

STORIES FROM THE GROUND : ART IN CHURCH

We run an art gallery in the church café

When its Oasis Community Café needed decorating around five years ago, **Frinton Free Church** in Essex hit on an idea that has brought a new dimension to life there.



“The café had one long wall that had been covered by a TV screen,” explains church member Simon Carter. “My first thought was that the church could use it to hang things on. Fortunately, others agreed and we put an eight metre long, gallery hanging system in. Ever since, almost by accident, we’ve been running an art gallery.”

Simon is a local artist and through his connections, has been able to organise a different

exhibition in the café each month. The walls have space for around 12 – 15 medium-sized pieces.

He says the artists, mainly drawn from Essex and Suffolk, are pleased to have their work featured there.

“No one says ‘no,’” says Simon. “I left arts school in 1984, and I know how hard it is to make any headway. Any opportunity to show your work, you generally take it. So it’s an opportunity for

us to give something back to the community. Being a seaside town, it’s quite a lovely space.”

“It’s also helped the church connect with a new community”, adds minister Mark Massey.

“We’ve often had open afternoons or evenings, when the artist introduces their work, and the art community turns up. We get to mingle among these people who we had never previously mixed with.

We can get into some great conversations, about creativity and vulnerability.

“They are all so grateful. They are grateful that as a church we value what they do, recognising their gifts and abilities.”

Simon has been connected to the church since he was 13. While he’s been involved with various art activities there over the years, he says this is the first time the church is ‘celebrating creativity for its own sake, celebrating the art and the artist’

It’s a point reinforced by Mark.

“We are made in the image of the creative God. The first command God gave was *‘name the animals.’* It was creative. Whether they realise it or not, the artists are being Christlike in their creativity. It’s something about celebrating our humanity.

“We’ve been good at celebrating in word and music – let’s celebrate creativity as a God-given witness.”



Painting by Linda Adcock



Pictures by Jevan Watkins Jones

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them. [Genesis 1:27]