

## “NOT HAVING PREMISES IS ACTUALLY LIFTING A BURDEN”

Ange Whiles on life at church4u in Pickering



Photo: church4U

**church4u in Pickering (YBA) decided not to renew the lease on its building during the pandemic - and the reason goes to the heart of who the church is.**

**L**ike many churches across the country, church4u has had to adapt its usual activities during the pandemic. Pre-Covid the community-focused church in Pickering, Yorkshire, would host a weekly Bible discussion/reflection, a monthly Sunday breakfast gathering, regular board games nights, and could see potential for a listening/prayer space further down the line. Over the years it has held a variety of events, including film nights and quiz evenings, from its rented premises.

In the autumn it opted not to renew the lease on this building. While Covid has played its part – even when restrictions began to be lifted it couldn’t hold socially distanced events there – the decision wasn’t entirely unexpected, says church co-leader Ange Whiles.

And the reason goes to the heart of who the church is.

“It’s church without walls; we want to be out there,” says Ange. “Everything we do is relational, relating to our neighbours. As a group of Christians we enjoy being together and want to find ways to share our faith in Jesus. The building isn’t essential to who we are.”

Ange explains that church4u is an expression of church that tries to operate without jargon and is not tied to a particular way of doing things. Tuesday evenings are the time when its activities most closely resemble that of a traditional church service, when those involved gather for Bible study, prayer and communion. It has a core leadership team of six, with a very light structure. church4u began life within the Methodist Church in 2002, and eventually emerged from there to join the Baptist Union in 2010. (“There has been an understanding of who we are

and what we are trying to do. We’ve found a supportive home,” says Ange.) Over the years the team has patiently built strong relationships through its presence and activities, and these can continue without fixed premises.

“We’ve not had such big changes because of Covid. Yes, we’ve not been able to use the building, but we have maintained a presence, and are doing what we can, in different ways.

“We were wondering about whether to renew even before the pandemic. And with the finances being shared among a small group of people, it means that not having the premises is actually lifting a burden.”

The main loss is visibility - the building was right in the middle of the market, but even when clearing the building for the final time, Ange she didn’t sense an emotional attachment.

“I was surprised because we have done a lot there, but it shows we have made the right decision.

“We have worked out that we can find venues for all our activities (when allowed). Indeed, we can do much more in local cafés, and begin to develop relationships with the cafés and their owners.

“So, it’s an interesting continuation - and we’re looking forward to where and how God will lead us during the next part of our journey!”

She adds: “We’re a tight knit group who’ve been through a lot. We’ve had to be very dependent on God - and God does move you on.”

---

**Ange Whiles** is co-leader of church4u in Pickering