'Everyone can come to the Feast'

For a few years now in Winson Green, I have, in partnership with other churches or other organisations, wanted to run a school holiday lunch club, to try to reduce some food poverty in the community.

In the school holidays last month, an Easter Family Holiday Lunch Club took place for three days. The partners with my church – Bishop Latimer United Church were: Winson Green Pre-School which meets in our church hall and the Real Junk Food, Birmingham that runs a Sharehouse not far from the church. Another organisation called Nash Dom, a leading Eastern European and Russian Speaking Community Support & Business Development Centre/Coalition, supported us by promoting the Lunch Club to their clients (in their own respective language) who attend their weekly advice surgery, which also meets in the church hall.

The aim, was to gain evidence of need, to be able to fundraise for a bigger lunch club to take place in the summer school holidays.

As this was the first time we were running the lunch club, we were unsure of how many people might attend if we promoted the event generally to families in the community and we didn’t want to run out of food! So, we decided to work on an invitation-only basis and invited families linked to the church hall: families from the pre-school, families from the Boys Brigade, families from a women’s group called Women mean Business, plus the families of Nash Dom clients.

Although we did have people attend the lunches each day and they enjoyed what they had, we didn’t see anything like the number of families we potentially could have hosted. We were slightly frustrated that we hadn’t seen more families and wondered what our next step might be? In our community, it is difficult to launch new projects. It can take time for people to have the confidence to attend new initiatives even if they know the organisers. One of the volunteers who attended each day was one of the church wardens and as we tidied up on the last day, discussing whether or not we felt that the lunches had been successful, she reminded us of the story of the great feast ….. and we realised we had been wrong to just use the method of invitation to the groups we knew.

The Parable of the Great Feast

15 When one of the guests sitting at the table heard this, he said to Jesus, “How happy are those who will sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God!”
16 Jesus said to him, “There was once a man who was giving a great feast to which he invited many people. 17 When it was time for the feast, he sent his servant to tell his guests, ‘Come, everything is ready!’ 18 But they all began, one after another, to make excuses. The first one told the servant, ‘I have bought a field and must go and look at it; please accept my apologies.’ 19 Another one said, ‘I have bought five pairs of oxen and am on my way to try them out; please accept my apologies.’ 20 Another one said, ‘I have just gotten married, and for that reason I cannot come.’ 21 The servant went back and told all this to his master. The master was furious and said to his servant, ‘Hurry out to the streets and alleys of the town, and bring back the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ 22 Soon the servant said, ‘Your order has been carried out, sir, but there is room for more.’ 23 So the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the country roads and lanes and make people come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you all that none of those who were invited will taste my dinner!”

We didn’t receive excuses from families as such as to why they couldn’t attend. This parable helped us realise that we should have promoted the lunches as wide as possible across the community and that was what we have decided we will do if we run a lunch club in the summer school holidays.

Between now and the summer holidays we are going to hold a monthly lunch to continue to raise awareness of our future plans for a school holiday lunch club. The Real Junk Food project can continue to donate the food and provide a cook, free-of-charge to create the lunches and I will work with my colleagues to promote the idea to the different groups and organisations that were involved at Easter time, plus promoting to the wider community and seek future funding.

An almost throwaway comment by our church warden, reminded me of the never-ending value of looking to scripture to aid us in our community work deliberations, evaluations and future plans ….i.e the use of the pastoral cycle.

Winson Green Pre-School
Bishop Latimer United Church

Adella Pritchard, May 2018