?**

We saw another church in a similar situation which had started an after school café in their church and it was very successful. We felt it could work for us too!

- **Who is it for and what needs is it meeting?**

It is for all members of our community. There were no cafés or restaurants on our estate where folk could relax and have a good cup of coffee etc.

- **What preparation did you do? (research, consultation etc)**

The local council offered grants to community projects to benefit their residents. We applied for one, and residents voted between it and about six other projects at the annual May Fayre. We came out way on top and received a grant of £8,075. We consulted with the other 2 churches on our estate, with whom we had an informal alliance known as 'Southcote Alive', and they were very keen to join with us on the project. We also did a 'Café crawl', visiting other churches who had cafés on their premises, seeing how they worked and getting advice.

- **What resources did you need (money, people, expertise etc) and how did you find them?**

We needed about £30,000 which we raised by fundraising, selling our organ, donations from individuals and churches and applying for grants. We had the services of a Christian architect, who didn't charge, but did accept a donation. He had done previous work for the church. We also put the building work out to tender and found a very good and reasonably priced builder. We had inspected some of his work before making a final decision. We went to Kingdom Coffee to find out about coffee and chocolate making equipment and found them very helpful. They provide fairly traded coffee etc and were

competitively priced, so we used them. A local printer produced pads of order forms with duplicates for us. After some experience we progressed to triple layer pads, each layer being in a different colour, which we found very useful.

We also asked around a lot for advice.

- **Who have been your partners in this project?**

We have worked throughout with our ecumenical partners on our estate, collectively known as Southcote Alive. We already did much together in the way of outreach and community building. The other 2 churches in our Joint Pastorate were also very supportive.

- **How did the congregation get on board?**

At first they were doubtful if it would work and were not too happy about disposing of our pipe organ. They gradually came round and were happier about the organ when it went to a good home in North Denmark. As plans developed and building work started, they soon became fully supportive. Prayer underpinned all we did at every stage.

- **What were the key steps to get from the idea to day 1 and how long did it take?**

- Vision; permission – we had to get permission from Wessex Synod; fund-raising via grant applications etc; building work; installation of coffee machines etc. Training courses; planning actual activities; finding volunteers from the 3 churches. Planning and having a grand opening. It probably took about 18 months to become a reality.

- **What legislation did you have to deal with?**

Food Hygiene Certificate from the council and permission from our Wessex Synod.

2. IMPACT ON COMMUNITY.

- **What impact has the project had on the life of the community?**

The community now have a warm, safe, welcoming, friendly place to come on Wednesday afternoons and Thursday mornings in term time. We sometimes open in the half term holidays as well. They can enjoy reasonably priced speciality teas and coffees and delicious cakes and the children have a wonderful time. They can't wait to get in and the adults say it is the 'happening place to be'. Before they had nowhere, unless they had a long walk or bus ride into town to find such a place, which was also much dearer.

- **How has this changed the relationship between the church and the community?**

Members of the community are delighted to come into the café and are finding it a warm and friendly place. They are delighted to have such a place in the centre of their community, and feel ownership for it. It is their café!

They are now offering to make cakes for it, buy Fairtrade goods and contribute to the Food bank. They definitely consider us as friends and people to whom they can talk if they wish.

3. IMPACT ON THE CHURCH

- **How does the project connect with your faith and mission?**

This project was only achievable because we work so well with our ecumenical partners on the estate. Even better, the three of us work extremely well with the local community association, which gives real opportunities for mission. The whole enterprise was based on faith and prayer, and it continues to be undergirded by prayer. The café is welcoming to everyone who comes through our doors, of whatever age, colour, faith, race or sexuality.

- **How has the life of the church been transformed because of this project?**

Everyone stays in the sanctuary for coffee etc after the service on Sunday mornings, instead of trekking through to the hall. This makes it easier to catch and engage any visitors to the church. People are getting more involved, offering to make cakes for the café, even if they cannot attend. They definitely feel ownership for it and are very pleased about its impact in the community. Although we primarily aimed at parents and children after school, many of our older members come and chat to folk from all churches and none. So far, no new people on Sundays, but we are getting to know them and making connections. We greet each other as friends as we pass in the street and hopefully that will lead to people coming in on Sundays in the future. If not, we are still sowing seeds!

Additional resources and weblinks

Springboard is a charity that helps churches working together for the Kingdom of God and for their communities. They help with vision, give advice and encouragement and also give grants. They gave us a grant!

They are funded by a group of 'secret millionaires' and are known by different names in different areas of the country. We also received grants from a local housing association - Sovereign Housing, Reading Borough Council's Decent Neighbourhood Fund, Wessex Synod – including an offer of a loan if we needed it and donations from individuals and local churches. The Property Officer and other members of our Synod were also very helpful and encouraging.

Congregational & General were helpful with advice over insurance matters.

We did a Level 2 Food Safety in Catering Course and exam with the Soapbox Training Trust: - www.soapboxtraining.org.uk Tel: 012270373870. Kay Macpherson, the Course Director, tutored the one day course for us when we

had sufficient people to make the course viable. We offered it to other churches and soon had sufficient numbers.
Many of us were DBS checked, but it was not felt necessary for everyone.

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