

Pop-up Church in the Market Square

The Free Church, St Ives

Story

Notes:

1. PRACTICAL

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

The idea of having a Christian presence in our market square on market day arose after the Anglican Bishop came to St Ives and went around talking to people in the market square. There were so many people who wanted to chat that at our next Churches Together meeting, all of the churches in the town decided to set up a portable church in the market square on Market days.

Who is it for and what needs is it meeting?

The pop-up church is for all people who come into the town on market day. As we have people coming in from the surrounding villages, this includes those who come in from a distance as well as those who living in St Ives. It is to show a non-denominational Christian presence to meet people where they are. The hope is that it starts to meet pastoral and spiritual needs by chatting to people, praying with them and by handing out leaflets that give them information about the churches in the town.

What preparation did we do?

We invited Tim Yau, the Pioneer minister for the Eastern Synod of the United Reformed Church to come to speak to our Churches Together group and to give us ideas that have been tried in other locations. These included video clips of church in boot sales and sofa church and pop-up churches. We discussed what would be appropriate in our town and came up with a plan.

What resources did you need and how did you find them?

We recognised that we would need to buy a gazebo and also have tables and chairs and recruit volunteers from the different churches and train them as to our open, non-denominational role. Catherine, the minister of the URC applied for a Vision2020 grant to buy a good quality gazebo with sides for when it rains or is very windy, weights and posters. We costed it at £900 and were given a grant of £900. We borrow chairs and tables from the Free Church and store the gazebo in the Free Church between sessions. We asked for people from the different churches to serve as volunteers and trained them giving them our guiding principles:

Our guiding principles are to provide:

- A place for people to come and be listened to
 - A place to spread the Good News of God's love by being a visible and non-threatening presence
 - Not a place to distribute aggressive tracts or promote 'in your face' (born-again) Christianity
 - Neither is it there to promote individual churches, although appropriate pointers may be given where requested
 - A place of comfort and refreshment
- Jesus said, 'Come to me all of you who are weary and carry burdens and I will give you rest.'(Matt 11:28)

Who have been your partners in this project?

It is a partnership project with all the churches in the Town. We needed permission to put up a gazebo and obtained permission for the Town Council to do so for free as long as there was a space on market day.

2. IMPACT ON COMMUNITY

What impact has this project had on the life of the community? How has this changed the relationship between the church and the community?

On different occasions some of our volunteers baked home-made cakes and squares that we handed out to people and as a way in to talk to people. If people wanted, would like we offer them a cup of tea or coffee, which we buy for them either from the next door neighbour stall. The next stall owner has agreed to give us a discount to buy teas and coffees for people who come to our gazebo. (The churches have said that they will pay for this.)

It has opened up a contact with people in our community who would not normally attend church. Usually the volunteers stand at the edge of the gazebo and greet people as they are passing and informing that we are Christians who want to be available to serve and support people in our community. Many people respond with a greeting in reply, some keep walking on, but others stop to have a chat and some sit down at a table and tell us about things happening in their lives. If people show interest we ask them if they would like to say a prayer for them. We will pray for them then, but also ask if they would like us to add them on a sheet that will be brought to our prayer lunch later that day and we as people from the different churches will pray for them. One of the volunteers keeps a record of those who give prayer requests.

After we have taken down the gazebo volunteers and a few of the clergy in the town meet in the worship area of the Free Church for lunch and share news as to how the

morning went. We review how it is going and share prayer items with each other and have a time of prayer. It has also brought people from the different churches closer together as we meet for prayer and share experiences.

How does this project connect with your faith and mission and what impact has it had on the life of our church?

We already are open with a café to serve people each day and this extends our service of hospitality and presence in the community. It has got different people involved in talking with people and beginning to talk about their faith with others.

Additional resources and web links

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Tags: Making contact with people outside the church, being a Christian presence in your community, working with other churches