



UCSG newsletter

supporting urban URC churches in Thames North and Southern synods

Dear Friends...

This is to let you know that the UCSG is very much in business. However we are feeling some disappointment at present due to the fact that we had hoped that by now, the process towards a transformation into a different and new way of working would have begun, but we have discovered that there is still a long way to go before our vision can be realised. This means that the present format with myself as co-ordinator, working with colleagues John Danso and James Ashdown, forming the UCSG, will continue for some months to come.

You will find dates of our future activities enclosed. In 2010 we will also include a market-place event focusing on one of the priorities highlighted in the UCSG Manifesto which was compiled at 'Cause for Celebration' 2007, so please watch this space. We are pleased to say that the new Network of Resource people is meeting periodically and we have been able to draw on the talents and experience of 5 different ministers who have offered input and helped plan and implement some of our activities.

The UCSG really enjoys hearing stories from churches, particularly how different congregations are engaging in various ways with their neighbours in their local community. We are hoping to make a book of such stories of hope, engagement, struggle and creativity. This is a reminder to you of a request we made to churches two months ago. We look forward to hearing from you. In my church (Vine URC, Ilford) there is a formation of a story but we do not know how it will unfold. This church decided to run a Holiday Club for local children for the first time. All the planning and preparation has taken place including a training day, we have a team of volunteers working with the children and a catering team preparing the lunches and children were invited from local primary schools, playgroups, church families and by word of mouth. The maximum amount of children have registered and there is a waiting list. Many conversations have taken place with families that the church has never met before and 85% of these children are from muslim and sikh families.. What kind of a story will be told after this event has taken place ? What will the children say ? What will their parents say ? What will the church say ? What will the community say ? One thing I do know is that I do not think the church will be the same again!!!!
May God strengthen us to hear his life- giving words that we may go out and live them.

Greetings

Sandra (coordinator), James and John

Be Not Afraid in Brixton

During the spring we ran our third series of chronic illness workshops this time at Brixton Hill URC. It was a special time as a small group of us entered into a time of sharing and openness, exploring times of hardship and struggle in our lives and how God has enabled us to come through them without bitterness. The process was brought to an end at a joint Brixton Hill/Stockwell Green service where participants were able to share what they had gained and the whole congregation was able to get a taste of the sessions.

Now after running sessions in Camden, Tottenham and Brixton it seems like a good time to reflect on the sessions and what benefits they can bring

- **Be Not Afraid** consists of 12 Bible stories drawn from occasions when individuals are in a time of stress such as Jesus in Gethsemane or Jacob preparing to meet Esau. Participants are encouraged to choose one of these stories and explain why they have chosen it. This seems to give people permission to talk about deeply personal issues both because the stories evoke profound feelings and because they have been given permission to choose. This encouragement to choose seems to me central to the success of Be Not Afraid, people aren't forced to do anything, but they also aren't left with a completely blank sheet. This seems to enable us to share deeply
- **Although** much of the sharing has been focused around chronic illness, what is explored is deeper and broader than this. The process seems to give people the opportunity to share the thing in their life which has been most deeply painful. This is why the avoidance of bitterness has been such a recurring theme, everyone has something in the life which has disillusioned or disappointed them. Be Not Afraid seems to tap into this and provide the opportunity for healing and moving on because the pain is no longer a private grief but something shared and held together.
- **One of the participants** said during the sessions that 'this is what church should be'. They had discovered in the sessions a degree of openness that they had been longing for but had not previously found. We reflected on how much private sadness there is in the world and how church, as we had been experiencing it, was a real opportunity for this sadness to be shared and overcome. The sessions have not yet provoked effusive displays of emotion (!) but they create a safe environment in the context of scripture in which private sadness can be shared with dignity and respect.

If I think all of us who have been involved with Be Not Afraid have felt that, in its very modest way, it is something special. Chronic illness is a huge pastoral issue which leads us into asking deep theological questions, but it has received little direct attention in the Christian church. Be Not Afraid is a small step in addressing this lack, but we have also found that it has significance for people who aren't suffering from chronic illness. Through openly facing the sadness that chronic illness brings we have found a way of addressing those sadnesses which we all experience in turmoil and complexities of life

A sample of the Be Not Afraid material is available on our website <http://www.urbanchurches.org.uk/chronicillness.htm> alongside other resources

We will be running an ecumenical Be Not Afraid series at Rectory Road URC starting at 18:30 September 21. Do contact James Ashdown if you are interested in this or running a series in your church 07847 100850 jashdown44@gmail.com. We will also be at the following event:

Health Healing and Poverty. October 29, 2009 10:30-3.00 pm at the Eversfield centre, 11 Eversfield Gardens, Mill Hill, NW7 1AE. Contact Geoff Duncan at Thames North Synod

Urban mission on the web

Apart from our wonderful website www.urbanchurches.org.uk If (!) here are a few other web based resources on urban mission which you might find useful

Urblog is an excellent portal for giving you access to a wide range of our urban mission resources and should give you access to most of what is happening out there
<http://urblog.typepad.com/>

I have recently come across two very different blogs by urban pastors – you'll probably enjoy one but maybe not both!

<http://believeinthecity.blogspot.com/>

Chris Shannahan lives in Birmingham. He has been a Methodist Minister and community activist for 15 years and wants to find out what progressive faith means in the city in C21.

http://www.communitymission.org.uk/stories/on_the_frontline_an_east_end_blog/

Tony Uddin has been in ministry in East London since 1995 and has led Tower Hamlets Community since 2007.

Is there a blog out there written by an urban URC minister or lay person? Let us know.

See <http://www.urbanchurches.org.uk/links.htm> for more links to urban mission sites

UCSG events and meetings coming up

Different Ways of Marking Life's Big Events.....

Workshop to explore Rites of Passage focusing on Multi-faith Families

Saturday 19th September, 10.00 – 2.00 (finishing with a light lunch which will be provided)
St. Anne's and St. Andrew's Church West Kilburn (London Inter Faith Centre)

UCSG Network meeting September 30, 2009 10:30 am. Contact Sandra Ackroyd

Church Secretaries Consultation October 24, 2009 venue to be announced. Contact James Ashdown

Cause for Celebration March 20 1010 venue to be announced. Contact John Danso

UCSG can...

Urban churches support group seeks to provide a range of resources, events and services specifically designed for churches operating in an urban environment -- whether that be a classic inner-city community, an outer estate or a more deprived part of an otherwise prosperous neighbourhood. Whilst most of our work is in London we are also keen to support work in urban communities outside London in the southeast.

We have done the following in the past:

- Advice and resources on setting up new projects
- Events addressing urban worship, mission and responses to violence
- Exploring the issue of chronic illness in urban churches
- Interim ministry to churches in pastoral transition
- Introductions to urban ministry for new ministers
- Nonmanagerial supervision for community workers
- One-off consultations
- Ongoing support for church secretaries
- Ongoing training on multi-ethnic rites of passage
- Pastoral support for clergy and lay workers
- Promoting urban issues within the URC
- Support to churches threatened with closure or in crisis
- Theological reflection and practical guidance on estate ministry
- Theological resources on multicultural ministry
- Training for Elders
- Training to enable the multicultural church to address racism

etc...!

We have a range of skills as experienced ministers, community workers, trainers and youth workers available to support you in the exciting but challenging world of urban mission. We can offer a range of support from planned long-term interventions to occasional telephone support.

Our desire is to make sure that no URC Church in Thames North and Southern Synods feels unsupported in its mission and ministry to urban communities

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