

Telling our story

community work and evangelism

AIM

To provide some ways of starting discussions about how Evangelism can be linked to community work in our churches and communities.

INTRODUCTION

Some churches have been exploring community development work for some time, others are new to this. Here are some activities which can help a process of discussion and reflection on the relationship between community development activities and Evangelism. They are suitable for small groups of people to do together.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY WORK?

Here are some quotes from people about community development work and its relationship to Evangelism. Spend some time thinking about these in small groups. Write the quotes on small cards and pass them around so that there is one between three or four people. Collect up ideas after discussion. Swap cards around to get a wider range of views.

Quotes

Community Development is about building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives.

Standing Conference for Community Development

'Evangelism and social action go together like a pair of scissors; you need two blades for a cutting edge'

Colin Marchant

'When I give bread to the poor you call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no bread you call me a communist'

Dom Helder Camara

'You gain peoples trust by standing alongside them not by preaching at them'

George McLeod, Iona Community.

'Mission is the Good News of God's Love incarnated in the witness of a community for the sake of the world'

David Bosch

'Development, liberation and transformation are all aspects of the same process. It is not a marginal activity. It is the core of all creative human beings'

Anne Hope & Sally Timmel

'One of the things we have re-learnt ...is that to be true to the Gospel, the Church needs to...minister to people's physical as well as spiritual needs'

George Carey

Telling our story

community work and evangelism

'Don't think that small groups of people can't change the world.....they always have'

Margaret Mead

When small groups of people have caught the vision.....and live in hope.....change will occur in society

Jim Wallis

'If you pray without serving, then you are praying in vain. If you serve without praying, then you are serving in vain'

Mother Teresa

Let me tell you: Abington Avenue United Reformed Church, Northampton

Tell the story of Abington Avenue United Reformed Church. It is well known in Northampton. The taxi driver at the station needed no special instructions to deliver me (a first time visitor to Northampton) to this hub of activity. 'Side door or front door?' he asked.

Wednesday mornings at Abington Avenue is buzzing with activities for carers and children - the toy library, the Jolly Tots and Ladybirds. The newly renovated church and adjoining buildings are light, welcoming and warm. The rooms are designed for specific purposes such as the nursery, but are also flexible in use. The dining area with its glass roof is also used as an arts and crafts room and to exhibit painting and cards. The glass door from this area leads directly into the church, making a link between the community and spiritual activities of the church.

Toy Library

Bernard, a member of the church, has helped run the Toy Library since he retired in 1994. The library is bulging with colourful toys of all shapes and sizes which local carers can borrow for a weekly charge of 15p to one pound. It has been running for over nine years and has over 400 members. The original idea was that Mums, and sometimes Dads, would come select a toy and go home, but it has developed into a play-space where carers stay, chat and play. Angela, a local hairdresser gives special offers on toddler haircuts- £3 a head - in one corner of the room. In lieu of rent she donates ten percent of her takings to the toy library. The Toy library has had a turn over of £400 during the last six months; this money will be ploughed back into the project making it self-sufficient.

Janet, [have someone read out her part] a mum who uses the Toy Library says: "*It really saves money coming here, you don't have to buy an expensive toy that is discarded after a few days. You can just borrow a toy for a week and then change it for something else. Although it is run by the church, you wouldn't really know; nobody is trying to force religion on to you. But it is very friendly and open, perhaps that's something to do with the church. I have brought some of my friends here and introduced them to the library.*"

Ladybirds

Abington Avenue United Reformed Church runs three 'Ladybirds' groups each week during term time. Ladybirds offers support, guidance and a 'safe space' for parents and their pre-school children who have been referred to the group by Health Visitors, Social Workers and other statutory and voluntary organisations. During 2002 Ladybirds catered for 54 children and their carers. Ladybirds provide a brightly painted, purpose built nursery (regularly

Telling our story

community work and evangelism

inspected by Ofsted) with its own toilets, a variety of toys, and a small counselling room. Carers and children take part in games, activities, and every session finishes with a song. It provides for the social needs of both carers and children.

Rachel, [have someone read out her part] mother of three tells her story. *"I have been attending Ladybirds for some time. It's like being part of a family. I first came in contact with the Ladybirds group when I was referred here by my health visitor following mental health problems, which resulted in my children being taken into care. My husband left me and my family abandoned me because they couldn't cope with my health problems. But I maintained contact with my children through the Contact Centre run here by the church (at Abington Avenue). The staff from Ladybirds gave me lots of support during the court hearings to get my kids back. I now live with my three children and come to Ladybirds on Wednesday mornings. Sometimes I bring the family to church on Sunday mornings. They are very accepting, it doesn't matter that I am a single mum or that the kids sometimes make a noise during the church service. I especially enjoyed the Church weekend holiday when we went away - the Minister cooked Sunday breakfast for us!"*

Although it is not situated in a particularly affluent area, the United Reformed Church in Abington Avenue Northampton manages to carry on its various community work activities without external funding. All the work is hugely subsidised by the local church membership, both in kind and financially. About sixty members of the congregation are involved in the work with children and young people. And two members lead the art and handicrafts group.

The 'Community Day', which the church organised in September 2003, is something they count as one of their achievements. The church invited everyone within the neighbourhood to join in discussions about local concerns, meet with each other and to have fun. As well as a barbecue, cream teas, a bouncy castle and games, there was also an opportunity to talk to local politicians and members of the business community.

Following a community survey and the 'Community Day' the main problems of the area were brought to light. People's main problems and concerns were: parking, rubbish, child safety, dog mess, vandalism and crime. Their priorities for attention were: the starting of a neighbourhood watch scheme, support for older people, support for the youth of the area, support for people with disabilities and activities for pre-school and school children.

The local resident's association, which meets in the church centre is taking these things forward and the church is responding to these priorities through its activities - family luncheon club for parents with pre-school children, Friday luncheon club for senior citizens, Ark Club (a children's holiday club during most school holidays), and youth clubs.

Discuss

What is your reaction to the stories from Abingdon Avenue?

Do you know any other projects like this that you could tell others about?

Do you think the work at Abingdon Avenue was Evangelism? Explain your answer.

Telling our story

community work and evangelism

Prayer

We pray for the Church throughout the world, that she may be a voice for those who lack even the basic necessities of life, tirelessly serving them and calling for change.

We pray for the world's leaders, that they may not hide behind their power or abuse it, but work for the good of all humanity, particularly the poor throughout the world.

We pray for our local neighbourhood and community here in ..., that we may show our love through our respect for each other and for our environment, gladly sharing what we have with those in need.

Linda Jones /Cafod

EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourself and for others who will use this material:

1. What was the most helpful thing?
2. What was the least helpful thing?
3. What would you like to try now?

THE NEXT STEP

There are more items about Community Development Work and Evangelism on the website.

Acknowledgements

This material has been prepared by Steve summers, URC CRCW Development Officer. Please contact the CRCW Development Office if you want to know more about the programme.

HOW TO FEEDBACK TO VISION4LIFE?

If you wish to offer any feedback – brickbats and bouquets are equally welcome! – you can do so in various ways.

You can email the Vision4Life steering group and the coordinator about general issues via the website or at admin@vision4life.org.uk

Website issues can be dealt with through web@vision4life.org.uk

If you want to make contributions or ask questions about other V4L years you can email: Year 3 – Transformed for Evangelism: evangelism@vision4life.org.uk