

Minutes Church Members Meeting
21st July 2021

Apologies: Dave Connelly, Julie Ledden, Carol Skov and Duncan Tuft

Attendees: 49

1. Approval of Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes were approved with 5 abstentions.

2. Youth and Children Update

Helen Yarrow reported. The Search and Recruitment Team (SRT) comprised Helen Yarrow, Nikki Latham, Karen Ingram, Marianne Genes, and Derek Page. Nikki has taken on the permanent role of Families and Youth Administrator and therefore stood down from the team and Derek is on Sabbatical.

Huge thanks to Helen Smith who took on temporary role as Children and Families Worker and Marie Dendy as Children, Youth and Families Administrative support. They have done incredibly amazing jobs and we are so grateful to them for their passion and desire to see our children hear about Jesus and the way they have navigated the issues and complexities we are facing at the moment. Nikki also took on the temporary role of Youth Worker. As from Sunday, Helen and Marie stood down from those roles. From Monday, Nikki has taken on the permanent role of Children, Family and Youth Administrative support that she is combining with the Operations Manager role. It is testament to them and all our volunteers that our children and youth groups have started up again and are thriving.

A number of youth had a social at Willow Tree; Sunday groups are meeting weekly; Xtreme are successfully running a hybrid session, in person and on line. The SRT has continued to search for a Children and Family Worker and a Youth Worker. We had a number of applications for both roles. There was only one suitable candidate to invite for an interview but they subsequently took a role nearer to where they live. Last week we received an application for our Children and Family Worker that the Search team were keen to invite for an interview. That person was Farrah Easton, who has been helping in Xtreme and felt that God was encouraging her to apply for this role. The Search team agreed to interview Farrah. Helen Yarrow, Helen Smith and Karen Ingram interviewed Farrah for the position of Children and Family Worker. It was a joy to hear her passion, sense of calling, her relevant experience and such a desire to bring children and their families to Christ. Farrah's appointment was unanimously recommended and taken to the trustees who have approved it. As we are aware of Matt and Farrah's desire to return to China, the appointment will be on a 6-month temporary contract. This is exciting news. As a church, we are confident that with the administrative support of Nikki and our volunteers, we will see our Children and Families work grow.

Please continue to pray for our Children and Family Worker and for Matt and Farrah as they are hugely disappointed that they are unable to return to China. Plans for Children and Youth will continue to meet over the summer.

Nikki has ended her temporary role as Youth Worker but with the support of a dedicated team we have made plans for our youth to continue meeting and they went to Willow Tree for an end of term social. The SRT hasn't stopped searching and will be meeting to review the situation. Barry is in discussion with LST about the possibility of a Youth Intern and there are opportunities for a student from LST to be in a paid role, who might more formally want to get involved in Youth work. We believe God is at work with the appointments so far and the SRT and Trustees continue to be open to God's leading and prompting as we move forward. Helen invited questions. None were received.

3. COVID-19 Report

The COVID Working Group continue to meet weekly. David Rose reported. The group look at guideline changes, plan activities, services, communications and fellowship needs. It is a big commitment and prayers are invited. The focus is on getting as many people as possible engaging and attending church or watching on line. Since we last met, we had a GPS prayer time and Park meet up, a couple of Sundays ago. The take up was not as big as expected. About 30 folk met up and had a great afternoon. On-line Alpha has continued and the course is now nearly over. A huge thank you to those that have given their time and made it possible to run the course. It is great to be able to share the gospel with people on-line.

Café Connect have been meeting since 14th June, with approximately 40 guests. They are breaking for the summer apart from 2nd & 16th August. Action Tots is running again with increased numbers and has a lot of interest. A great opportunity of outreach, with a mix of church and community families. Holiday Club will be running 26th – 30th July. Numbers are lower than normal, around 50/60. It seems parents are nervous about exposing themselves to the risk of self-isolation before going on holiday themselves. Holiday Club will run with COVID protocols in place so that parents can be reassured it is as safe as can be. Holiday @ Home will be running on 10th & 11th August, with an Italian theme, that was decided before the football!

Sunday services is the big discussion. Now that we are in Step 4, as a team we have prayerfully discussed, for many hours, what to do about services. Around quarter of surveys sent were returned – over 100 people. What is obvious from those results is that we are not going to please everybody. Some folk are keen to get back to normal and others are more cautious. Issues are complex and difficult to reconcile. We hope to have church back to ‘normal’ around the autumn. We need to be patient and understanding with one another. Government and BU guidelines are that we should continue to be cautious. Although Government restrictions have lifted, their guidelines and BU guidelines are that we should continue to be cautious and make careful and gradual decisions bearing in mind the nature of our church, the make-up of the congregation, our building, our spacing, our numbers and the ventilation. This is almost the hardest stage as we are making decisions ourselves.

The plan from Sunday 25th July is to have congregational singing. We will maintain social distancing and you will be asked to wear face coverings. As the rule of 6 has lifted we would encourage you to book in as large a group as you like. This will provide more space for folk that wish to be more socially distanced. After 8th August, we are still plotting this out. Trying to balance the continued easing of restrictions, managing potentially lower numbers due to summer holidays and clear concerns people have, at least up to 16th August when the self-isolation rules change, about being too near to other people and having to self-isolate.

There are a lot of people who are keen to be in church but have concerns, particularly about mask wearing and concerns that other people won't wear face coverings. We are polling tonight to get a rough temperature of your appetite for risk here. It seems the 16th August will be a key moment, when self-isolation rules change for the under 18's and the double vaccinated will feel more confident about coming to church, be closer to people and not have to self-isolate. We will keep you informed about the steps we plan to take and that will largely be by email, as this is the quickest and easiest way to reach people. Members are encouraged to read emails from the church office carefully, as they contain a lot of information.

Children and Youth will continue to be in church on 8th and 15th August and we plan to move back into normal age brackets groups: a crèche for under 3's, although we ask parents to stay with their children as we can't ask leaders to distance from under 3's. Stars and Sparks, we can resource those with group leaders but this will be reviewed after the 16th August.

There is an issue with Service. There are currently very few people willing to serve in church. We have been very reliant on a small number of very dedicated people but that is not sustainable. We are particularly short of stewards and folk to support the live stream. Sunday services and events won't happen without volunteers. We are a community and without volunteers, things won't happen. Please consider if you are able to serve as a steward or manning the live stream. David read out a statement from the BU.

A poll was launched to gauge how risk averse/willing folk are to return to services in church.

In relation to coming to church, on a scale of 10, where 1 is ultra-cautious and 10 is totally relaxed, where do you put yourself? The result: 1-0%, 2-2%, 3-5%, 4-10%, 5-5%, 6-10%, 7-21%, 8-21%, 9-12%, 10-14%.

The results show that folk are at very different stages and it was requested that everyone has respect for staff and volunteers that you give distance and use face coverings etc. Members were then placed into chat rooms, with a Trustee in each group for 15 minutes and 3 questions were raised for discussion. Please discuss how you feel about returning to church and the pace at which we should travel, with regards to singing, face masks, social distancing; what measures would you like to see dropped first and which of the innovations should continue, for example using Zoom, service broadcasts, on-line Alpha, etc. Group feedback is annexed to these minutes.

4. Membership Matters

Alison Dennis reported the death of John Reeder. Our membership is now 290.

5. Health & Safety Policy Renewal

Normally an advanced copy of proposed revisions is provided but on this occasion, time constraints prevented this. It is available on the web-site. We will vote on approval of the Health & Safety policy statement, that relates to the policy itself. Roy read the H&S policy statement and then passed to Nikki Latham.

Nikki advised that she had reviewed the procedures. The main change is to Responsibilities. Nikki has taken on the role of Health & Safety Officer from the Chairman of the Fabric Committee. There are still some volunteers that have areas of responsibility: Chris Gardner maintains responsibility for lighting; Maggy Gardner for food preparation; Jane Golden for safeguarding and for emergency evacuation it is the trustees and stewards at Sunday services. Everything else comes under Nikki's remit as H&S Officer.

There are 19 sections that have been retained and Nikki has updated any of the British Standards and legislation that we need to keep in line with and added more detail to certain areas, namely, COSHH assessment – hazardous materials such as cleaning materials, that will be reviewed annually and will be available to anyone that needs it. Also risk assessments for general use of the building. Nikki will put together a register for every area of the building and will be responsible for reviewing and updating volunteers and groups as they come back into church. An annex has been added to the end of the policy, to highlight how we can comply with these procedures. A series of checks has been put in place, including their frequency. A record will be kept that will be available in the Operations Manager's office for anyone to see, if required. Nikki invited questions. None were received.

Roy launched the poll **"I agree with the Statement Health & Safety policy."** This was **Agreed Unanimously.**

Roy thanked Nikki for grasping a key area of the Church's operations that affects all of our safety and all members of the community that come into our Church, that we are trying to seek and bring the gospel to.

6. Report from Church Treasurer

Craig Rowland brought the report. The report and slides are available on the church members' website. 1st slide shows 12-month moving average. We reached the highest level of offerings in January 2020, just before COVID. Since COVID hit, offerings have dropped by £4,500 a month. £2-£3,000 is due to the church being closed and lack of blue bag offerings but some of the remaining £2,000 is due to redundancies. As Alison reported, we are down to 290 members and with the church not being fully open, we are not getting new members. Hopefully, as we open back up, the number will rise.

2nd slide shows how we have done against budget. Offerings are £14,000 down against budget after 6 months. We had a legacy from Eileen Thompson, a one off donation of £5,000 and an unexpected tax refund as we had a very large gift at the end of last year that we were able to claim Gift Aid against. This puts us ahead of budget. On the expenditure side, in the ministerial team, we have staff vacancies. External mission is >£3,000 favourable and internal mission, we are spending £7,000 less. We are £13,000 under-spent on expenditure. Looking at the bottom line, we have £17,000 more cash than anticipated. A very blessed position to be in.

Craig will be working with Ian (Pople) on the budget. A first cut draft will hope to be produced by September. Looking at how the money is spent, offerings come in and Gift Aid is added to it and that is the money the church has available.

The 3rd slide shows the distribution of offerings. 51% goes on extending the Lord's Kingdom: Ministerial Team, Children and Youth work, Ministers; 20% External Mission (8% Baptists Family) including Janet Souster, Shiv Dales etc; 16% Church Premises = heat, light, etc; 13% Management and Admin = Nikki, the church office, stationery etc.

Chris has 10 days left. Craig reiterated his thanks to Chris for his service on the finance team over the last 16 years. Craig welcomed Ian who will be taking up the role.

7. Report from Church Secretary

Roy Bawden brought the report and provided a slide listing Strategic Priorities. The slide was shown at the meeting in May when the actions taken in relation to items 1-3 were reported.

In respect of item 4, Senior Minister Transition, the names of the trustees serving in that group were mentioned, Duncan Tuft, Tope Oshowole, Craig Rowland and Roy Bawden. The others are Helen Brown, Liz Treadaway and Nel Osborne. The group had its first meeting this month and are meeting again in September. Please pray for them as they plan for Derek's succession.

Re item 5 Inter-generational church – Helen Yarrow is bringing together a group to look at actions, help delivering our aspirations and looking at our culture. This group is not yet fully formed, so if you would like to get involved, contact Helen.

Item 6 Gifts and their use – the feedback given in breakout rooms was really helpful. It has served as the basis for production of a detailed plan, with at least 20 points on it already, to revisit the gifts God has given us and how we provide opportunities for them to be used. Currently, we are identifying how implementation of the plan is best resourced.

Finally, some of the Deacons have kicked off work on addressing item 7 – Young Adults. As a church we will get around to looking at others but none are set in stone and other strategic objectives are surfacing. As members of this church, we each play a part in listening to God and feeding into your appointed leaders what you think He is saying to you about key areas of church life. Please make that known.

Deacons elections occur in 4 months – 2 existing vacancies. You need to have been baptised as a believer by full immersion. Please consider whether God is prompting you or to nominate another.

Jill Durn will be leaving the role of Pastoral Co-ordinator at the end of September after 5 years' service. Roy wanted to minute what a fantastic job Jill has done for the church. Roy expressed our deep thanks to Jill on behalf of the fellowship. Work has begun on finding a replacement for Jill. Roy invited questions. None were received.

8. AOB

Redevelopment of the Sidewalk. Mick Ledden shared thinking around the potential development of the Sidewalk including the offices and the entrance on that side of the church. Proposals have been prepared and Mick expressed thanks to Gus Jones, Roy Treadaway, Gary Steward and Mark Dendy for a great job. There is a whole range of things we would need to understand about how it would be funded, the scale, the scope, the disturbance, etc.

The Sidewalk was originally built as storage. It is not particularly well insulated. Thoughts are to extend the area out and up and improve the whole environment. There is an opportunity to improve the shop front; there are grants available that we could apply for. There are options to reconfigure the offices downstairs. The staircase is out of current regulations. A personnel lift could be included. The offices upstairs could be reconfigured and there are some ideas for that. The loft area is currently used for storage and is accessed by a ladder. We could convert that and it could be fitted out as a proper office with fixtures and fittings to meet current regulations.

When a fully scoped plan has been formulated, costed and how it would be funded, the plan would be taken to the trustees and then brought to the members. We would want to scope it out this year and plan for it in the next budget that is concluded in November. We would want to make a decision around that time and begin building next year. Disturbance to staff would need to be considered. Feedback will be given back to the design team, detailed plans worked out and proposals for the specification and costings etc.

Roy thanked members for attending and closed the meeting in prayer.

Breakout rooms feedback:

- The group were keen to retain the use of masks for as long as possible (and perhaps encourage the continued use of them out of respect for others in church even if their use is not 'enforced');
- Less concern about social distancing, most people were happy for these to be relaxed, noting that it's not enforced in many other places anymore
- A suggestion that we could leave some space (one of the block of seats, for example) as a social-distanced / mask-wearing zone, even after we relax restrictions elsewhere. This would give those with lingering concerns a 'safe space' in church
- a recognition that the booking systems, while very successful and helpful, may no longer be necessary. It is a significant barrier to entry for many, especially those seeking faith. Some concerns were raised that this might force our hand to remove social distancing, but unlikely in the summer/early stages as people get more comfortable returning to church
- Could we look to improve ventilation in the sanctuary / other areas of church?
- The one-way system seems to be working well, and perhaps that should be maintained for longer.
- The group preferred Zoom for CMMs as it makes meetings more accessible (perhaps we could have a couple of Zooms and a couple of in-person/lunch meetings when back to normal)?

1. Please discuss how you feel about returning to church and the pace at which we should travel, for example in removing masks to sing; reducing or removing social distancing etc.

- A couple felt that we should get back to normal ASAP just drop masks and start singing (which we are doing). They wondered whether we had done enough work on understanding the ventilation of the building versus the need to wear a mask.
- The ventilation of the building was raised by another person who was worried about catching/spreading COVID. Wanted further work on whether the ventilation is up to scratch before we start reducing restrictions

2. What measures would you like to see dropped first?

- Stop wearing masks
- No more booking

- In the children's groups, stop making the children sit on mats "the children are very compliant but it is sad to see the lack of activity and enjoyment" - cannot wait to release them.

3. If time remains available, which of the innovations seen during lockdown should continue e.g. use of Zoom for some meetings; service broadcast; on-line Alpha...

- Keep live streaming going - it so brilliant for reaching out to those who would otherwise not hear the word.

Question 1

- "Could separate people wearing masks and not wearing masks. Those who want to wear masks could be nearer the back more socially distanced, whilst those who don't want to wear masks could be nearer the middle and front next to each other. This is what happens in the Church of England."
- "Can be hard for single people to sit on their own and to find someone to group up with"
- "If want to encourage visitors to church we need to be cautious and encourage social distancing"
- "We could have situation where those who are vaccinated sit in one part of church and those not vaccinated on the other, although this could be complicated."
- "Could we enter the sanctuary with our masks on, but when the service starts remove them?"
- "People who work in areas like schools are worried about unwittingly bringing the virus into church"
- "With my work, I can't afford to come to church, and run the risk of getting contacted by test and trace and be told to self-isolate," (especially if we relax lots of restrictions).

Question 2

- Three people said "remove masks first"
- Another said take away 'Booking in first'
- Another said can put hand sanitizers out, but don't have to check if they have cleaned their hands. Is up to person.

1) How do you feel about coming back to church?

There was a wide range of views across our small discussion group. It appeared that some people were more concerned with the rising number of cases in England whilst the restrictions were being lifted. They felt anxious about removing social distancing and mask wearing requirements. They would like to take a pre-cautionary approach when they return to church, especially considered those vulnerable congregation members who should be given a choice of watching streamlined service online.

Someone had suggested that only double vaccinated persons (except children) should be allowed in church, he said his idea might be controversial, but it could keep everyone safe.

Others would be happy to remove the mask as they felt the mask had been a great barrier in communicating with other members of the congregation. But they wouldn't mind observing social distancing when attending church service. One of the suggestions was to keep the pre-booking system going so that the number of people attending services can be monitored and controlled to avoid overcrowding.

another member raised the issue of congestion at the entrance of the church outside of sanctuary, especially when it is 5 - 10 minutes before service starts. There should be some sort of floor marking so everyone could still maintain social distance even with or without mask.

One member recommended one step at the time approach, for example, if social distancing can not be maintained, then mask should be worn inside of the church.

2) What measures would you like to see in church after the lift of restriction?

Again, some people would like to have the livestream option should they felt vulnerable or unwell, they would be able to watch online at home.

Majority of people would like to see some sort of measures such as social distancing, sanitising hands or mask wearing to be continued until the number of covid cases has significantly dropped. There might be a need to do the opinion poll in a few months' time.

One member mentioned the ventilation of the church building, whether sanctuary or rooms should be sufficient, but this might be an issue when the weather is getting cold.

Everyone was encouraged by the fact that many church activities had been resumed such as Holiday Club, Holiday at Home, Café Connect, Action Tots and Tuesday Fellowship.

Question 1

- The general consensus was that a very cautious approach should be taken re- returning to normal.
- There was anxiety because of the increasing infection rate.
- It was felt that a slow return is necessary because of the disruption being caused by the need for self isolation.
- It was also a concern that a disturbing proportion of the population is still unvaccinated.

Question 2

- Measures to be dropped first: if masks are worn, social distancing could be relaxed a little, and chatting outside church should no longer be discouraged.
- It was also questioned if booking for the service was now necessary and what the approach should be if a passerby wanted to join the service.