

**Minutes Church Members' Meeting - 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 8:00PM**  
**Held in the Main Hall and via Zoom**

Roy Bawden opened the meeting and welcomed attendees who numbered 86 (Zoom 62; Hall 24).

Apologies had been received from Chrissie Dore, Lesley Ferguson, Chris Gardner, Gary McGrath, Tom and Ros Monteath.

**1. Worship and prayer**

A worship song was played and Roy prayed.

**2. Approval of minutes of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

The minutes were **approved**.

**3. Membership matters**

Hilary Ross-Smith reported the deaths of Serena Said and Vijay Soba and the resignations of Dave Pead, Kat Pead and Mary Willoughby. Serena's thanksgiving service is to take place on 2<sup>nd</sup> February at 12:30PM and all are invited. The following deletions were **approved**: Paul Desai (1 abstention); Ron Dunning (2 abstentions); Dianne Faulls (1 abstention); Naomi Kwasi; Shadrack Kwasi and John Reynolds. Members now total 267.

A helpful document issued by the Baptist Union on the role of a church member has been uploaded to the church website that each member is encouraged to read.

**4. Report on children, families, youth and young adults**

Nikki Latham reported that there had been no applicants for the vacant Children and Families Worker post and that it was planned to re-advertise soon. Sunday groups are bursting with group leaders doing a fantastic job preparing and delivering – we are still unable to staff fully and are reliant on parent rotas to fulfil adult ratios with deacons plugging any gaps. Numbers average 60 but range up to 80. 'Stars' has moved into Ruby and Topaz to provide more room for themselves and 'Sparks'. David and Gillian Rose have stepped down from Xtreme whose numbers can range to nearly 30 with Katherine and Rob Rowland assuming its leadership. Barry and Chrissie Dore have undertaken a number of assemblies in local schools and the Open The Book team are equally active. Prayers for the continuing work and filling of the vacant post were sought.

Helen Yarrow reported on children and family outreach activity including Action Tots which is maxed out with action taken to reduce the waiting list from 20 to 5 families. An expanded Christmas event on 14<sup>th</sup> December saw 40 children and their parents hearing the gospel with advent calendars having previously been distributed. On 19<sup>th</sup> December, a party for 25-28 Ukrainian families was held with poignant examples of the personal impact shared and the Christmas Crafternoon event had seen 180 children including their parents hearing the gospel with the help of the Open The Book team and enjoying fellowship.

Nikki advised that Michael Adesanya had started on 3<sup>rd</sup> January as the Youth and Young Adults Worker and was getting to know them and the volunteers and discerning God's will for their future meetings. Youth register numbers remain at 85 with 65 being seen over the 3 groups. 'Refine' ranges between 11-15 and has completed Youth Alpha expressing their thanks for the pudding donations. 'Roots' is bursting at the seams with 20-25 regulars enabled by an expanded volunteer group following Mark Dendy and Phil Daniels joining. They are continuing their 'Freedom in Christ' course. 'Phase' which captures year groups 7-11 (up to 16 years) numbers 15-23 and uses Youth For Christ resources. There is no Sunday provision for 6<sup>th</sup> formers who attend Sunday services with some getting involved in serving opportunities including Springboard and the sound desk. It is the intention to take the youth to the Christian festival 'Limitless' in August at the Staffordshire showground.

Prayers were requested and given for Michael, his family and the youth work.

## **5. Report from Church Treasurer**

Craig Rowland brought the report which is available on the website. Rolling annual average giving levels are 2% down year on year but 2022 has seen much higher donations which if included would lead to £10k greater income. These will be included in future to give a more accurate trend. Total 2022 income is broadly in line with forecast whilst expenditure is lower with a net surplus of £66k consequently evident.

The surplus, given that offerings and donations are £26k below budget, is due to legacies of £45k (of which £35k had been budgeted), staff vacancies of £32k and other lower expenditure including energy and internal mission due to the absence of a youth worker with no visit to Limitless an example.

The 2023 budget which entails an 8% increase in offerings or £26k inclusive of donations will represent a challenge as no legacies are budgeted nor staff vacancies although the delay in recruiting a Children and Families Worker will yield a budget saving.

The former manse at 8 Oxford Drive, currently let, is in disrepair as reported previously. The tenant will leave in March and David Durn has reported to the trustees on future options as material expense would be needed if the property is to be retained. The report has been considered by the Finance Sub-Group and Trustees. The outcome is that a recommendation to sell the property will be brought to a future Special members' meeting. There are various possible uses of the sale proceeds: capital projects such as the potential Sidewalk redevelopment; replacement of the sanctuary roof which is beyond its guaranteed life; investment for interest to support the budget, or purchase of a low maintenance property nearer the church. The latter option has the potential to aid staff recruitment as it would enable the church to provide subsidised housing (but not a manse).

## **6. Report from Church Secretary**

Roy Bawden brought the report. He advised that he was spotlighting 3 items but that there were others he could include such as the planning application for Sidewalk redevelopment which is a work in progress; the Prayer Ministry which is the same and Alpha which is due to start in February with an appeal to respond to the recent email from the Office for service and to encourage prayer and whom to invite.

Roy advised that a valediction service would be held to mark Derek Page's retirement on 8<sup>th</sup> October and asked members to note it in their diaries and respond swiftly to an email that they would receive from the office shortly.

Roy reported that the person who had preached on 22<sup>nd</sup> January, was ultimately the only candidate that the leadership team had been drawn to through the recruitment process for a new Lead Minister. Roy informed members that he had spoken to the candidate on 23<sup>rd</sup> January and been informed that he was withdrawing from the process. The reason relates to a confidential issue in his present church that had been explained to Roy and which had blown up just prior to his visit. It is significant and likely to require considerable time to deal with. The door has been left open to him to revert should resolution occur sooner than expected. Continuing prayer was sought. Roy advised that the leadership team had agreed that the forthcoming vacancy should be readvertised as soon as possible, again through the BU Settlement Process and Premier. The profile will be tweaked to update it and the deadline for responses shortened which might allow for 2 more recruitment phases if necessary. Together with the staff, the trustees will also work on a contingency plan to support Barry and the church in the event that God does not provide a successor to Derek in the short term.

Roy advised members that their leadership team was continuing to look at Sunday evening services, further to the members' discussions in 2022 that had occurred prior to the change to their current pattern which was recited. Although numbers were not shabby and greater than smaller churches' morning congregations, discernment was sought in breakout groups in responding to the following question. Feedback is reported in the Appendix.

"What are the main obstacles to attending Sunday evening services and how, where possible, can the church overcome them?"

**7. AOB**

Roy asked if there was any AOB. There was none.

Derek closed the meeting in prayer.

## APPENDIX

Members' responses to: "What are the main obstacles to attending Sunday evening services and how, where possible, can the church overcome them?"

- A key issue is pressures on family life in the age of double income families: weekends are often a hectic period in homes locally as people do tasks that might have been done by a 'homemaker' in a house during the week in years gone by.
- Also the change in working culture which has led to longer working weeks/working from home also feeding in to the pressure on weekend time.
- As a culture, we seem to want to 'do' more than maybe previous generations could. This is partly a consequence of (relative) affluence, partly enhanced mobility, partly technology, partly more leisure choices being available to us. But we still have the same amount of time every week. Choosing not to fill it so densely (so we can have space to attend church) is counter-cultural and sometimes difficult to keep doing when others around you are not.
- Some members come from households where, whilst family is supportive of their right to choose to worship in Church on a Sunday, they still have to balance spending weekend time with family as well as weekend time in Church.
- Consequently, the people most likely to attend an evening service are under 30, (probably free of family responsibilities and the need to pay a mortgage,) and the over 60's. (Ditto, for different reasons, (the mortgage is paid and the kids are grown up,) but with different cultural positions about what they want from a church service and how they express their faiths.)
- These two demographics are difficult to keep happy in one service.
- Younger people might choose to go to a more regionally based youth-focussed service in the evening, reflecting the 'going out' culture of their non-church friends and perhaps an easier format to encourage non-church friends to come to with them.
- The morning service has a more stable structure. This allows people to feel comfortable knowing what sort of service they will be attending. Some people really appreciate this predictability.
- The evening service's different formats depending on which Sunday in the month it is, whilst allowing for different types of service to reflect differences in the congregation, does encourage people to pick 'favourites' and skip the ones they're not so keen on.
- Older people might well make a decision based on the weather/season as to whether to attend on a dark, wet, cold evening, in a way that younger people, for whom meeting with their friends is a big part of attending, might not. Older people might also appreciate a more stable service format, so that when they do feel able to attend, (a warm, dry, late spring evening,) they are not trying to work out whether it's a week when they will feel more comfortable with the format that week.
- The fact that the church runs an extensive small group offering also enable people to experience a regular, more intimate fellowship structure outside of a church service and as an alternative to a smaller, more intimate/informal evening service.

- Two said that now that we are in our 70s, it's difficult to come out in winter evenings. One felt that some of the evening services was geared towards younger people.
- Another said she struggles with the weekly service change. She wants to come to church and have preaching. She struggles with the different types of evening services and find it confusing.
- Another said with young children, it's difficult to come out in the evening. She said Sunday evenings in her home is used for relaxation and spending time with kids and get ready for the week.
- Another comes to evening services twice a month, mostly in the evenings when she is singing. She said she would come to evening services even if she wasn't singing but again due to child care challenges, she can come only twice a month.
- Another enjoys evening services when she does make it but with morning service, Springboard in the afternoon, she finds it a struggle to come out a third time.
- Another said she only comes to evening services when she is on duty. She does hope that as her children are now older she can come more often.

- Length of service – limit to one hour?
- Pressures of life – family time.
- Too early at 6:30PM – make it later in summer.
- Some prefer the sanctuary for services.
- Some can only make the evening services – important to have them.
- Some services busier when there was a youth leader – may consequently increase again.
- Increase advertising.
- Use guest speakers, worship groups and offer something different on occasion.
- Maybe limit open prayer as puts some people off.
- Have a definite finish – not a fluid end with music.

- Obstacles: family-time with children and spouse; lack of youth activity e.g. Squash-In; worship team recruitment; elderly may struggle to come out; weather in winter.
- Solutions: re-engage youth and young adults in the services; have a Sunday evening where small groups are encouraged to meet as an alternative fellowship; needs creative thinking; have fellowship Sunday evenings in church; what do other churches do who have successful Sunday evening services?

- Overly confusing as to what happens when.
- If people don't know what they're coming to, they won't come.
- Catering to a broad range, differing demographics missing everyone.
- Greater consistency.

- Obstacles with solution: old age = not wanting to go out/tired; family/young children; distance from church = can't come twice per day; transport/can't drive = lift rota; "service type" = add more sung worship and scripture reading; too much choice/service types = offer more 'full' traditional service (similar to AM); small group discussions = give advance notice including agenda.

#### Hindrance

- Timing - for families with children and work the next day; but it is appropriate for older people
- Lack of consistency, not really knowing what to expect every week- stop too many changes
- Who is the target audience/participants (unclear) - do we expect the same people to come for both services?
- Can it be youth-led sometimes?
- Weather - in summer more people come but in winter it is not easy for some.

#### Future

- People enjoy worship services : some people enjoy the evening quietness services.
- A need to make the service attractive and maybe different from morning service.

- Is this symptomatic of the fact that most Christians nowadays seem to only attend church once on a Sunday?
- Presumably, we must assume most evenings are not attractive enough to get people out of their homes.
- What if we had afternoon services/events e.g. 4pm-5pm
- Do we need a change of thinking i.e. we don't have to have lots of people in attendance at each event?
- Need to have clear objectives of what trying to achieve with each type of evening gathering and communicate this.
- Need to support those in fellowship who can't attend morning service and need evening one e.g. Children's' groups' leaders and helpers, those in Care Home ministry, young people who prefer evening events.
- Appointment of Youth Worker might lead to more young people wanting to be at church on a Sunday evening? If so, how do we cater for this?
- Need to identify who is coming in the evenings and why, then provide what they are looking for.
- How about two evening events per month rather than four that cater for needs identified? Will help with rotas for musicians etc. Keeping the fifth Sundays when they occur for prayer.
- Need to keep ringing the changes in content and format to keep people coming and attract new people.
- Should we poll the membership on what they would like to see?