

HAYESFORD PARK BAPTIST CHURCH



What's so great about being a small church?

[Jesus] said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch".

Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets".

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.

Luke 5:4-6 NIV

Over the course of the last twelve months or so, this passage of scripture has been brought to us several times from various people. It is the story of the calling of the first disciples. A small group of fishermen are disheartened by the lack of results from a hard night's fishing. Tired and exhausted they had all but given up when Jesus prompts them to go out and try again.



When I first started having conversations with Hayesford Park Baptist Church about becoming their minister, the church felt very much like that group of fishermen. They had been through some difficult times and were ready to call it a day. But like those first disciples, they heard a call from the Lord to try again. And much like those first disciples, even though it made no sense to them, the church stepped out in faith to try again.

So I want to write this article as an encouragement to those of you who are struggling pastors, or those who are in small churches, or even those who are in large churches and don't know where to go next. As we share the story of what God has been doing among us, I hope he speaks to you about what he wants to do in your situation.



In terms of the number of people worshipping with us on a Sunday morning, we are a small church of only around 30 people. However, this has grown from around 20 this time last year so this is encouraging growth. Of course we would say that church growth is not measured by the number of people attending a service but by the number of people entering the kingdom. Nevertheless, numbers are important and many small churches feel restricted because of their size. Many of us try to emulate larger churches in the hope that this will attract people. But one of the key things for us has been to embrace who we are and all that is good about being a small church. So we have embraced the informality and we study the bible



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together using discussion over coffee and croissants. This gives the services a house group feel which visitors have found more accessible.

The informal approach also provides opportunities to pray for each other and we have seen some significant answers to prayer, especially in the area of healing. We have had several examples of significant physical healing with the evidence of medical x-rays or scans. But more than this, God has been healing the church. The church is more united than it has been in the past (many say more than ever). I'm told that in recent years people have left as soon as the service is over, now they stay and we can't get people to leave. People share each other's burdens and pray with each other. The result of all this is that we have new people attending and, as I write, we are in the process of welcoming some of them into membership.

Outside of the Sunday service we have several midweek activities. One unusual activity is our weekly painting group. This was originally started by Age Concern in 2000 to provide a friendly meeting place for older people to enjoy being creative and enjoy time together. In 2002 Diana Knights, one of our deacons took over as leader and the group is now run as a regular activity of Hayesford Park Baptist Church. The group produces some stunning paintings and, as well as sharing a love of painting, it has also provided opportunities to share the love of Jesus. Over the years about six of the group have been baptised and become church members and many others have become regular members of the congregation. However, like the church, it has gone through a thin patch and numbers fell but after much prayer, numbers have increased again with a younger set of very enthusiastic people who are really enjoying each other's company and the warm friendly

atmosphere. At the moment only a few actually attend church but we do have opportunities to invite them to our activities and we are praying that some of these new members will respond to these and find the Lord as others did before them.

Staying on a creative note, Messy Church continues to be one of our most popular events attracting around 70 children each month with their parents. So we get to share something of the gospel through crafts, video, songs and fun. 'Cheeky Charlie' the monkey is popular with the children and helps to illustrate the story for the day. One of our craft tables is always a prayer table. It is both encouraging and humbling to hear some of the prayers written by the children.

We also have a popular toddler group which is growing. To help build relationships with parents and carers we started organising meals out at a local pub. This has led to deeper relationships and people asking us to pray for them. We are also having more meaningful conversations about faith and people seeking to know more. We have recently had so many of these conversations that we are thinking of running an Alpha course or similar in 2015.

We also invited the toddler group to be involved in the Christmas carol service. This had a very positive response from parents and so for the first time ever, our toddler group was part of our Christmas service last year.



We have much to praise God for, but perhaps what I am most proud of is that a church who have been through hardship and brokenness, are now helping others through difficulties and hardships. We have walked with several people through some very tough situations. Through this, people who felt like giving up have experienced the love of their Father God. And we as a church have experienced his love for us and have heard his call to let the nets down once again. We have already seen God do so much that we would not have believed a year ago, but we believe this is only a taste of what is to come.

We give thanks to all those who give so generously to Home Mission. Your support has been invaluable and we are truly seeing God moving in tremendous ways among us. Please continue to pray for us as we seek to follow God's leading for the future.

Darren Street

Pastor, Hayesford Park Baptist Church

Please pray:

- » For Diana Knights as she leads the painting group, and for opportunities to share the love of Jesus with the newer members of the group
- » For deepening relationships with the children and parents who come to Messy Church and the toddler group
- » For plans to run an Alpha course this year
- » For the whole church as they seek to follow God's leading for the future