

“The community has changed – and we need to change”

Justice Enabler Wale Hudson-Roberts also serves as the minister of **John Bunyan Baptist Church** in Oxford. He explains how the church is exploring its response to a post-pandemic future.



“Through Covid our eyes have been opened to the needs of the community in a new way,” says Wale Hudson-Roberts. “One example is an increase in homelessness. There are various factors for this, such as unemployment and domestic abuse.

“We’ve had homeless people present themselves at the church. How do we respond with the love of Christ? How do we respond in a way that Social Services is happy? – they don’t want people to become too dependent on the church. The café at the church has been fantastic in supporting them, but Social Services is concerned about dependency - it’s a really difficult balancing act.

“Issues like this are much more in our focus now. So we are asking the question: ‘what next?’”

Wale explains that John Bunyan is a ‘traditional’ church, and one of the things he and the congregation are trying to recognise is how their traditions can create a ‘dissonance’ with the community.

“In some ways we are old fashioned. Our worship is liturgical. This can make a church inaccessible to a community, so we have been looking at how we can make ourselves more accessible.”

The congregation is dividing itself into various groups to try to discern the voice of the church, the voice of the community – and the mind of Christ.

Each team has a specific agenda to explore. One group will look at preaching, and how it can be made more accessible to the church and community. Other groups are looking at worship, and church meetings.

One group is exploring the external aspect – what resources are needed to enable the church to develop cohesive actions and plans that meet the needs of the community?

Each group will be designated a period of time. They will feed their findings back to the leadership team, and there will be discussions with the wider church and various external stakeholders to discern the best way forward.

“The pandemic has shown us a lot of things about the community in which we exist,” says Wale. “Some aspects we knew already, others have been brought into greater focus, whilst others have arisen because of the pandemic. Our congregation is very open to exploring how we can meet some of these needs and respond with the love of Christ.

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