
E-READ

The General Conference of the New Church **Articles and Letters**

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Café Church: a Field Report - Church for the young un-churched

by Richard Cunningham

“Several families come along, all ages welcome; we have had children from babes-in-arms to junior school age. There is a continual background of small children’s chatter. The parents are welcomed too: there is no suggestion that anyone should remain quiet or seated.”

Some of you will know that I live near Reading, and I’m a long way from any New Church society and so can’t attend regular Sunday worship. Instead, I often attend a Church of England parish near to my home, where I join in many of the activities. You could find St. Barnabas, Emmer Green on the map if you wish.

This parish church has a good attendance - typically 50 persons at the main Sunday morning service. Like many others, we find it difficult to attract families and children, and often almost all the congregation is over 50. Two of our members (in fact, the churchwardens) have decided we need a “Café Church” and carried out some visits to other churches that already have a “Café Church” to find out what happens. Now they have set one up at St Barnabas. So what is it all about?

In the afternoon of the last Sunday of the month we have our new activity. It’s not held in the church, but rather the annex that was built on to the side of the church about 10 years ago, which has a meeting room, kitchen, lavatories and stores. The main meeting room is where we hold the Café Church, and we put out coffee height tables with chairs, set with cloths and pots

of crayons and 'fun' paper, for example with line-drawings (for colouring-in by the small children). This meeting room has the serving hatch to the kitchen, and a volunteer team has tea, coffee, fruit squash, cakes, biscuits and fruit; anyone may help themselves to the food at any time and a volunteer will always prepare a drink. I have attended as a helper and interested observer.

Several families come along, all ages welcome; we have had children from babes-in-arms to junior school age. There is a continual background of small children's chatter. The parents are welcomed too: there is no suggestion that anyone should remain quiet or seated. We quite often get a family with only Mum, but Dads are welcome too! We as organisers are keen to get the fathers along - our reports from other parishes are that when Dad is present the family become regulars.

We try to have a 'fun' activity to start with - last session we had a 'bingo' inspired game, but the ticks on the 'bingo card' were simple questions, such as: "do you have a pet dog? If so, put in cross in box A2." The first person to complete a line across or a column down is the winner. (It was me, and I won a ginger-bread man!)

After the fun activity and the colouring-in are finished (or at least well under way), say at about half-an-hour through, we have the somewhat more organised items: a short reading from the Gospels, a short address (intended to be understood by primary children), an easy hymn, and we say the Lord's Prayer. Most of these are on the screen with a computer projector so that artwork, graphics or film can be displayed. Hymns are sometimes found on the 'youtube' web site.

After an hour we begin to close, and the team of volunteers is left to re-arrange the tables, clear up the servery, load the dish-washer, tidy the chairs, collect the litter, and vacuum the floor.

So far it's been great fun and we feel we have made a good start in making church relevant and interesting to our neighbourhood - particularly families with small children. Some of our families attending are those known to us already who have occasionally attended our family services, and others are friends of those families. We are hoping to grow the size, and in the summer perhaps meet in the park. As organisers we feel that are making the Lord and His church more readily accessible and hope that we are growing the church for the future. And we have thanked the Lord for the success of our experiment up to now.

Welcoming

by Gemma McLean

“I can't believe how incredibly welcome I have been made to feel over the last 3 years. From the moment I arrived and began meeting people associated with the Church, I was blown away by their friendliness and kindness. ”

As it has been 3 years since I started my job as IT Manager here at the General Conference of the New Church, I felt it would be a good time to reflect on how welcome I have been made to feel during this time.

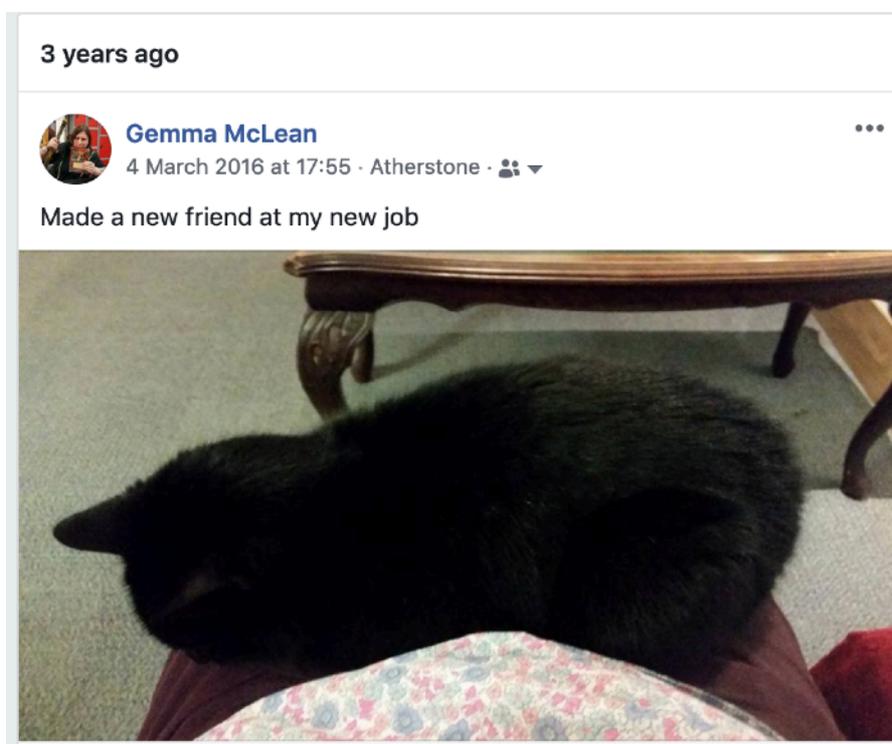
Previous to this job, my experience with Churches was through my late Nan's local Church. My Mum and I would sometimes go to coffee mornings with her. One thing that struck me was how unwelcoming they were to new people. I recall sitting at the coffee morning one Saturday with my Nan when a lady in her 70s walked in. She was 'new' and had not visited before. The room fell silent and everyone stared at her. Nobody greeted her. She got herself a coffee, sat alone, and then left. As a visitor myself and being quite young at the time, I didn't feel confident enough to go and chat to her but I really wish I had. Needless to say she didn't return.

Another time, my Mum and Dad went to a Sunday service. They hadn't been to one there before but my late Grandad was being commemorated so they wanted to attend. The Church Warden stood at the door welcoming the regulars in and not recognising my parents said "Are you coming in here?!" My Mum replied "Yes is that ok?" He was clearly aware of his reaction and said "Oh yes sorry of course".

So what about this Church community? Well it's been the complete opposite. I can't believe how incredibly welcome I have been made to feel over the last 3 years. From the moment I arrived and began meeting people associated with the Church, I was blown away by their friendliness and kindness. Even though I am not a member myself, I have always been treated as if I am one. The Annual Conference is a great example of this as people chat to me, invite me to sit with them at lunch and even offer me bread and wine at the Holy Supper Service.

I think it's a credit to you, every person I have spoken to and met through this job, how welcome I have felt over the past 3 years, and from what I've seen, this applies to other newcomers as well.

I have had an amazing 3 years working here and have met people that I would now call friends. So thank you to everyone and I hope there are many more years to come.



P.s This is a photo I shared on Facebook exactly 3 years ago during my first week in the job, at Purley, with the fabulous Romeo x