



UCSG newsletter

supporting urban URC churches in Thames North and Southern synods

Chronic illness and the church

On February 19, 2011 we are planning an event looking again at chronic illness and the church. (for details see below)

This gathering brings to a close the chronic illness programme run by Urban Churches Support Group of the URC since 2005 seeking to bring together people who have been involved in the programme and consolidate the learning that has been achieved

The programme has involved:

- A session at Cause for Celebration 2005
- A conference "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go" 4 March 2006 at Pott Street URC
- A local study session run at Camden URC in the autumn 2006 leading to the development of the Be Not Afraid Bible story workbook
- This workbook was then used in three churches High Cross URC, Brixton Hill URC and Rectory Road URC between 2007 and 2009. Altogether about 28 sessions were run involving around 50 people.

Around this core work a number of other contacts have been made and invitations accepted to speak at various URC and ecumenical events such as the Parish Nursing study day. Links have also been maintained with organizations such as Social Action for Health and Wholecare. A rich resource of contacts and writing has thus been gathered. Some of this is made available on the website <http://www.urbanchurches.org.uk/chronicillness.htm>

What have we learned so far

Some examples of the discussions we had in the Be Not Afraid groups:

... discussed at some length the problems of a simplistic identification of the illness with sin and this was firmly rejected in a number of different ways. Reference was again made to the passage in John where Jesus rejects questions about who's sin caused the blindness. Some people reject the identification of illness with sin as a matter of common sense, others have more theological reasons e.g. healing is spiritual not physical

... sometimes there is nothing you can do for others you just have to listen, it is important to reach out to others and not just turn inwards, and similarly we must move towards God not away

... talked about how sometimes we feel we want to get away from God because we are suffering but know we can't. People got around to talking about being angry with God and this was at the heart of the evening. Why do we suffer? Why does God not stop it? Does he want to see us come to harm? Why let the baby survive for 10 months when from the start it was clear the baby could not survive? Why let the good daughter suffer with eczema and now boils? What is God trying to teach us from years of pain from arthritis? It was agreed that it wasn't about how hard we prayed. It was God's will and we are not to know his purposes. Out of suffering comes love. Even when we are suffering, we should count our blessings and we know that when we do look for them, we can find them, they are there.

... striking how a number of people hadn't previously identified themselves as having a chronic illness but they seemed to find some liberation in acknowledging this with a group who would listen sympathetically

Reflecting on these stories we came to these conclusions

- The importance of groups supporting each other. This externalizes personal experience and creates support in the public arena
- Storytelling is important. Significant things are learned in the process of telling. It is simple but profound
- There are no easy solutions. But as we share together and tell our stories we find a way to overcome shame and the privatization of our experience
- The key theological issue is that chronic illness is not caused by personal sin. Rather it causes us to ask 'where is God in this?'

What's next

Our approach has been rooted in encouraging people to tell their stories and this will continue to be important. It is easy for chronically ill people to become invisible and silent even in church which in other ways is very loving. But we also need to go beyond the telling and listening to stories into concrete action which makes a difference

Firstly how can we make a difference for people who are suffering from chronic illnesses? We have been looking at how it might be possible to enable people to develop a 'rule of life' to help in managing their chronic illness where diet, exercise and medication are integrated with prayer and other spiritual disciplines

Secondly churches need to reflect on their pastoral care strategies and how they can include chronically ill people within the life of the church, not only so people are cared for but also so that they are able to bring their unique contribution to the body of Christ

Thirdly we have been trying to link up with other people who are interested in these issues of chronic illness and disability. So if you have a particular interest or know of other groups or people -- do get in touch! See contact details on the back of this newsletter.

Forthcoming events

October 7

UCSG network 22 Scarbrough Rd. E11 12:30-14:00

October 30

Church Secretaries Consultation 'How to Encourage your Church to Be a Volunteer Magnet' Crossway URC 10-13:30. A follow-up to the previous consultation particularly looking at the multicultural dimensions to the issue

December 4

'What is the URC all about?' Half day for urban multicultural churches Grange Park URC Looking at developing knowledge and awareness of the opportunities and resources that our denomination has to offer us and from which we can all benefit and that all can contribute to.

19 February 2011

Abide with Me -- telling and listening to stories of chronic illness

Supporting each other, reviewing the Be Not Afraid course, practical ideas for local churches, hearing the voice of people with chronic illness

10:30-15:00 West Kilburn URC, 125 Salusbury Rd. NW6 6RG Lunch provided

Advance notice for 2011

Cause for Celebration Saturday, 2 April 2011

Saturday 24th September...URC Multicultural Event at Carrs Lane URC Birmingham

Christian Coalition for Urban Mission

This coalition is now in the process of forming and brings together a wide range of churches and urban agencies. The URC representative on the management board is Steve Summers from the CRCW program

Purposes: to be inclusive of all involved in, and concern for, Urban Mission, irrespective of theological perspective, denomination, or type of organization.

Work will include support and promotion of Urban Mission Training Consortium, a national Urban Mission Forum, the triennial UK Urban Mission Congress and an urban bulletin

Contact: Erica Dunmow 01142939060 erica.ccum@urbanmission.org.uk . Erica is based in Sheffield. See the website www.urbanmission.org.uk for evolving news

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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